

Strategies in forming the speech act of refusals of non-native  
English speakers and native English speakers in entry-level  
customer service positions in Canada

by

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## Abstract

Being able to refuse – decline requests, offers, invitations or suggestions – is necessary in the workplace. Native English speakers (NES) and non-native English speakers (NNES) often use different strategies to form the speech act of refusals (Riddiford & Holmes, 2015). This study investigates the refusal strategies of NESs (n=5) and NNESs (n=5) in Canadian customer service. Six role-plays were conducted to determine the refusal strategies of both groups. Stimulated recall interviews (SRI) provided insights into the participants' use of these strategies. Role play analysis show both groups use *reason/explanation* the most. NES formed successful refusals more often than NNES. During the SRIs NES were concerned about workplace expectations, and the difficulty of refusing while NNES voiced justifications for refusing. SRIs also uncovered that NNES and NES may use the same strategy for different reasons. Pedagogical implications for language learners working in customer service are given.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and Context**

Workplaces require employees to communicate effectively, while cooperating to maintain a harmonious workplace environment. To achieve this, employees must successfully navigate difficult situations (e.g., a disagreement, asking for help, declining to help a co-worker, etc.) with people they interact with at work by expressing intended meanings that are understood by their interlocutors, without causing offense. This is done through a set of conventions (i.e., language forms used in certain situations) that communicate the intended meaning between interlocutors. Being direct is the clearest way to express an intended meaning (Brown & Levinson, 1987) but established conventions to express different intended meanings are not always direct. For example, in the case where an employee rejects their boss's request to stay late at work, rather than being direct (e.g., "I refuse," or "no, I can't") the employee can be indirect, and use a strategy such as providing the boss with an explanation of why the employee will not stay late (e.g., "my wife's parents are coming over, and I need to cook dinner"). The conventions used can vary between different workplaces and are considerably different between workplaces that use different languages (Yates, 2010). This can pose a problem for new employees, particularly those using a second language (L2) in the workplace, as they may not fully understand how to express their intended meaning appropriately at the new workplace. Although speakers from the same language background will vary considerably, they will share a similar set of assumptions of how to navigate difficult

situations based on their previous experiences (Newton & Kusmierczyk, 2011; Yates, 2010).

Newcomers to Canada have identified employment and language training to be among their top priorities (Murphy, 2010). As a result, there are organizations in Canada that offer workplace language training (WLT) programs to help employees integrate into the Canadian workplace (i.e., any workplace in Canada) because these workplaces often require use of one or both of the official languages (i.e., English and/or French). Training materials for WLT programs often focus on transactional language (i.e., the language used to get a task done) rather than on the social aspects of work (Holmes, 2005). The unbalanced focus on transaction language might not be as useful as providing a balance of transactional language and social aspects of language, as the ability to socialize with co-workers determines the success an employee has in a job more than the employee's ability to complete tasks (Holmes, 2005). Furthermore, many of these materials have been deemed unsuitable, as they do not reflect actual language used in the workplace (Chan, 2017; Ross, 2018), or they do not place attention on important social aspects of communication between employees (Holmes, 2005; Newton & Kusmierczyk, 2011).

Part of the motivation for the current study is to use the results to develop workplace language training materials on refusals. This is in conjunction with a local government-funded settlement program that is offering a WLT program to a group of newcomers that are currently working in entry-level positions (i.e., jobs that require minimal education, and experience, often considered low-status and low paying [Cheng et al., 2020; McCoy & Masuch, 2007]) with a goal of helping these newcomers maintain and excel at their jobs. The WLT program offers one-on-one sessions between the

newcomer and a volunteer language trainer. Some of the volunteer language trainers have called for more relevant materials that can address the specific needs of the newcomers, thus, the settlement program with Research in Newcomer Workplace Language (RNWL) at Carleton University aimed to develop a 10-module curriculum that meets the newcomers' language needs. The focus of the curriculum design was on language skills needed to succeed in entry-level customer service positions (i.e., entry-level jobs where the employee interacts with customers, for example, a cashier, retail clerk, food server etc.), as many of the newcomers enrolled in the WLT program were working in customer service. A needs analysis conducted by RNWL and the settlement program revealed 10 topics for the modules that would help the newcomers gain the language skills that enable the newcomers to be successful at work. These 10 topics include some modules focused on transactional language (e.g., following instructions) and the social aspects of work such as greetings, requests, small talk, handing complaints, raising concerns, and the focus of the current study, refusals (i.e., declining a request, offer, invitation, or suggestion).

## **1.2 Organization of This Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature to provide the theoretical background used in research on the speech act of refusals, literature relevant to newcomers' communication in entry-level workplace positions in Canada, relevant literature on the speech act of refusals, and presents the questions that guided this study. Chapter 3 describes the methodology in collecting and analyzing refusals. Chapter 4 presents the results of the questions that guided this study. Chapter 5 discusses how the results of the current study relate to previous literature and provides a

conclusion that includes pedagogical implications of the results, limitations of the current study, and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Refusals are a speech act that typically require a high level of indirectness, mitigation, and other strategies for the refuser to not offend the hearer. The refuser uses signals that are recognized within the context they are speaking to enable the hearer to understand the intention of the speaker's utterance as a refusal, even when the speaker does not directly refuse. These signals will vary between different languages, cultures, and settings (Newton & Kusmierczyk, 2011). The study of how people create meaning through speaking and other signals is known as *pragmatics*. Pragmatic knowledge of language learners is often divided into two categories: *pragmalinguistic* (i.e., the forms used in language to create meaning) knowledge and *sociopragmatic* (i.e., when to use certain forms in each context to create polite speech) knowledge (Rose, 2012). Much of the research on pragmatic knowledge investigates how people communicate a meaning in their second language (L2). This field is often referred to as *interlanguage pragmatics*. Studies on interlanguage pragmatics tend to focus on specific speech acts (e.g., requests, apologies, refusals, etc.). The field is influenced by Speech Act Theory proposed by Austin (1962), developed further by Searle (1979), and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), both of which serve as a framework for research. In this chapter, a brief overview of these theories, language barriers to newcomers in Canada, and a review of the relevant literature of research on the speech act of refusals are presented. The chapter concludes with the questions that guided the current study.

### 2.1 Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory builds on the work of Austin (1962), who observed that utterances can represent three different types of acts: (1) locutionary acts (i.e., an

utterance where the actual meaning is being expressed), (2) illocutionary acts (i.e., an utterance with a specific intention by the speaker), and (3) perlocutionary acts (i.e., an utterances that has an impact on the world). A single utterance can simultaneously perform a separate locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. That is, an utterance can have a literal meaning that is separate from the speaker's intended meaning, while having a consequence on the world that may or may not be the same as the speaker's intention. An illocutionary act intends for a specific consequence to happen in the world, but that intended consequence may not happen. According to Austin (1962), an illocutionary act needs to be understood by the hearer, elicit a response, and have the desired outcome of the speaker. Thus, an illocutionary act would be unsuccessful if it did not meet these conditions (i.e., it was not understood by the hearer, the hearer did not respond to the speaker, or the desired outcome of the speaker does not occur). Refusals are an illocutionary act because the speaker's utterance is said with the intention of refusing something. As with all illocutionary acts, refusals are unsuccessful when the refusal is not understood by the hearer, when the refusal does not elicit a response from the hearer, or when the desired outcome of the refuser is not met.

Searle (1979) built on Austin's theories and separated illocutionary acts into five categories: *assertives*, *directives*, *commissives*, *expressives*, and *declaratives*. An utterance stating a fact (e.g., "Ottawa is the capital of Canada") commits a speaker to a belief being true or false and is referred to as *assertives* by Searle. Utterances with the purpose to get a hearer to do something like making a request (e.g., "please pass me a pen") or a command (e.g., "give me a pen") are referred to as *directives*. When a speaker intends to commit to a future action through an utterance, like making a commitment

(e.g., “I will be on time”), Searle defined it as a *commissive*. Utterances with the intention of expressing the psychological state in an event of apologizing (e.g., “I’m sorry”) and expressing gratitude (e.g., “I really appreciate that”) are classified as *expressives*. Finally, Searle considered utterances that take direct change about the world by means of voicing the utterance like a parent naming a child (e.g., “I’ll name her Julia”), a priest marrying two people (e.g., “I now pronounce you husband and wife”), and a judge convicting a criminal (e.g., “the defendant is guilty as charged”), as *declaratives*. Although not explicitly stated in Searle’s (1979) original taxonomy of illocutionary acts, refusals are understood to be a commissive (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Bella, 2014), as they are an illocutionary act where the speaker makes themselves obligated to not perform an action. Refusals can be implicit (e.g., “I don’t think I’d be able to”) or explicit (e.g., “no, I refuse”).

## **2.2 The Notion of *Face* and Politeness Theory**

A speaker has multiple choices on how they can commit a speech act such as refusals. Brown and Levinson (1987) developed politeness theory to serve as an explanation of why a person makes the choices they do when they speak. Politeness theory builds on Goffman’s (1967) notion of face. Goffman (1967) used the term *face* to describe the self-image that individuals strive to present to others. Through the way the individual acts (i.e., how they speak, actions done to be perceived as good), they claim a certain face, according to Goffman. This self-image may be shared by those around the individual (e.g., someone believes they are seen as a good person, and other people also believe the individual is a good person), but it is fundamentally an individual’s desired perception of themselves (Goffman, 1967). Interactions and events can change a person’s

face, which can be boosted or threatened. Goffman (1967) suggests that whenever people are interacting, they are doing *face-work*, which he describes as “the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face (p. 6)”. Face-work is defensive when a person is doing it to maintain their own face, and protective when the person is helping the interlocutor protect the interlocutor’s face. As Goffman (1967) puts it, “he helps them to help himself, and him.” (p. 29)

Building on Goffman (1967) and his notion of face and face-work, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory seeks to explain why people say things in one manner and not another. Brown and Levinson (1987) believed that every adult in a society understands the concept of face, and that they do work to maintain their own face, as well as the face of those around them. In other words, adults have an implicit understanding that they, along with all other adults have a desired image in which they hope to be perceived by others, and through tactics (e.g., mitigated language), attempt to satisfy their own desired self-image as well as the desired image of others. This idea of maintaining face is like Goffman’s (1967) face-work, where a person defends their own face and protects the face of their interlocutor.

According to politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), there are two different types of face: (1) *positive face* (i.e., individuals want their actions to be considered desirable to others) and (2) *negative face* (i.e., individuals do not want their actions to be impeded by others). When communicating, two interlocutors ensure that face is being maintained because each of them has an understanding of their own face and their interlocutor’s face wants (i.e., the want to have actions considered desirable by others, and the want to not have actions impeded by others). The motivation for interlocutors

cooperation to maintain face while communicating is in self-interest, as every individual's face is mutually vulnerable (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Thus both interlocutors can have their own face protected through an implicit agreement to cooperate through protecting the other interlocutor's face. Brown and Levinson considered any situation that threatens positive face, negative face, or both to be face threatening acts (FTA). In a FTA, the utterances of a speaker can do damage to their own face (e.g., if a speaker requests something, they may give the impression that they are a demanding person), and/or the face of their interlocutor. For example, through the utterance, "can I borrow your car?" the speaker threatens their own face (i.e., their actions might not be considered desirable to others) and the face of the hearer (i.e., one of the hearer's future actions are impeded by someone else, and the hearer's actions might be undesirable to others). According to politeness theory, a speaker's use of the speech acts requests and suggestions threaten the hearer's negative face wants because the speaker is asking the hearer to do something or telling the hearer what they ought to do, thus the speaker is impeding on the freedom of action for the hearer. Other speech acts, such as offers and invitations, threaten the hearer's negative face because the hearer possibly could be in debt to the speaker in the future, and a future action from the hearer might be required to pay the debt to the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These four speech acts (i.e., requests, suggestions, offers, and invitations) are FTAs that require their own set of strategies to maintain face, and are the initiating acts to refusals, a FTA that requires additional work to maintain face. In the case of refusals of requests, and refusals of suggestions, the work done to maintain face can be complicated as the refuser must use strategies to avoid damage to their own negative face (i.e., the refuser's freedom to

perform actions unimpeded by others) (Taguchi, 2013). For refusals of offers, and refusals of invitations, the speakers must decline support of their own positive face (i.e., the speaker's want for their actions to be considered desirable) (Taguchi, 2013).

According to politeness theory, the strategies used when performing a FTA vary based on the social closeness the speaker has to the hearer, the power dynamics between the speaker and hearer (i.e., the social status of the speaker compared to the social status of the hearer), and the imposition of the FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The strategies that maintain the face of the speaker and the hearer when considering the variables of the FTA can be vastly different from setting to setting, but Brown and Levinson (1987) believed that the need to use strategies to maintain face during a FTA is universal in any society, across all languages and cultures. In other words, the strategies to maintain face may differ from setting to setting, but all adults implicitly understand that work must be done to maintain face when interacting with others. The speaker does work to maintain face unless the speaker's desire to express a FTA efficiently (i.e., clear, and easily understood by the hearer) is greater than the speaker's desire to maintain face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Drawing on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge of familiar settings, adults are generally skilled at creating meaning through utterances, but these utterances may not prove effective when applied to unfamiliar settings and may instead, require that the adults learn new setting-appropriate strategies to maintain face during a FTA. For example, newcomers to a country working in a job that uses the newcomer's second language (L2), may approach a FTA (e.g., refusing a request from a manager) in a manner deemed appropriate in their home country (e.g., apologizing profusely), which might be seen as inappropriate in the new context, and can have a negative impact on the

newcomer (e.g., the manager perceives the newcomer as annoying). As the ability of interacting with others at work is believed to be an important determiner of an employee's success of integrating into a new workplace (Holmes, 2005), and because pragmatic errors (i.e., performing a speech act in a way deemed inappropriate for the context) are judged more harshly by interlocutors than other language errors (e.g., grammatical errors) (Nelson et al., 2002; Yates, 2010), refusing inappropriately can result in damage to the newcomer's and their interlocutor's face. This might have an impact on the newcomer's relationships with the people they work with, and can lead to tension in the workplace, which could possibly lead to the newcomer quitting their job if the tension is too high.

The knowledge of strategies used to mitigate FTAs to maintain face is pragmalinguistic knowledge (i.e., knowledge of the forms used to express a speech act), and the knowledge of how to use those strategies appropriately in each context is sociopragmatic knowledge (i.e., knowledge of what forms are most appropriate for a particular situation). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), adults from any society implicitly have this pragmatic knowledge, as maintaining face is a cooperative effort between interlocutors universally across all cultures and languages. The strategies used to maintain face are not consistent between different contexts, and appropriate mitigation techniques in one context can be considered inappropriate in another (Yates, 2010). This can lead to misunderstandings, and can even offend the interlocutor (Nelson et al., 2002; Yates, 2010). Given that refusals are a FTA that responds to another FTA, there is opportunity for pragmatic errors in the way the refuser responds to their interlocutor's initial FTA, and the manner in which they approach an additional FTA, their refusal.

In the workplace, refusals are a FTA that an employee may need to use in situations where they cannot complete a task (e.g., they are unable to do something because of a physical hinderance) or are not comfortable with performing a task (e.g., they believe a particular task is unsafe). Newcomers to Canada who speak English as a second language (L2) in the workplace may find it particularly difficult to refuse, as appropriate ways to refuse in their previous workplace are likely different from what would be considered appropriate in their new workplace. It is then important to consider how the newcomers go about forming refusals in the workplace to determine potential barriers these may present and to identify possible ways to overcome them. The need to identify these barriers is paramount considering employers often use linguistic limitations as a means to legitimize discrimination of employees who are not highly proficient in the language used at that workplace (McCall, 2003). This knowledge may, in turn, allow for creation of targeted language training (in refusals) to empower newcomers to succeed in the Canadian workplace (i.e., any workplace in Canada) and satisfy their two of their top priorities, language training and employment (Murphy, 2010).

### **2.3 Issues Facing Newcomers in Canada**

Language is a common barrier for some newcomers to Canada as, upon arrival, one third do not speak one of the official languages, English or French (Shaffir & Satzewich, 2010). For the newcomers that can speak English or French, learning how to speak and interact with Canadians in a manner considered appropriate and polite can also prove challenging. For example, refugees that moved to Hamilton have reported difficulty adjusting to face-to-face conversations with strangers, using proper etiquette when visiting someone, and dealing with perceived expectations of eye-contact that differ

from some newcomers' home countries (Shaffir & Satzewich, 2010). These examples given by refugees in the Ontario city may suggest that communication barriers facing newcomers include the need for the development of pragmatic knowledge, especially in the workplace.

Several recent Canada-based studies have considered the kinds of communication barriers that newcomers might face in entry level positions (e.g, Cheng et al., 2020; Douglas, Doe & Cheng, 2020). Cheng et al. (2020), for example, interviewed 14 non-native English speakers (NNES) who were newcomers to Canada working in entry-level positions (i.e., jobs that do not require much previous work experience or training) in Ontario cities. The participants had lower intermediate to intermediate proficiencies and spoke a diverse set of first languages (i.e., Arabic, Bangla, Chinese, Gujarati, Korean, and Spanish). The researchers identified three challenges these newcomers had with communication: (1) topical knowledge (e.g., topics of conversation, Canadian culture, and expressions used in the workplace), (2) language knowledge (e.g., grammar, pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, pragmatic knowledge), and (3) personal attributes of the participants (e.g., nervous when speaking). Cheng et al. (2020) also identified communication strategies used by the participants (e.g., asking an interlocutor to slow down or repeat something, speaking face-to-face, and avoidance). The participants reported having difficulty communicating with their customers, co-workers, and supervisors. All participants reported having difficulty understanding native English speakers (NES) they perceived to speak too fast. Some of the participants commented on the difficulty of knowing the appropriate language to use (e.g., how to address older customers at a restaurant).

Douglas et al. (2020), in turn, examined communication breakdown between L2 English speakers and their mostly NES colleagues through interviews. The participants were six newcomers to Canada with varied language backgrounds (i.e., French, Spanish, Tagalog, Arabic, and Korean) working in entry-level positions in British Columbia. The participants had been in Canada between one to six years at the time of the study and were determined to have achieved intermediate to advanced proficiency in their L2 English speaking and listening abilities. Through a series of interviews, Douglas et al. (2020) identified affective tension (e.g., annoyance, discomfort, interlocutor insensitivity), interlocutor language use (e.g., speaking too fast, saying an unexpected thing), interlocutor comprehension (e.g., perceived accents), time pressure (e.g., not enough time to prepare to respond to the interlocutor), and participant's perceptions of the interlocutor (e.g., perception that interlocutor does not want to answer a question) as causes for communication breakdown. The interlocutors referred to by the participants included co-workers, customers, clients, and superiors. Douglas et al. (2020) suggest that the communication breakdown is not necessarily due to deficiencies in the entry-level employees' language abilities, but in some cases, real or perceived tensions between the participants and their interlocutors. The researchers also state that some interlocutors' conscious or unconscious biases toward the English L2 participants have an impact on communication in the workplace, often leading to communication breakdown.

Many newcomers to Canada work in entry-level positions, including positions in the customer service sector (McCoy & Masuch, 2007; Cheng et al., 2020). Despite being broad, the findings from Cheng et al. (2020), and Douglas et al. (2020) are telling in the communication challenges newcomers in entry-level positions face. Newcomers in

customer service will interact with customers, co-workers, and superiors, three groups of interlocutors that have been particularly difficult for newcomers to communicate with (Cheng et al., 2020; Douglas et al., 2020). Refusals are a particularly difficult FTA for L2 speakers to form appropriately (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990), but are a necessary common occurrence in the workplace as has been observed in studies with authentic data of workplace interactions (e.g., Riddiford & Holmes, 2015; Schnurr and Zayts, 2013). Thus, the purpose of the current study to focus on how newcomers form refusals in entry-level customer service positions. The next section will cover literature focused on the speech act of refusals.

#### **2.4 Research on the Speech Act of Refusals**

Perhaps the most influential study investigating the speech act of refusals is that by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990), which presented a classification of refusals considered by many to represent refusals across different languages and cultures. Because it has been highly influential on refusals, the study's methodology and findings are considered here in detail. Beebe, et al. (1990) investigated a group of native Japanese speakers making refusals in their L2, English, to determine if the participants showed signs of negative pragmatic transfer from Japanese to English (i.e., when refusing in English, the participants use methods more typical of a native Japanese speaker's refusals in Japanese, than of a NES's refusals in English). These L2 English speakers completed discourse completion tasks (DCT) – a written task where the participant reads the context of a situation with an interlocutor's dialogue for the participant to write what they believe their oral response would be – of various situations where the participant must refuse their interlocutor (please note that DCTs are covered in more detail in Chapter 3).

Following Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the DCTs were designed to place the participant in a variety of situations that cover three levels of social closeness (stranger, acquaintance, and close), and power dynamics (higher social status than interlocutor, equal social status to interlocutor, and lower social status than interlocutor). Beebe et al. (1990) also varied the stimuli for the refusal, having three DCTs for each stimulus (i.e., requests, offers, invitations, and suggestions). The responses from the DCTs were compared to two control groups: native Japanese speakers refusing in Japanese and American NES refusing in English. The researchers determined that the native Japanese speakers showed signs of negative pragmatic transfer – performing a speech act in an L2 using sociopragmatic knowledge of how the speech act is formed in the speaker's first language (Beebe et al., 1990) – when refusing in English.

To analyze the refusals, Beebe et al. (1990) presented a classification of refusals. This classification was initially presented in Takahashi and Beebe (1987), although Beebe et al. (1990) is the most referenced source of this classification. The classification contained three main types of categories: direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjuncts to refusals. There are two types of direct refusals: (1) refusals with a performative verb (e.g., "I refuse") and (2) refusals that express a negative willingness or ability (e.g., "I won't" or "I can't"). Direct refusals are the clearest refusal category but do the least amount of work to maintain face. The researchers provide 13 categories of indirect strategies: statement of regret (e.g., "I'm sorry"), wish (e.g., "I wish I could help you"), excuse (e.g., "I have a headache"), statement of alternative (e.g., "why don't you ask someone else?"), set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., "if you had asked me earlier, I would have..."), promise of future acceptance (e.g., "I'll do it next time"), statement of principle

(e.g., “I never do business with friends”), statement of philosophy (e.g., “one can never be too careful”), attempt to dissuade interlocutor (e.g., “I won’t be any fun tonight”), acceptance that functions as a refusal (e.g., an indefinite reply), nonverbal avoidance (e.g., physical departure), and verbal avoidance (e.g., switching the topic of conversation). Indirect refusals do work to maintain face while being clear that a refusal is being made without the addition of other strategies. Finally, there are four types of adjuncts to refusals: statement of positive opinion/feeling/agreement (e.g., “that sounds great”), statement of empathy (e.g., “I know you are tired”), pause fillers (e.g., “umm”), and gratitude/appreciation (e.g., “thank you”). Adjuncts to refusals are a supportive move and cannot be understood as a refusal unless it comes before or after a direct strategy, or an indirect strategy. Adjuncts to refusals serve the purpose of maintaining face rather than helping the interlocutor understand that a refusal is being made (Beebe et al., 1990).

This classification of refusals has enabled researchers to identify and classify pragmalinguistic conventions – the forms of mitigation devices that let an utterance be recognized as a specific speech act – of refusals across different languages and dialects including: Arabic (Abed, 2011; Al Masaeed et al., 2020), English (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Beebe et al., 1990; Salazar-Campillo, 2013), Greek (Bella, 2011; 2014), Japanese (Beebe et al., 1990; Nurjaleka, 2020), Persian (Aliakbari & Changizi, 2012; Ghazanfari, Bonyadi, & Malekzadeh, 2013; Mokhtari, 2015), Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; 2004; 2006; 2008), and Vietnamese (Nguyen, 2006), among others. The refusals can be studied in a single language (e.g., Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Bella, 2011; 2014; Codina-Espurz, 2013; Farnia & Wu, 2012; Salazar-Campillo, 2013), or across two or more languages (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Beebe et al., 1990; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003, 2008). The

speech act of refusals has also been studied in the participants' L2 (e.g., Codina-Espurz, 2013; Farnia & Wu, 2012; Salazar-Campillo, 2013), or has been compared between native speakers with non-native speakers of a language (e.g., Beebe et al, 1990; Bella, 2011, 2014; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003, 2008).

#### ***2.4.1 Refusals to Four Different Initiating Acts***

Taking Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory into account, refusals in varying situations will look different. Therefore, Beebe et al. (1990) included 12 DCTs that covered a wide range of situations that varied in terms of social closeness, power dynamics between the refuser and interlocutor, and stimuli to refuse (i.e., different initiating acts to refuse to). Studies have investigated refusals to these four stimulating acts (i.e., requests, invitations, suggestions, and offers) through DCTs (Al-Eryani, 2007; Keshavarz, Eslami, & Ghahraman, 2006), role plays (e.g., Taguchi, 2013) or authentic data (Riddiford & Holmes, 2015; Schnurr and Zayts, 2013). Other studies have focused on refusals to a single initiating act, including refusals of requests (e.g., Abdolrezapour & Dastjerdi, 2012; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Bella, 2014; Codina-Espurz, 2013; Salazar-Campillo, 2013), refusals to invitations (e.g., Bella, 2011; Farnia & Wu, 2012; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; 2008), and refusals to suggestions (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993).

**2.4.1.1 Refusals of Requests.** Requests, a speech act that requires its own mitigation strategies to maintain face, have received much attention in the field of interlanguage pragmatics. Of the stimuli that can lead to a refusal (i.e., requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions), refusals of requests are a common topic that are the focus of studies (e.g., Abdolrezapour & Dastjerdi, 2012; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Bella, 2014; Codina-Espurz, 2013; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) or are

the partial focus of a study (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Riddiford & Holmes, 2015; Taguchi, 2013).

Salazar-Campillo (2013) dedicated a study to investigating refusals to requests from a group of ten L2 English learners enrolled in an undergraduate program at a Spanish university. Using politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), Salazar-Campillo (2013) created five situations that varied the social distance and the power status between a requester and refuser. These situations included a request from a stranger, professor, friend, and a neighbour, all of which would be relevant to the participants. The researcher acted as the requester, with the participants as the refuser for five role plays that were recorded and then coded using a taxonomy of refusal strategies (Salazar, Safont, & Codina, 2009) that was based on Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of refusals. A typical order (i.e., at least 40% of participants used the same strategies in the same order for a scenario) for most of the scenarios included an expression of regret (e.g., "I'm sorry") followed by a reason for the refusal (e.g., "I don't have the exact change"). The only situation to not follow this order saw participants being blunt (e.g., "no") as the first strategy. This was to refuse a stranger, who requests to borrow the participants' car. This scenario has a higher imposition than the only other scenario involving a stranger, where a waitress requests that a customer give her exact change.

Using the same taxonomy of refusal strategies (i.e., Salazar et al., 2009), Codina-Espurz (2013) investigated nine DCTs that elicited a refusal of a request in nine scenarios from 100 L2 English learners from a Spanish speaking university. Each scenario included different variables such as gender differences, and, like Salazar-Campillo (2013), the social closeness, and the power dynamics between the refuser and the requester. Across

all strategies, Codina-Espurz (2013) found that participants provided the requester with a statement of regret and provided an excuse for refusing the request.

In a longitudinal case study with a participant who had moved to and was working in New Zealand from the Philippines, Riddiford and Holmes (2015) conducted a role play that included a request from an employer that the participant was to refuse. The role play was done three separate times over a 12-week period while the participant gained more experience in a New Zealand workplace, and was progressing through a workplace language training (WLT) program. The participant, Salvadore, was reported to be a highly proficient L2 English speaker. The participant was provided with a reason (i.e., physical limitations) to refuse a request to move heavy boxes by an employer. This was done before Salvadore's first week in the WLT program, during the sixth week of the WLT program, and during the final week of the WLT program. In the first week, Salvadore showed signs of negative pragmatic transfer from the workplace context of the Philippines he was used to. He expressed regret multiple times to the extent that it was considered inappropriate for the context of a New Zealand workplace. Salvadore also gave detailed accounts of why he had to make the refusal. According to Riddiford and Holmes (2015), during his sixth and final weeks, the participant showed a greater understanding of how to perform a more appropriate refusal in the New Zealand workplace context, expressing regret less often and providing briefer justifications for his refusals. In this case, it appears that the issue in refusing appropriately did not have to do with Salvadore's pragmalinguistic knowledge, but rather his sociopragmatic competence, which he was able to improve through experience in a New Zealand workplace in combination with his progress in a WLT program.

**2.4.1.2 Refusals of Invitations.** Refusals to invitations have received some attention in studies, being investigated on their own (e.g., Bella, 2011; Farnia & Wu, 2012; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003, 2008) or in conjunction with other stimuli, such as requests, suggestions, and offers (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Taguchi, 2013). As with refusals to requests, the power dynamics between the refuser and the interlocutor may have an effect with how some groups refuse an invitation. For example, Farnia and Wu (2012) found that refusals to invitations from a higher status (i.e., an academic advisor) and equal status (i.e., a friend) interlocutor did not change the typical order (i.e., the order of strategies used by 40% or more participants in the same scenario) used by Chinese students in Malaysia and Malaysian students in Malaysia. The Chinese students typically started their refusals by first giving a reason and then expressing regret to both a friend and to an academic advisor. The Malaysian students started their refusals by first expressing regret and then giving a reason to both a friend and academic advisor. Similarly, Beebe et al. (1990) found that while the native Japanese participants seemed to be affected by the status of an interlocutor when refusing an invitation, this was not the case for the NESs.

Félix-Brasdefer (2003) observed groups of L2 Spanish learners, native Spanish speakers, and NES. The L2 Spanish learners all had English as a first language, so like Beebe et al. (1990), Félix-Brasdefer (2003) was able to compare the strategies used by the learners to a group of native speakers of the target language, and a group of native speakers of the learners' first language. The researcher found significant differences in several refusal strategies (i.e., offering an alternative, hedging, solidarity, and positive opinion) between the learners and the native Spanish speakers when refusing an

invitation. The researcher also noted that the NESs used direct strategies the most compared to the native Spanish speakers who used them the least; no significant difference was found between the two groups, however. The learners used direct strategies less often than the NES, but more often than the native Spanish speakers. Félix-Brasdefer (2003) suggests this may be because the learners do not have an awareness of what refusals to invitations look like in a Latin American setting. This might be evidence of a lack of both pragmalinguistic knowledge (i.e., not knowing the forms to refuse), and a lack of sociopragmatic knowledge (i.e., not knowing how to refuse in a certain context) that led to learners' inappropriate refusals to invitations.

Bella (2011) investigated refusals to an invitation to a birthday party with three groups of Greek speakers: native Greek speakers, L2 Greek learners with a long residency in Greece who had limited social interactions with native Greek speakers, and L2 Greek learners with a short residency in Greece who had extensive social interactions with native Greek speakers. Significant differences in the frequency of some refusal strategies (e.g., apologies, indefinite reply) were found between the learners with a long residency who had limited social interactions and the other two groups. The learners with a short residency who had extensive social interactions formed refusals that appeared more like those of the native Greek speakers. Based on the similarities between this group and the native Greek speakers, Bella (2011) put forward the idea that the intensity of interaction with native speakers is a more defining factor of language learners' abilities to produce appropriate refusals in the target language than their length of residency.

**2.4.1.3 Refusals to Suggestions.** Suggestions – the term used when referring to giving advice – have received some attention in the literature on refusals with studies

partially focused on refusals to suggestions (e.g., Al-Eryani, 2007; Beebe et al., 1990; Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Taguchi, 2013). Most of these studies investigated other stimuli: requests, invitations, and offers; however, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) did a study entirely focused on graduate students refusing a professor's advice on what courses to take at an English-speaking university. The study used authentic data of recorded audio and consisted of a group of students who were native English speakers and a group of students who were non-native English speakers, both of whom interacted with a university professor in a scheduled session to advise students on courses to take. The researchers believed that for the refusal to be successful it must be acknowledged by the interlocutor and the refusers' desired outcome must be met. This mirrors Austin's (1962) definition of a successful illocutionary act. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) reported that NNES were much more likely to refuse the advice from a professor than the NES, with every suggestion being refused by NNES in the first advisory session, and only one of nine suggestions being refused by NES in the first advisory session. The researchers also reported that in the first and second advisory sessions, all the NESs' refusals were successful (i.e., acknowledged by the professor and the student did not enroll in the suggested course), but less than half of NNES refusals were successful in the first session, and only 67% were successful in the second session.

A study by Schnurr and Zayts (2013) used authentic data to investigate refusals in the workplace. The authors analyzed an interaction where a subordinate refused his boss's suggestion to terminate two employees to save the company money. The researchers note that the subordinate initially uses an indirect strategy, *offering an alternative* (e.g., providing the problem employees with more training instead of

terminating the employees). The boss suggests terminating the two employees a second time, which leads to the subordinate defending the decision to not follow the boss's advice by providing the boss with multiple explanations of why the subordinate should not terminate one of the employees.

Simulated data of a refusal of a professor's advice on what course to take at a Spanish language university in Mexico was obtained by Félix-Brasdefer (2006) through open role plays. The participants were all male university students and monolingual Spanish speakers from Mexico. The researcher reported that when refusing a professor's advice, the participants showed respect for the difference of power between the student and professor as well as a high level of indirectness. The need for a high level of indirectness may have prevented the participants from using a more brief and clear refusal in favor of respecting the higher status of the professor.

Refusals of suggestions are investigated by Al-Eryani (2007). The study collected data through DCTs of Yemeni native Arabic speakers, Yemeni L2 English learners, and American NES. The suggestion situation was taken from Beebe et al. (1990) where a friend gives diet advice that the participant is instructed to refuse. All three groups had examples of starting a refusal to the suggestion with being blunt (e.g., "no") and examples of expressions of gratitude (e.g., "thank you"). The researcher states that all three groups are more direct when refusing a suggestion from a peer than in any other scenario (Al-Eryani, 2007).

**2.4.1.4 Refusals of Offers.** There are no known studies to the researcher that have exclusively investigated refusals to offers, but some studies (e.g., Al-Eryani, 2007; Beebe et al., 1990; Keshavarz et al., 2006; Taguchi, 2013) have included refusals to offers while

investigating other stimuli to refusals (e.g., requests, invitations, and suggestions). Two studies conducted 27 years apart, (Al-Eryani, 2007; Beebe et al., 1990) each had 20 NES from America complete the same DCT prompt: a boss offers the refuser a pay raise under the condition that the refuser move to a new town. Beebe et al. (1990) investigated refusals made by American NESs, native Japanese speakers, and English L2 learners from Japan, while Al-Eryani (2007) investigated American NES, Yemeni native Arabic speakers, and Yemeni English L2 learners. In Beebe et al. (1990), no NES offered an alternative and only 5% of the NES also used a statement of regret, which is less often than the two other groups. This contrasts with Al-Eryani (2007) where half of that NES group offered an alternative, and more than half used a statement of regret for the same situation. Keshavarz et al. (2006) also used the same scenario seen in Beebe et al. (1990) and Al-Eryani (2007) where a boss offers a pay raise to an employee on the condition that the employee moves. Like Beebe et al. (1990), and unlike Al-Eryani (2007), the NES group in Keshavarz et al. (2006) did not give a statement of regret when refusing the boss's offer.

Keshavarz et al. (2006) compared the results of refusals to offers of varying power dynamics (i.e., refuser has a higher social status, an equal social status, or a lower social status to the interlocutor) of native Persian speakers and NES, finding differences in the use of positive statements. The NES used positive statements consistently (i.e., three of 37 participants) when they were a lower status, a higher status, and an equal status. The native Persian speakers did not provide a positive opinion when they were a lower status (e.g., the employee is lower than the boss), but some native Persian speakers did give a positive opinion when refusing an offer from a lower status person (i.e., 13 of

40 participants) and most used it when refusing an offer from an equal status person (i.e., 25 of 40 participants).

Taguchi (2013) investigated two different proficiency levels' L2 refusals (i.e., L2 refusals of a higher proficiency group and L2 refusals of a lower proficiency group) to an offer from an interlocutor of equal status (i.e., an offer for coffee from a sibling). The researcher specifically created this scenario to be a low imposition stimulus for a refusal in a role play. The other two role plays were a suggestion to take a course from a teacher and a boss requesting an employee to work on a Friday. The refusals were rated by English as L2 instructors. A significant difference was found between the advance level L2 English group and the beginner level L2 English group in terms of appropriateness rating, but Taguchi (2013) notes that there was less of a difference for the scenarios with a lower imposition (i.e., the offer and the invitation) than for the higher imposition scenarios (i.e., the suggestion and the request). This suggests that refusing higher status interlocutors (e.g., a teacher or a boss) appropriately is especially difficult for lower-level English L2 learners, who may lack the required pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge.

#### ***2.4.2 Directness of Refusals***

A common finding in studies investigating refusals of any stimuli (i.e., refusals of requests, offers, invitations, or suggestions) is that different groups (e.g., native vs. non-native speakers, lower proficiency language learners vs. higher proficiency language learners) use different levels of directness (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Bella, 2014). As stated earlier, Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of refusals included direct refusals which are clear but do little or no work to maintain face, indirect refusals which are less clear but do some work to maintain face, and adjuncts to refusals

which do work to mitigate the refusal but cannot be seen as a refusal without the inclusion of a direct or indirect strategy. Using this classification or a similar classification of refusals, researchers have been able to compare the level of directness between two or more groups when forming a refusal. According to the politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), there are several reasons why a refuser may choose to use a direct strategy. For example, the clarity that a direct refusal provides may help it be understood by the interlocutor and thus might help it be successful in the same sense that illocutionary acts would be considered successful according to Austin (1962). On the other hand, direct strategies do little or no work to maintain the speaker's negative face, or the hearer's positive face and negative face, which may make them seem inappropriate when taking politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) into account.

In a study comparing refusals to requests of Greek L2 learners (who came from multiple language backgrounds, including Bulgarian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Chinese, and Turkish) to native Greek speakers, Bella (2014) created three role plays based on varying social distance and power dynamics. The requests were from a friend for money, from a boss to stay late at work, and from a stranger to borrow a car. She found for all three scenarios that the learners used more direct strategies (e.g., “Δεν μπορώ να δίνω λεφτά” [“I can't give money”]), but fewer indirect strategies and adjuncts to refusals than their native Greek speaking counterparts. This was more the case for the request from a friend, and request from a boss, as Bella (2014) reports that native Greek speakers avoided the use of any direct strategies to refuse. Similarly, Al-Gahtani and Roever (2018) found that beginner L2 English learners were more likely to refuse a request from a stranger using unmitigated and direct refusals than their intermediate and advanced

counterparts. Beginner L2 English learners were the only group to have an example of a direct “no”. The similar apparent influence of proficiency on the directness of refusals in two languages (i.e., Greek and English) coupled with the participants’ diverse language backgrounds (i.e., Bulgarian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Chinese, and Turkish for Greek refusals, vs Arabic for English refusals) might suggest that direct refusals are more likely to be used when language learners lack pragmalinguistic knowledge of refusals in the target language.

In a recent study on refusals to requests by L2 Arabic learners (Al Masaeed et al., 2020), the refusals made by three groups of learners of various proficiencies were compared to those of a group of native Arabic speakers. It used three spoken DCTs (also referred to as closed role plays, and oral discourse completion tasks) borrowed from Bella (2014) and translated into Arabic. Like Bella (2014) and Al-Gahtani & Roever (2018), Al Masaeed et al. (2020) found that the higher the proficiency level, the wider range of strategies used by the participants, and that native Arabic speakers used more strategies than learners. The researchers believe that native Arabic speakers treat a stranger that lives in the same neighbourhood with culturally appropriate respect by apologizing (i.e., expressing regret) and giving an account (i.e., providing a reason) when refusing. This is in contrast with the Arabic L2 learners, who the researchers believed had shown dismissiveness and a lack of awareness of Arab community norms by using less elaborate refusals with more direct strategies. In contrast to Bella (2014), and Al-Gahtani and Roever (2018), Al Masaeed et al. (2020) found the native speaker group to use direct refusals more than any other group when refusing a request from a boss, which the researchers believe was to avoid confrontation and further negotiation. An explanation

for this discrepancy may be that, as has been shown in previous research on Arabic speech acts, native Arabic speakers prefer to be vaguer in their responses (e.g., Al Masaeed, 2017; Al Masaeed, Waugh & Burns, 2018). The vagueness of native Arabic speaker's refusals might require a direct strategy to ensure that the interlocutor understand the refusal.

The differences in these studies may be evidence that direct refusals, which are typically viewed as less polite, may be expected in some situations. In other situations, clarity of direct refusals may be an appealing aspect to language learners trying to communicate meaning, but direct refusals may come with unintended negative consequences like offending the interlocutor. Studies that have considered the directness of language learners have highlighted differences between language learners' and native speakers' use of direct refusals, attributing these, in some cases, to the learners' lack of the pragmalinguistic knowledge (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Bella, 2014) of indirect strategies and, in other instances, to the lack of sociopragmatic knowledge (e.g., Al Masaeed et al., 2020) of when to use direct strategies.

#### ***2.4.3 Retrospective Interviews with Participants***

This section will focus on additional methods used by researchers to gain further insights into their participants' production of refusals by means of retrospective interviews with participants that are introspective in nature (i.e., the participant reflects on their mental process [Gass & Mackey, 2000]). Many of the studies in the preceding sections coded refusals according to some classification, but as with studies like Al-Eryani (2007) and Taguchi (2013), rating refusals for the level of appropriateness may provide some additional insight by discovering in which situations language learners appear to have more difficulty refusing appropriately. These two methods (i.e., coding of

refusals to a classification system and rating refusals for appropriateness) rely solely on the judgement of a coder or rater, not of the refuser. For this study, and all studies on refusals reviewed in this chapter, the intention of the refuser is what determines that an utterance is a refusal. As the refuser's intention is of utmost importance, several investigations on the speech act of refusals have incorporated opinions of the participants through retrospective verbal reports (e.g., Farina & Wu, 2012; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003, 2008), follow up interviews (e.g., Keshavarz et al., 2006; Riddiford & Holmes, 2015), and stimulated recall interviews (SRI) (e.g., Salazar-Campillo, 2013). It should be noted that the retrospective verbal reports, follow up interviews, and SRI are all retrospective in nature, as they take place after a role play or DCT has taken place. The key difference between these methods is that the retrospective verbal reports and follow up interviews are guided by a series of specific questions predetermined by the researcher, while SRI are guided by questions intended to have the participant speak about thoughts that occurred during the DCT or role play by means of a stimulus (i.e., watching a video tape of a role play). Of the three methods, SRI is the only method that requires some form of support (e.g., a video) to help the participant recall the thought process (Gass & Mackey, 2000), but researchers can also include a similar form of support in the retrospective verbal reports and delayed follow up interviews reviewed in this section.

**2.4.3.1 Retrospective Verbal Reports.** To investigate the social perceptions of refusals to invitations between different groups of Latin Americans and a group of Americans learning Spanish, Félix-Brasdefer (2003) designed a retrospective verbal report – an interview that takes place after the role plays – that included nine questions. These questions focused on the participant's feelings (e.g., “How did you feel during the

interaction?”), perceptions of cultural differences (e.g., “Do you decline an invitation different in Spanish and in English?”), and the participant’s awareness of cultural norms (e.g., “How do you think native Spanish speakers would decline this invitation?”). The researcher asked the participants the same questions, except in the case where a question was not relevant to a group (e.g., he did not ask monolingual native Spanish speakers if they refuse differently in Spanish than in English), for each role play after playing an audio recording of the role play. He found that 80% of the Americans reported negative feelings (e.g., feeling uncomfortable, impatient, or corralled by the interlocutor) when the interlocutor was insistent the refuser accept an invitation. The Americans generally expressed that refusals to invitations were more direct in the United States as opposed to Latin American countries. Four of the ten American participants did not provide an example of how a native Spanish speaker would refuse, which Félix-Brasdefer (2003) believed was evidence that even advanced learners of Spanish lacked knowledge of Latin American values.

In a later study, Félix-Brasdefer (2008) investigated refusals to invitations in a similar context to his 2003 study. Again, Félix-Brasdefer (2008) employed role plays where a participant refuses an invitation followed by a retrospective verbal report. The retrospective verbal report was altered to have questions that focus on cognition (e.g., “What were you paying attention to when you refused in this situation?”), language of thought (e.g., “To what extent were you thinking in Spanish or in English?”), and pragmatic knowledge (e.g., “Have you noticed any cultural differences with respect to the notion of insistence between the United States and the country you visited in Latin America?”). The participants were American males who were advanced L2 Spanish

learners. Félix-Brasdefer (2008) found the participants reported various thoughts to explain their refusals, including the reason for the refusal, concern for the interlocutor, and particular elements of the Spanish language (i.e., grammar and vocabulary). Less than half of the participants reported thinking exclusively in the target language. Adding to his earlier study where the researcher found 80% of Americans reported a negative feeling with insistent interlocutors, Félix-Brasdefer (2008) focused attention on differences of the interlocutor's insistence. The researcher claims that it is important for most Latin Americans to show that an invitation was sincere after it is refused by insisting the refuser accept the invitation, which contrasts with American norms where insisting may be considered rude. Félix-Brasdefer (2008) found that even when an advanced Spanish L2 learner had explicit knowledge of the cultural perception of insistence, refusing appropriately when an interlocutor is insistent was a challenge for some learners.

Farina and Wu (2012) used the same role play prompts and adapted the questions for a retrospective verbal report from Félix-Brasdefer (2008) to investigate English refusals to invitations of Chinese university students in Malaysia and Malaysian university students in Malaysia. Through the retrospective verbal report, Farina and Wu (2012) found that Chinese students were mostly concerned with thinking about the reason for refusing and the interlocutor's attitude. Malaysian students were more concerned with the wording of their refusals and wanted to avoid upsetting the interlocutor. Like in Félix-Brasdefer (2008), more than half of the participants reported thinking in their first language (i.e., Chinese or Malay) before refusing in English.

**2.4.3.2 Delayed Follow Up Interviews.** Delayed follow up interviews (i.e., interviews with participants that generally take place after the initial data is collected) can provide an explanation of unexpected findings. For example, Keshavarz et al. (2006) found that a group of Iranians with the most advanced English L2 proficiency showed more signs of negative pragmatic transfer in refusals than a group of Iranian beginners and intermediate English L2 learners. This contradicted the findings of some previous studies (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Bella, 2014; Taguchi, 2013) that showed that higher proficiency in a L2 tends to lessen the level of negative pragmatic transfer in the case of refusals. The follow up interviews conducted by Keshavarz et al. (2006) provided a possible explanation to this unexpected result. The researchers asked questions based on the participants' choice of strategies and found that many of the participants explained their choices to be made by a perceived notion that English is a "dry" language while Persian was perceived as "flowery". The researchers suggested that the participants with a more advanced level of English had the ability to refuse in a way that reflected the participants' Persian speaking background by translating expressions from Persian to English. Keshavarz et al. (2006) explain that the less proficient English L2 learners did not have the linguistic resources to refuse in their preferred manner. These interviews seem to suggest that to maintain their language background, some advanced language learners choose to refuse in a way that is different from that of native speakers despite having a high level of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence.

In the longitudinal case study of a participant enrolled in a WLT program who moved to New Zealand from the Philippines, Riddiford and Holmes (2015) conducted follow up interviews after a role play was conducted in the first, sixth and final weeks of

the program. For the interviews, the participant watched a video recording of the role play while the researchers asked him questions looking to understand his cognition (e.g., “What were you thinking when you said that?”), awareness of sociocultural context (e.g., “What social features of the context were you paying attention to?”), and awareness of differences between workplace cultures (e.g., “Would this situation arise in your first language? What would you say if it did?”). The participant from the study, Salvadore, also would view videos of previous weeks’ role plays to compare with those of the current weeks. The role play examined in the study was a request from a boss, which the researchers observed Salvadore was able to refuse in a contextually more appropriate manner by the end of the WLT program. Through the follow up interviews Riddiford and Holmes (2015) found that Salvadore was initially hesitant to refuse a boss because of expectations he had from his experience of working in the Philippines, but over time he began to view it as more acceptable for a subordinate to refuse a superior’s request in a New Zealand workplace. When re-watching videos of the first- and sixth-weeks’ role plays Salvadore was able to point out clues from the interlocutor that his refusal had been accepted and also for Salvadore to stop speaking. By the final week, Salvadore reported that the norms for refusing at work in the Philippines were considered annoying by his co-workers in New Zealand.

**2.4.3.3 Stimulated Recall Interviews.** Retrospective verbal reports and follow up interviews thus far mentioned in this chapter have been used to better understand participants’ production of refusals and served somewhat of a supplementary role to the analysis of refusal strategies found in DCTs or role plays. In search of a valid method of a retrospective interview, Salazar-Campillo (2013) devoted a study to answer questions

primarily about the findings in SRIs and the validity of SRIs as an indicator of participants' thoughts while refusing. She hypothesized that the English L2 learners who participated in her study would verbalize sociopragmatic features of the situation in the role plays. She also hypothesized that SRI would include insightful comments that could help researchers interpret participants' refusals.

To answer her research questions, Salazar-Campillo (2013) conducted five open role plays that involved a refusal to a request with ten English L2 learners as refusers and herself as the interlocutor. The role plays were video-recorded and the recordings were played back to the participants during a SRI. Salazar-Campillo (2013) believed the participants did show awareness of the sociopragmatic features of the situation, with participants commenting on the inappropriateness of a situation (e.g., "it's not OK") and their attempts not to seem rude. For her second research question, Salazar-Campillo (2013) believed that through SRI she was able to gain further insights into the participant's production of refusals, giving examples such as participants using a blunt "no" when thinking about negative past experiences. Through the SRI, the researcher found re-occurring themes (i.e., that the participant would have accepted the request if not instructed to refuse, providing a justification for the refusal, describing personal experiences, wanting to make the interlocutor aware of the situation, appealing to common sense, and obeying a rule), which in some cases may provide an explanation of why a participant chose a particular strategy. For example, when some participants were blunt and direct in their refusals, they were thinking about a past negative experience. It also could highlight a situation when a participant would not refuse, as was the case of participants who stated they would have accepted a request in a role play. This may

explain if a participant uses different strategies than other participants in the same group, as they may have had difficulty to empathize with the refuser.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The language NNES newcomers to Canada use in an entry-level position has only recently been investigated. Refusals can be a particularly difficult FTA to navigate, and there are no studies on refusals in an entry-level workplace in Canada known to the researcher of the current study. There are also no known studies on refusals in a customer service context. To contribute to this growing body of work, the current study set out to investigate how the speech act of refusals is enacted by NNES newcomers to Canada, who have not received language instruction on refusals in the workplace and are currently working in an entry-level customer service job. The current study will also investigate how NESs in entry-level customer service positions in Canada form refusals, and potential reasons NNESs and NESs use those strategies. This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What strategies do non-native English speakers, and native English speakers use when refusing at an entry-level customer service position, and are there differences between the two groups?

2. What are the reasons behind the strategies used by non-native English speakers, and native English speakers when forming a refusal at an entry-level customer service position?

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter will describe the methodology utilized in the current study, which aimed to investigate refusal strategies used in entry level customer service positions in Canada between a group of non-native English speakers (NNES) and a group of native English speakers (NES). This chapter will cover the research context, participants, instruments employed, procedure for data collection, and the methods used to analyze data.

### **3.1 Research Context**

Primary concerns for newcomers to Canada are housing, language, and employment (Murphy, 2010). Assistance with these is available through government-funded settlement programs. This includes some workplace language training (WLT) programs, where the focus is primarily related to language used at work and development of job skills. A local community-based government-funded settlement program (henceforth “the settlement program”) created a WLT program as a response to a Syrian refugee influx in Canada. To enroll in this WLT program at the time the current study was conducted, four requirements had to be met: the candidate (henceforth “the client”) had to (1) be a refugee living in Ontario, (2) have Arabic as a first language, (3) have a Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) of three to five, and (4) be employed or in the process of being employed.

The WLT program connected clients with employers that would supply them with job opportunities, job development support, as well as one-on-one language training meant to help with job retention (OCISO, n.d.). The language training portion lasted 12 weeks and involved the clients meeting face-to-face with a volunteer language trainer

(VLT) assigned to them upon enrollment. Each meeting lasted 3-4 hours and was designed by the VLT to meet the needs of the client they met with; as such, the sessions varied from one client to the next. In terms of training and teaching experience, most VLTs were not TESL certified and had little to no previous experience teaching English as a second language. Because of this, many VLTs expressed difficulty with the task of designing lessons (Ady, 2020) and had the WLT program provide them with a materials toolbox. Still, these materials, according to the VLTs, did not sufficiently meet the needs of the clients, prompting the WLT program administrators to partner with Research in Newcomer Workplace Language (RNWL) from Carleton University to create ten self-learning modules for the clients that respond to the client's needs (OCISO, n.d.). Since most clients were working in the customer service industry, the modules reflected language used in that context and focused on such themes as small talk, responding to complaints, greetings and requests, and refusals (OCISO, n.d.). Tasks in the modules included prediction tasks, coming up with solutions to pre-determined scenarios, matching, and cloze-type passages (Ady, 2020). The modules were to be completed by the client online, via cell phone or computer, before meeting with the VLT in person. The VLT would then assist the client with any language-related issues the client may have faced when completing the module in addition to serving as a mentor, and advising the client on real-life work issues the client was facing.

### **3.2 Participants**

Two groups of participants (n=10) took part in this study (i.e., the NNES group, and the NES group). The NNES group consisted of five NNESs who were clients enrolled in the WLT program. The NES group consisted of five NESs with customer

service experience in an English-speaking workplace within Canada. Members of the NES group were not associated with the WLT program in anyway. The participants are described in more detail by each group below.

The method of recruitment was approved through CUREB-A clearance (Appendix A) prior to any contact with potential participants. To recruit for the NNES group, the settlement program sent an e-mail (Appendix B), which had an English description of the study and contact information for the ethics board that provided the clearance, to current WLT clients to introduce the clients to the research project. A translator who worked for the settlement program provided a description of the project over the phone if a client expressed interest in participating in the study. The NES group was recruited with the same e-mail (Appendix B) to people known by the researcher to have worked in customer service, who were encouraged to forward the e-mail to anyone they knew that worked in customer service who might have been interested in participating in the study. When a potential participant from the NNES group expressed interest in taking part in the study, the settlement program forwarded an invitation (Appendix C) that explained the purpose of the study and the procedure of the study, and that the participant would be videotaped, and audio recorded. The contents of this invitation were described over the phone by the translator from the settlement program. When a potential participant from the NES group expressed interest in taking part in the study, the same invitation (Appendix C) was forwarded to them by the researcher. Once the participants volunteered, they were asked to contact the settlement program (in the case of the NNES group) or the researcher (for the NES group) to find a mutually exclusive time and location to conduct the experiment; the settlement program

coordinated the meeting with the researcher. To protect their identities, all participants chose their own pseudonyms to use for this study.

### **3.2.1 NNES Group**

As Table 1 indicates, the NNES group (n= 5) was comprised of five NNES clients (3 males and 2 females) enrolled in the WLT program; the median age was 26.2 years. As with all clients enrolled in the program, the members of the NNES group were Arabic speaking refugees living in Ontario. At the time of the study, each member of the NNES group was employed in an entry-level customer service position in an English-speaking setting in the province. Although Dema did not report the length of time she had worked in customer service in Canada, it is known that at the time of the study, she was working at an entry-level customer service job.

**Table 1**

Participants from the NNES Group

Name	Age	Gender	Years of customer service experience
Messi	37	M	2
Alex	26	M	1
Sarah	23	F	1
Dema	23	F	No answer
Sam	22	M	2

All NNESs reported using Arabic exclusively at home, apart from Alex, who also used Turkish. None of the NNESs used English at home. In line with the settlement program's admission criteria, each participant had a CLB between three and five at the time the study was conducted. CLB three and four are classified as basic while CLB five is a low level of intermediate (CCLB, 2021). At these levels, the participants would have some trouble understanding information on unfamiliar topics, need support through

clarification in most conversations with English speakers, and make enough errors with grammar and pronunciation to cause frequent communicative breakdowns (CCLB, 2021).

The participants were each asked to report which group in the workplace they found refusing to be the most difficult. Participants were also asked to report an incident where they wanted to make a refusal that was especially difficult. Sarah, Sam, Alex, and Messi expressed difficulty with refusing their managers or supervisors. Dema, Sarah, Messi, and Alex expressed difficulty with refusing customers. Dema also reported having difficulty refusing suggestions such as advice on how to complete common tasks at work from co-workers. A suggestion from a co-worker might include the best order to complete tasks in, how to accomplish a particular task, and the best kind of shoes to wear at work. A needs analysis also revealed this group's inability to form refusals, which proved to be an issue leading to job loss with some WLT clients.

### **3.2.2 NES Group**

The NES group was comprised of five NES participants. For the current study, a native English speaker is a person who has spoken English since childhood. As expressed by some researchers (e.g., O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2013), the concept of a native language speaker can be problematic, and this might be especially true with NESs, as there are more NNEs, than NESs (Crystal, 2003). However, previous research on refusals has found it useful to compare native speakers of various languages such as Arabic (e.g., Al Masaeed, 2020), English (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990), Japanese (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990), Greek (e.g., Bella, 2011, 2014), and Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003, 2008). This is not to imply that a NES will refuse in English more appropriately than a NNE, or that a NNE will not encounter other NNEs in situations where they want to refuse in English. The comparison between native and non-native language speakers has allowed more

streamlined investigations that have been able to find possible conflicts and misunderstandings, such as language learners using overly direct refusals (e.g., Al Masaeed, 2020), or responding in a way that does not follow common norms that might be expected by the interlocutor (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). Thus, NESs were selected as a group to compare with the NNEs enrolled in the WLT program in terms of their refusal strategies in the context of English-speaking entry-level customer service positions in Canada.

Each of the five NES participants lived in Canada and used English daily. They all had some customer service experience (from six months to 19 years), with some of them working in a customer service position at the time of the study. As Table 2 shows, of the five NES participants, two were men, two were women, and one person did not want to disclose her gender but used “she/her” pronouns when referring to herself. The mean age of the participants in the NES group was 28.2 years old.

**Table 2**

Participants from the NES Group

Name	Age	Gender	Years of customer service experience
Claire	22	F	5
Thomas	27	M	4
Denise	26	F	0.5
Nolan	35	No answer (she/ her pronouns preferred)	19
Zach	31	M	3.5

Each participant from the NES group used English at home. Claire was the only NES participant who used other languages (i.e., Haitian-Creole and French) in the home. Thomas, Nolan, and Zach all had some school experience in French immersion programs as children and post-secondary school experiences in English. All five participants spoke

a second language, though only Claire reported using a second language on a regular basis.

While all participants had experience in entry-level customer service positions, Thomas and Nolan had experience in management as well. At the time of the study, Thomas reported having been the manager of a big box retail store for several years. Nolan had a supervisory role in a retail store, and had experience being a small business owner for a company that deals with customers. For her own company, Nolan had not had any employees at the time the study was conducted. As a result of their management and supervisor roles, Thomas and Nolan had experience with tasks such as creating employee schedules and training employees on new store products.

As with the NNE group, the NES group was asked who they found to be the most difficult to refuse while at work and to provide an example of a difficult situation. Claire and Thomas reported difficult situations of refusing a superior's request. Claire, Denise, and Nolan reported difficulty refusing customers, particularly with requests. Thomas and Zach reported difficulty refusing co-workers, with Zach providing an example of having difficulty refusing an experienced co-worker's suggestion to change the presentation of something that Zach did not agree with.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Instruments**

The study primarily used two instruments for data collection, (1) open-ended role plays set in a customer service environment, and (2) stimulated recall interviews (SRI), where participants reported their thought process during the role plays following the protocol set forth by Gass and Mackey (2000). The role plays were designed to be relevant to the context of this study, while considering the variables found in role play

design in previous research on refusals (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2004) to include varying degrees of social distance, power dynamics, and the four stimuli identified in the seminal study on refusals by Beebe et al. (1990). The stimulated recall interviews were prepared in a similar manner to Salazar-Campillo (2013), being conducted on the same day as the role plays using video footage as a stimulant to help the participant recall their thought process.

Salazar-Campillo (2013) was able to identify strategies used in refusals through open-ended role plays and to gain some insight into her participant's thought process with SRI. Thus, Salazar-Campillo's (2013) coding methods were used in the current study. Refusals found in role plays were coded using a taxonomy of refusal strategies (see Table 3) originally presented by Salazar et al. (2009). As Salazar et al. (2009) predicted, some additional strategies were discovered during the role plays of this study. These strategies were added to the taxonomy. The SRIs were coded based on categories found in Salazar-Campillo's (2013) study on refusals, with additional categories being added when needed.

To answer the first research question on the strategies used when forming refusals of NNEs and NESs in customer service, role plays were used where the participant was given a prompt to provoke a refusal (see 3.3.1 Prompts for role plays) and acted out a scenario with the researcher. Each role play included a stimulus to be refused and a motivation to make a refusal. This was done to allow the strategies used by NNEs and NESs in the same workplace-related situations to be observed. The design and procedures used for the role plays are detailed in section 3.3.1.

To determine the reasons for the strategies used in the role-plays (i.e., to answer the second research question), SRIs were chosen. A SRI allows the participant to vocalize their thought process during the role plays. This may point to some of the rationale behind why a particular strategy was chosen over another (please refer to section 3.3.3 for more information).

### ***3.3.1 Role Plays***

Studies that investigate the speech act of refusals collect authentic (e.g., Schnurr & Zayts, 2013) or simulated data (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990). Authentic data are considered by many researchers (e.g., Beebe & Cummings, 2006; Golato, 2003; Schnurr & Zayts, 2013; Turnbull, 2001) to be the gold standard for investigating speech acts and pragmatics, but it is difficult to obtain data of a specific speech act in a natural environment. Privacy concerns may also be an issue for collecting authentic data. Most studies on the speech act of refusals have opted to use simulated data, particularly written discourse completion tasks (DCT) and open-ended role plays. These studies require participants to respond to a prompt that was created to elicit the targeted speech act of refusals. Where DCTs often have a participant write out their spoken response to a prompt, open-ended role plays have a participant speak to another participant or the researcher to act out the scenario.

Role plays differ from written DCTs in several other ways that are useful to answer the first research question of this study. DCTs do not allow for turn taking when speaking, which is common in natural conversation. Role plays also reflect a more naturalistic situation, where a refuser must respond in a timely manner, in contrast to a DCT where the participant is afforded more time to form their response. Additionally,

since the purpose of the current study is to investigate spoken refusals, an instrument that captures natural speech was deemed more appropriate than a written response.

Simulated data, including role plays, have been criticized for not collecting authentic data (see Golato, 2003; Schnurr & Zayts, 2013; Scarcella & Brunak, 1981). However, role plays have been shown to resemble what a person is likely to say in a scenario (Yates, 2010). Role plays allow a researcher to control a scenario to elicit a specific speech act which is especially useful when investigating pragmatics (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006). Role plays also allow the researcher to observe a complete interaction, with the opening and closing of a conversation (Scarcella & Brunak, 1981).

Another benefit for role plays for the purposes of this study is that role plays can be video recorded, which was helpful for conducting SRIs. According to Gass and Mackey (2000), since in SRIs participants are reminded of an event through video along with the prompt, thoughts that occurred during the event can be vividly recalled (p. 67). During her study on refusals, Salazar-Campillo (2013) found video recordings of role plays provided a strong stimulus for the participants to recall during the stimulated recall interviews, and she was able to make some connections between what her clients were thinking during the role plays and the strategies they used.

**3.3.1.1 Design of Prompts for Role Plays.** To investigate the speech act of refusals with simulated data, prompts are designed to elicit a refusal in a participant's response to that prompt. Beebe et al. (1990) successfully obtained simulated data of refusals by creating prompts that vary for stimuli for refusals (i.e., request, offer, invitation, and suggestion), and for the status – superior, subordinate, or peer – of the refuser relative to the interlocutor (i.e., higher than, equal to, and lesser than). According

to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the status of the speaker (in this case the refuser) relative to the interlocutor has an impact on the strategies the speaker chooses to use in a face-threatening act (e.g., a refusal) as the strategies are heavily influenced by the power relationship between two parties. Studies (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2004; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) show evidence that another sociological variable put forth in politeness theory, social distance between two parties, also has an impact on the strategies used by participants when refusing. For example, Félix-Brasdefer (2004) found more instances of his participants being more direct in a situation with an equal status interlocutor they were close with than with a stranger.

Some studies (e.g. Aliakbari & Changizi, 2012; Delen & Tavit, 2010;) have used the discourse completion tasks scenarios from the seminal Beebe, et al. (1990) study on refusals, while other researchers modified those DCTs (e.g., Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Chen, 1996; Shirinbakhsh, Rasekh, & Tavakoli, 2018) and others (e.g., Bella, 2014; Dewi, Aniq, & Anisa, 2020; Félix-Brasdefer, 2004; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) designed new scenarios to meet the needs of their study or to reflect actual scenarios relevant to the participants. No studies known to the researcher were conducted in a Canadian entry-level customer service setting (the focus of the current study), thus six new scenarios were created to fit that context.

Prompts for six role plays were designed to meet a range of situations that were deemed relevant to customer service representatives. The prompts contained the four stimuli: with (1) a request (Prompt 1, Prompt 5, and Prompt 6), (2) an offer (Prompt 2), (3) an invitation (Prompt 3), and (4) a suggestion (Prompt 4). Most studies that involve simulated data on refusals include three power status levels in line with Brown and

Levinson's (1987) politeness theory (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Félix-Brasdefer, 2004; Salazar-Campillo, 2013), however, because the current study is only concerned with entry-level employees, scenarios where the refuser would have a higher power status than their interlocutor were not created to follow the definition from previous research on entry-level positions in Canada (Cheng et al., 2020; McCoy & Masuch, 2007), which describe *entry-level positions* as low-status jobs. The two varying power status levels included in this study were (1) refuser and interlocutor as equals (Prompt 3, Prompt 4, and Prompt 5), and (2) refuser lower than interlocutor (Prompt 1, Prompt 2, and Prompt 6). Having representation of the three levels of social closeness was also considered when designing the prompts and included: (1) intimate (Prompt 4), (2) acquaintance (Prompt 1, Prompt 2, Prompt 3, and Prompt 6), and (3) stranger (Prompt 5). This is in line with other research (Félix-Brasdefer, 2004; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) that has found social closeness to have an impact on the strategies used when refusing.

The settlement program provided the researcher with two re-occurring situations involving requests from managers that some WLT clients reported to the settlement program. These two situations were made into prompts (Prompt 1 and Prompt 6). Additional prompts were created by altering available prompts from existing studies to be more relevant to the context of this study (Prompt 2, and Prompt 3), and by creating scenarios that meet variables (stranger for social distance, and suggestion for stimuli) not present in other prompts (Prompt 4 and Prompt 5). After the six prompts were created, they were vetted by the WLT program's project coordinator at the settlement program and the RNWL team; the role-plays were also pilot-tested (see section 3.3.4 for details).

This section describes the design of the six prompts and the instructions given to the participant for each prompt.

**Prompt 1.** The first prompt is a request from a manager. The manager asks the employee to work on a holiday, but the employee already has plans and is unable to consider the request. This prompt was based on one by Bella (2014), who had a situation where an employee was asked to stay late on a shift. It was altered to take place on a holiday to reflect the situation reported by the settlement program where WLT clients did not know how to refuse a shift on a holiday. The participant was given a piece of paper with a description of Prompt 1 and asked to form a refusal based on the situation depicted:

You are a salesclerk at a gift shop. Your manager asks you to work on Tuesday, which is an annual religious holiday. You never work on Tuesdays, so you didn't request time off. You only have 3 shifts this week but you have plans with your extended family that are very important to you. You will not come on the Tuesday.

In this prompt, the employee would need to consider how to inform the manager that they are unable to work the shift while saving face. The last line in the prompt pushes for the refusal: "You will not come on Tuesday." The interlocutor being a manager places the employee in a lower power position.

**Prompt 2.** The second prompt is an offer from a manager. The offer is to work at a different location to receive more hours. This prompt was based on Beebe et al. (1990), who had a situation where an employee was offered another position that required the employee to move. This prompt was altered to resemble the common situation where a company has multiple locations within one city. Refugees in Canada have been identified

to be at a transport disadvantage (Farber et al., 2018), and thus the second prompt was altered from the one found in Beebe et al. (1990) to reflect the possible dilemma of getting to and from work. The participant was given a piece of paper with a description of Prompt 2:

You work at the counter of a coffee shop. You like the location because it is close to where you live. In the summer there are less hours for work. There is another coffee shop with the same owner where some of your co-workers do extra shifts. It is difficult to get to and so you won't work any shifts there.

In this prompt, the employee would need to consider how to reject the offer while saving face. The last line in the prompt pushes for the refusal: "It is difficult to get to and so you won't work any shifts there." The interlocutor's power status places the employee in a lower power position.

**Prompt 3.** The third prompt is an invitation from a co-worker. The co-worker asks a new employee to join him and other co-workers for dinner after the shift, but the new employee has plans. This prompt was based on an invitation prompt by Beebe et al. (1990), where a friend invites another friend over for dinner, but the other friend does not want to go. The prompt was altered to match a workplace setting, and a reason for the refuser to not go to dinner was provided to get more consistent answers between participants. Communication between co-workers is a very important aspect of work, and an employee's ability to fit in with the social culture in a workplace can predict the employee's chances of success in that workplace (Holmes, 2005). The participant was given a piece of paper with a description of Prompt 3:

You just started working at a grocery store. It is Sunday and the store closes before dinner time. You made plans with your significant other to go out for dinner tonight. You want to get to know your coworkers, but you won't change your plans with your significant other.

In the third prompt the employee would consider how to not join their co-workers while still coming across as a friendly and sociable person. The last line in the prompt, "...you won't change your plans with your significant other" pushes the participant to form a refusal in the role play. As with the fourth and fifth prompts, the refuser has the same power status as the interlocutor.

**Prompt 4.** The fourth prompt is a suggestion – advice – from a co-worker. The co-worker suggests that the employee use a garbage can in the restaurant that the manager instructed the employee to not use. Previous studies that have included suggestions have used situations that are not relevant to the workplace. For example, Beebe et al. (1990) had a situation where a friend recommends a diet, and Felix-Brasdefer (2004) used a situation where a bar was suggested. Because commenting on someone's diet may not be appropriate for the workplace and suggesting a bar is somewhat like Prompt 3 from this study, a new scenario was created. The participant was given a piece of paper with a description of Prompt 4:

You work in a fast-food restaurant. Often you clean off the tables and throw out the garbage left by customers. You were explicitly told not to use the garbage cans near the table meant for customers. You always throw the garbage out in the back even though it takes longer. You fear if you were seen using the garbage cans for customers, that you'd get in trouble. You will only use the garbage cans in the back.

In this prompt the employee would consider how to reject the suggestion while saving face with their co-worker. A motivation and a rationale are provided in the last two sentences of the prompt for the employee to refuse the interlocutor's suggestion "You fear if you were seen using the garbage cans for customers, that you'd get in trouble. You will only use the garbage cans in the back." As with the third and fifth prompts, there is no power imbalance between the refuser and the interlocutor.

**Prompt 5.** The fifth prompt is a request from a customer. The customer wishes to return a pair of pants that are ineligible for an exchange or refund according to the store policy. In this scenario, there is no obvious power distance between the customer and the employee, though it could be argued that in some situations the employee has more power and in other situations the customer has more power. Much of the research on refusing a request from an equal at work has focused on a business setting (e.g., Mitkova, 2018; Riddiford & Holmes, 2015). Salazar-Campillo (2013) included a prompt that had an interaction between a waitress and a customer. In her prompt, the customer refuses a request from a waitress. This was altered to create a scenario where the employee would be the one who must refuse a request from the customer as the intent of the study is to examine how entry-level customer service employees form refusals in the workplace; the prompt is also ecologically valid since employees in the customer service industry are expected to refuse some forms of service or discounts. The participant was given a piece of paper with a description of Prompt 5:

You work at a clothing store that has a strict return policy. You are not allowed to take items back from customers that are dirty and don't have tags on them. The customer

you are currently dealing with wants to return a pair of pants that have mud along the bottom and the tags have been taken off. You won't take the pants back.

In this prompt the employee would consider the store policy with the expectations and demands of the customer. The last line, "You won't take the pants back" pushes the participant to form a refusal. As with the third and fourth prompts, there is no power imbalance between the refuser and interlocutor.

**Prompt 6.** The final prompt, like the first prompt, is a request from a manager. In this situation, the employee is asked to hand out a free sample that contains pork, but the employee will not work with any pork products. This prompt was created based on situations reported by the WLT clients to the settlement program. At the request of the settlement program, this specific scenario was included to reflect a re-occurring situation that WLT clients had experienced. The participant was given a piece of paper with a description of Prompt 6:

You hand out free food samples at a grocery store. Usually, you are giving out a type of soymilk but today you are asked to hand out microwavable rice with ham in it. You do not eat pork products and you won't work with them.

In the sixth prompt the employee must balance advocating for their beliefs and boundaries to be respected without appearing as if they do not want to work. The last line, "You do not eat pork products and you won't work with them" is intended to push the participant to refuse the request to hand out a pork product. As with the first and second prompts, the refuser would have a lower status to the interlocutor who would be their superior at work.

### 3.3.2 *Stimulated Recall Interviews*

To answer the second research question, SRIs were conducted. These interviews serve as a recall measure where participants can explain their thoughts and actions from the role plays (Gass & Mackey, 2000). Several studies on refusals have included a follow up interview or questionnaire (e.g., Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Park & Oh, 2019; Siebold & Busch, 2015) to understand such concepts as pragmalinguistic knowledge and differences of pragmatic norms in different settings.

Salazar-Campillo (2013) proposed conducting SRIs in studies on refusals to gain further insights into the production of participants' refusals. She found that by doing a SRI after role plays, she was able to make connections between reported thoughts and strategies used. Participants were more likely to use *bluntness* – a direct “no” or “I refuse” – if thinking about a similar past event. Salazar-Campillo (2013) also found that participants were often thinking of how they could get the interlocutor to empathize when using *reason/explanation* – when an explanation is given – as a strategy to refuse.

Prior to SRIs taking place, the researcher prepared a description of the process for the participants and himself. This was adapted from Gass and Mackey's (2000, pp. 43-44) stimulated recall protocol:

Instructions for participants:

What we're going to do now is watch the video of your six role-plays. I am interested in what you were thinking at the time you were telling me you wouldn't do something I asked. I can hear what you were saying by looking at and listening to the video, but I don't know what you were thinking. So, what I'd like you to do is tell me what you were thinking, what was on your mind at that time while you were talking to me in the video.

You can pause the video any time that you want. So, if you want to tell me something about what you were thinking, you can push pause. If I have a question about what you were thinking, then I will push pause and ask you to talk about that part of the video.

Instructions for researcher:

Read the instructions for the participants and model pausing the video.

If the participant pauses the video, listen to what they say.

If you pause the video, only ask general questions such as:

“What were you thinking at this point?”

or “I see you’re laughing here, what were you thinking?”

If the participant says “I don’t remember” accept the comment and move on. Do not “fish” for answers.

Do not give concrete reactions to participants responses. Respond with “oh” “mhm” “I see” “ok” etc... (Appendix E).

A printed copy of the instructions for participants was provided to each participant and was read aloud by the researcher to follow the protocol provided by Gass and Mackey (2000). The researcher also prepared a printed copy of the instructions for him to reference during the SRIs.

### ***3.3.3 Pilot Study***

A pilot study was conducted before recruiting the participants. This was to ensure that (a) the prompts would elicit a refusal, (b) the refusals could be coded using an existing taxonomy of refusal strategies, (c) further insights could be gained into the reasoning for the refusals through SRIs, and (d) all equipment was in working order and could capture the data.

The researcher carried out the pilot study with a graduate student who was a NNES. She was not a WLT client. This was intentional since the WLT program had few clients and asking for one of them to partake in the piloting would automatically disqualify them from participating in the actual study. Like the WLT clients, the participant in the pilot study immigrated to Canada from a country in the Middle East, though her first language was not Arabic. She did not work in customer service but had work experience in her country of origin and Canada. Like the participants in the NNES group, the pilot study's participant used English in the workplace and did not use English at home.

The researcher recorded the six role plays and conducted the SRI (see 3.3.5 Procedure for a more detailed description of the process in data collection) with the pilot study's participant in less than an hour. The equipment used to capture video from the role play, to capture the audio from the SRI, and for the participant to watch the role plays on during the SRI, all proved to be effective. The dialogue from the role plays were transcribed and coded according to Salazar et al.'s (2009) taxonomy of refusal strategies. Each prompt elicited a refusal from the pilot study's participant. The participant also understood the SRI protocol (described earlier) and was able to recall the thought process during the role plays throughout the SRI. Thus, it was deemed suitable to proceed with the experiment.

### ***3.3.4 Procedure***

To conduct the current study, CUREB-A ethics clearance was obtained (see Appendix A) before any data collection. Those who agreed to participate met with the researcher one-on-one in a mutually agreed upon public space. At this meeting, the researcher went over a consent form (see Appendix D) that outlined the procedure of the

experiment. To ensure that language barriers did not cause any misunderstandings for participants for the NNES group, WLT clients who expressed interest in participating in the study were e-mailed a description of the purpose of the study and an explanation of the procedure ahead of the meeting; they were also given time to ask any questions or express concerns before data collection commenced. To ensure the WLT clients would be able to communicate their questions, an Arabic speaking translator was recruited. The translator was employed by the settlement program and was on site for all the meetings with members of the NNES group; he, however, was not in the room when the experiments were conducted. This was to more closely simulate the scenarios in the workplace, where the refuser would not have access to a translator, and a third person in the room may affect the dynamics between the participant and the researcher, as the participant may be concerned with how they are perceived by the translator. This also provided privacy for the participants from the settlement program. The researcher also met the translator ahead of the experiment to explain the procedure and purpose of the study. As English was the first language of the participants from the NES group, no extra person to ask questions was present. The researcher explained the procedure to members of the NES group and asked if they had any concerns or questions prior to commencing data collection.

After the consent form was signed, the participant was given Prompt 1 to read and to ask any questions for clarification. One minute later, the participant carried out the role play as the employee who refuses while the researcher performed the role of the manager. Each prompt included a line that was deemed to signal a need for a refusal, so the role play ended when the participant formed a refusal or when the participant accepted the

stimulus. One additional attempt was granted to those participants who requested it, with the initial attempt discarded from the analysis. The remaining five prompts were carried out in the same manner, with the participant acting as the employee who refuses something and the researcher taking on the role of the various target interlocutors. All recordings of the role plays were under three minutes, with most taking around one minute to complete.

After the six role plays were conducted, the participant filled out a short questionnaire for the researcher to collect basic background information (Appendix F). This questionnaire took each participant no longer than ten minutes to complete. During this time, the researcher prepared for the SRI that followed.

The SRIs were conducted immediately after the participant finished the questionnaire. This was done to ensure that the experiment took as little time for the participant as possible. This follows the design in Salazar-Campillo (2013), who conducted her SRIs with the participants on the same day as the role plays. This is also in line with the stimulated recall methodology advocated for by Gass and Mackey (2000), who argued that SRIs should be conducted within two days of the recall material – role play videos in the current study – being made.

In line with Gass and Mackey (2000), the participant was seated at a laptop and the researcher read the SRI procedure (see Appendix E) and the purpose of the SRI aloud. The procedure was also printed out and given to the participant to review at any time during the SRI. The participant was invited to (and shown how to) pause the video at any time to tell the researcher any thoughts that they could recall as they watched the role plays. The researcher also informed the participant that the researcher, too, may pause the

video and ask questions. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions about the process. If the researcher recognized a refusal strategy being employed in the role play but the participant did not pause the video around that moment, the researcher would pause the video and ask “What were you thinking at this moment?”. If the participant stated they could not remember or were not sure, the SRI moved on. This was to follow Gass and Mackey’s (2000) guidelines for stimulated recall questioning. If the researcher could not understand the participant, he asked for clarification while avoiding asking the participant the meaning of what they said, as they may not have been thinking of that meaning during the role play. The SRIs were audio-recorded.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

#### ***3.4.1 Role Play Analysis***

To analyze the data, role plays and SRIs were transcribed. The role plays were coded following the taxonomy from Salazar et al. (2009) for the frequency and order of refusal strategies. Frequency and order of strategies is used in much of the research on refusals (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) to determine how a refusal may be expected to be formed by a group in a given scenario, allowing for comparisons between groups. The Salazar et al. (2009) taxonomy includes three main categories: (1) direct strategies, (2) indirect strategies, and (3) adjuncts to refusals. Often multiple strategies are used to form a refusal. For example: “I’m sorry, I can’t because I’m busy,” uses three different strategies: (1) “I’m sorry,” functions as an indirect strategy where the refuser expresses regret, (2) “I can’t,” is a direct strategy where the refuser negates the proposition, and (3) “I’m busy,” is another indirect strategy where the refuser provides their interlocutor with a reason or explanation. Using Table 3, “I’m sorry, I can’t because

I'm busy," would be coded as (1) indirect- *regret/apology*, (2) direct- *negation of proposition*, and (3) indirect- *reason/explanation*.

**Table 3**

Revised Taxonomy of Refusal Strategies (from Salazar et al., 2009)

Refusal types	Examples
<b>Direct Strategies</b>	
1. Bluntness	<i>No. / I refuse.</i>
2. Negation of proposition	<i>I can't, / I don't think so.</i>
<b>Indirect Strategies</b>	
1. Plain indirect	<i>It looks like I won't be able to.</i>
2. Reason/ Explanations	<i>I can't, I have a doctor's appointment.</i>
3. Regret / Apology	<i>I'm sorry! I can't</i>
4. Alternative:	<i>I would join you if you choose another restaurant.</i>
• Change option	<i>I can't go right now, but I could next week.</i>
• Change time (postponement)	
5. Disagreement / Dissuasion/ Criticism	<i>Under the current economic circumstances, you should not be asking for a raise right now!</i>
6. Statement of principle / philosophy	<i>I can't. It goes against my beliefs.</i>
7. Avoidance	
• Non-verbal: ignoring	
• Verbal:	
○ Hedging	
○ Change topic	
○ Joking	
○ Sarcasm	<i>We'll see if I can.</i>
<b>Adjuncts to Refusals</b>	
1. Positive opinion	<i>This is a great idea, but...</i>
2. Willingness	<i>I'd love to go, but...</i>
3. Gratitude	<i>Thanks so much, but...</i>
4. Agreement	<i>Fine, but...</i>
5. Solidarity/ Empathy	<i>I'm sure you'll understand, but...</i>
6. Clarification request <sup>a</sup>	<i>Oh, you mean this Tuesday?</i>
7. Acceptance <sup>b</sup>	<i>If you need me to, I can come.</i>

<sup>a</sup>Clarification request and <sup>b</sup>Acceptance were strategies found in the current study and did not appear in the proposed taxonomy by Salazar et al. (2009).

In Salazar et al.'s (2009) taxonomy (Table 3) two types of direct strategies are identified: *bluntness* and *negation of proposition*. *Bluntness* includes all performative

refusals (i.e., refusals that contain the phrase “I refuse” or a direct “no”). *Negation of proposition* is when a refusal is presented by a lack of willingness or ability. Seven indirect ways to refuse are identified: expressions or phrases that speculate ability such as “I don’t think I can” (*plain indirect*), providing an explanation for the refusal such as “I have to work on Friday,” (*reason/explanation*), expressing regret or apologizing such as “I’m sorry,” (*regret/apology*), offering an alternative option or time such as “I’ll come next time,” (*offering an alternative*), disagreeing with, trying to dissuade, or criticizing the interlocutor such as “that doesn’t sound like a good idea,” (*disagreement/dissuasion/criticism*), providing a principle or a philosophical statement such as “I would never do something illegal,” (*statement of principle/philosophy*), and ignoring, changing the topic, making jokes or being sarcastic (*avoidance*). Five adjuncts to refusals are also identified by Salazar et al. (2009) where the refuser: expresses enthusiasm about the stimuli (*positive opinion*), expresses willingness (*willingness*), shows appreciation to the interlocutor (*gratitude*), agrees with the interlocutor (*agreement*), and appeals for the interlocutor to empathize with the refuser’s position (*solidarity/ empathy*).

Salazar et al. (2009) state that their taxonomy is not an exhaustive list of all possible strategies. This proved true in this study, where re-occurring strategies were found in the role plays that did not meet the description of any of the strategies in Salazar et al.’s (2009) taxonomy. These strategies were coded using a bottom-up approach and two new adjuncts were added. The first adjunct added was *clarification request*. For the purpose of this study, *clarification request* as a strategy for refusals is when a refuser asks for more information about the stimuli, as in “oh, you mean this Tuesday?”. This is

considered a refusal strategy because in certain situations, asking for more information can show a lack of enthusiasm or willingness. It may also in some cases be a way for a refuser to stall while they think of how they will word their refusal, or to try and find an aspect of the stimuli that will make it easier for them to refuse. *Clarification request* would in most circumstances not be taken as a refusal strategy without a direct or indirect refusal strategy, thus it is categorized as an adjunct to refusals. For example, in the final role play Sam asks “oh, does it have ham?” when the manager tells Sam that the rice has “peppers, onions and ham”. Without a direct or indirect strategy, this could be interpreted as an issue where Sam did not hear the manager. However, after the manager confirms that the rice contains ham, Sam uses a series of indirect strategies (*regret/apology*, *statement of principle*, and *offering an alternative*) to form a refusal, and the use of *clarification request* then serves as an adjunct to the refusal that happens before the actual refusal.

The second category added to the Salazar et al.’s (2009) taxonomy of adjuncts to refusals was *acceptance*, when a participant accepts the stimulus and does not form a refusal (e.g., “if you need me to, I can come”). In face-to-face interactions, accepting the stimulus and not refusing may be a strategy used by some speakers to end an interaction with a persistent interlocutor (Kim, 2019). Acceptance of offers and requests when participants were instructed to reject the offer or request has been observed in Balan et al. (2020). Balan et al. (2020) explain that this may be because of a participants’ personal values or beliefs. Balan et al.’s (2020) explanation seems to be that that the participant would actually accept the offer or request whereas Kim (2019) may imply that the acceptance is not sincere, and the refuser is just trying to end the interaction. Salazar et al.

(2009) also agree that, although *acceptance* is not in their taxonomy, it may be a strategy observed in natural scenarios (i.e., authentic data collection) when the interlocutor is persistent. Any instance where a refusal does not take place, or when a participant retracts a refusal was coded as *acceptance* and considered to be an adjunct to refusals. For example, for Prompt 2, Alex accepts the stimuli by stating “if not, I can come. If necessary, I can come...it’s not a problem,” after he used the indirect strategies of *plain indirect* and *offering an alternative* to refuse. His acceptance of the stimuli without the indirect refusal strategies would not be understood as a refusal, but with the indirect strategies, this acceptance of a request appears to be a way to soften the refusal by making it flexible, thus his accepting the request operates as an adjunct to his refusal.

When coding refusals, only the portions deemed relevant to the refusals themselves were focused on, with the interlocutor’s position and context of the interaction taken into consideration (Salazar et al., 2009). For example, Nolan’s response in Prompt 1 (i.e., “no, I didn’t see it”) was to the manager’s question and was not a refusal. Without taking the entire conversation into consideration, Nolan’s response (i.e., “no”) to a simple yes/no question might be incorrectly coded as the direct refusal, *bluntness*.

Prompt 1:

Manager: I don’t know if you saw but I put up the schedule for next week already.

Did you get a chance to look at it?

Nolan: No, I didn’t see it.

### **3.4.2 *Stimulated Recall Interview Analysis***

In line with Salazar-Campillo (2013), this study used stimulated recall interviews to gain further insights into the reasons behind the strategies used to form a refusal. In

her study, Salazar-Campillo (2013) created six categories of reasons for why the participants used a particular strategy. These six categories were used to code the stimulated recall interview transcriptions:

1. Acceptability: when a participant would not have made a refusal in the situation in their personal life. The participant may have refused the stimuli in the role play, but during the SRI, the participant stated that they would not have refused the stimuli if they were not instructed to.

Example: “If I were in this situation, I think I would just agree with the person and take their advice. I can’t see me actually following the manager’s advice.”  
“I’ll just try and get whatever work I can. It’s not ideal, but it’s fine.”

2. Provision of reasons: when a participant explains or justifies why the person in their role would make a refusal. Explanations of the situation and of reasoning were coded as provision of reasons.

Example: “I had to say that I couldn’t work there because it was too far from my apartment.”  
“I had to tell them about the policy after they were done complaining.”

3. Personal experience: when the participant spoke about previous encounters that did or did not reflect the scenario.

Example: “At my last job, we had customers try to return used clothing all the time.”  
“I’ve never been in this situation before.”

4. Making the interlocutor aware of the situation: when the participant explains that they are trying to gain empathy from the interlocutor by making the interlocutor fully understand the situation.

Example: “I wanted my co-worker to know that I had plans that night and that I did want to hang out with him but couldn’t.”  
“I was thinking about how I could make you aware I wasn’t going to return the item without making you angry.”

5. Common sense: when a participant appeals to common sense.

Example: “It would have been weird to say yes.”  
“Of course you had a lot of employees book it off, it makes a lot of sense.”

6. Obeying the rule: when a participant states they feel they must follow a rule.  
Example: “I had to do what the manager told me.”  
“I want to do things the way they are supposed to be done.”

The current study coded the SRIs using a top-down approach with Salazar-Campillo's (2013) existing categories. However, like the analysis of the role plays, other themes that did not match the six categories emerged because the settings of the current study and that of Salazar-Campillo's (2013) were different. Participants' reported thoughts that did not match the existing six categories were coded using a bottom-up approach, and two additional categories were created based on emerging themes. These themes were (1) Canadian workplace expectations, and (2) difficulty refusing. Canadian workplace expectations were thoughts reported by the participants of their beliefs of how a workplace does or should operate in Canada. When participants reported thinking about their ideas of boundaries (e.g., “it's the employer's job to respect that”) or day to day operations in the workplace (e.g., “even male staff should be able to sell bras to women”) it was categorized as Canadian workplace expectations. When a participant reported a thought that involved rules and Canadian workplace expectations (e.g., “I need to do it the way the manager says”) it was categorized as Canadian workplace expectations. The second category, difficulty refusing, consisted of instances when participants spoke about how difficult they found the task of refusing. This included when power dynamics made the participant unsure about a way to refuse (e.g., “you were the manager, so I had to say yes”), when the participant was unsure about how to appear sincere (e.g., “it's hard to say no to friends and not make it sound like you are just trying to be nice”), when the participant cannot empathize with the refuser in the role play (e.g., “I found this situation hard to empathize with”) and when explanations were difficult (e.g., “I was kind of nervous... how do I get out of this?”).

**Table 4**

## Categories From the Stimulated Recall Interviews

Category	Example
<b>Acceptability</b>	<i>Just absolutely, I'm not going to listen to (a manager) making my life harder, so I'll just do what (my co-worker) says.</i>
<b>Provision of Reasons</b>	<i>I wouldn't bend over backwards for my job and get to whatever location whenever so I'd have some kind of restrictions.</i>
<b>Personal Experience</b>	<i>Customers do that all that time and that's fine, but I had to insist that this our policy.</i>
<b>Making the Interlocutor Aware</b>	<i>How do I make it sound like, well I am being sincere because I do want to spend time with my co-workers, but I already have plans?</i>
<b>Common sense</b>	<i>"Of course you had a lot of employees book it off, it makes a lot of sense."</i>
<b>Obeying a rule</b>	<i>I had to. The rule is the rule.</i>
<b>Canadian workplace expectations<sup>a</sup></b>	<i>You get cliques at work and you don't want to come off as a brownnoser to your co-workers because you spend a lot more time with them than you do with your boss.</i>
<b>Difficulty refusing<sup>b</sup></b>	<i>I would be nervous if I were in this situation.</i>

<sup>a</sup>Canadian workplace expectations and <sup>b</sup>Difficulty refusing were two categories added to the six categories found in Salazar-Campillo's (2013) study on refusals.

When all reported thoughts from the SRIs were coded into categories, each thought was recorded with the refusal strategy types used around the time that the participant or the researcher paused the video. This was to see if there are any categories that are often used to explain the rationale behind using a particular strategy.

### **3.4.3 Inter-Rater Reliability Check**

After the role plays and SRIs were transcribed and coded by the researcher a check was performed to ensure the reliability of the analysis. This was done by having a second coder, a native English speaker with previous customer service experience, to code 10% of the randomly selected role play transcriptions and 10% of the SRI transcriptions. The second coder used the Salazar et al. (2009) with the two extra strategies identified by the researcher (i.e., *clarification request* and *acceptance*) as a guide to code the refusals found in the sample role plays with a top-down approach. She then coded the sample of SRIs using a top-down approach, with Salazar-Campillo's (2013) categories and the two additional categories discovered by the researcher (i.e. difficulty refusing, and Canadian workplace expectations) to code the SRIs. If the coder did not feel the categories accurately described the data, she would name a category that she believed well suited them.

The second coder and the researcher met online to discuss how they coded the refusals in the sample of role plays and the sample of SRIs. The raters agreed 90.16% of the time. In the case of any mismatched coding, or when a refusal strategy or element of the SRI did not fit into the pre-existing categories, the second coder and the researcher discussed their decision-making process until an agreement was met.

## Chapter 4: Results

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the current study to answer the two research questions: (1) what are the strategies used by non-native English speakers (NNES) and native English speakers (NES) when forming a refusal in entry-level customer service positions, and (2) what are the reasons behind these strategies? To answer the first research question, the types and frequencies of the strategies observed in the role-plays of the two groups of participants are analyzed. The second research question is addressed by examining verbalized thoughts of participants during the stimulated recall interviews (SRI).

### 4.2 Research Question 1: Strategies Used by NNESs and NESs

To determine the strategies used by the participating non-native English speakers NNESs and NESs when forming refusals in an entry-level customer service context, role plays were conducted. The refusal strategies used in each role play were categorized in terms of type and frequency across the two groups and then assessed per role-play prompt. To categorize the types of refusal strategies employed, the transcriptions of the role plays were first analyzed to determine the presence of such strategies and to then code them using a modified taxonomy of refusal strategies originally from Salazar et al. (2009) described in Table 3 (see Chapter 3 for details). Each strategy used was counted once and categorized under the strategy type it was deemed to represent. For example, for Prompt 3, in response to a co-worker's invitation to have dinner after work, Claire responded: "I want to, but I already have plans with my boyfriend. But next time, invite me, and I'll go for sure". This response was coded as having a total of three refusal

strategies, representing (1) *negation of proposition* (“I want to”), (2) *reason/explanation* (“I already have plans with my boyfriend”), and (3) *offering an alternative* (“But next time, invite me, and I’ll go for sure”).

#### **4.2.1 Overall Frequency of Strategies of NNES Group and NES Group.**

As Table 5 shows, the three main categories of refusals (i.e., direct strategies, indirect strategies, and adjuncts of refusals) were present in the data of both groups. A direct strategy clearly and overtly informs the interlocutor that a refusal is being made with no mitigation. An indirect strategy, in turn, informs the interlocutor that a refusal is being made but does so implicitly. Finally, an adjunct to refusals is a move to help mitigate the refusal and will usually not be understood by the interlocutor as a refusal without accompanying a direct or indirect strategy.

**Table 5**

*Frequency of Strategies From Modified Version of Salazar et al. (2009) Taxonomy of Refusals Used of NNES Group and NES Group for All Role Plays*

<b>Directness</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>NNES group frequency</b>	<b>NES group frequency</b>	<b>Total</b>
Direct	Bluntness	4	4	8
	Negation of proposition	17	21	38
Indirect	Plain indirect	6	5	11
	Reason/ Explanation	36	41	77
	Regret / Apology	16	15	31
	Alternative	20	13	33
	Disagreement/Criticism	5	5	10

	Statement of principle	3	6	9
Adjuncts	Positive opinion	0	2	2
	Willingness	5	10	15
	Gratitude	2	6	8
	Agreement	13	11	24
	Solidarity/ Empathy	4	3	7
	Clarification request	19	6	25
	Acceptance	9	2	11

In terms of frequency, the most common strategy was *reason/explanation* for both the NNES group (e.g., “but it’s far from my house”) and the NES group (e.g., “I already have plans with my boyfriend”). *Offering an alternative* was the second most common strategy for the NNES group (e.g., “we can go next time”), and the fourth most common strategy for the NES group (e.g., “I could switch with somebody else”). *Clarification request* is the third most common strategy used by the NNES group (e.g., “You just tried? You don’t use?”). The NES group used *clarification request* (e.g., “this has pork in it, right?”) less often than six other strategies (i.e., *reason/explanation*, *negation of proposition*, *regret/apology*, *offering an alternative*, *agreement*, and *willingness*). *Negation of proposition* is the fourth most common strategy for the NNES group (e.g., “I can’t work”), and the second most common strategy for the NES group (e.g., “I can’t”). The adjunct to refusals, *acceptance*, was used more by the NNES group (e.g., “I can come, it’s not a problem”) than the NES group (e.g., “I can’t go downtown on Saturday morning, but other than that, if it’s possible, I’d love to work there”).

The NNES group also had examples of *bluntness* (e.g., “no”), *plain indirect* (e.g., “I don’t know if I can go with you or not”), *disagreement/criticism* (e.g., “it’s dirty”), *statement of principle* (e.g., “it’s too hard because of my religion”), *willingness* (e.g., “I will try”), *gratitude* (e.g., “thank you”), *agreement* (e.g., “yeah”), and *solidarity/empathy* (e.g., “totally understandable for the situation”). Overall, the NNES group used 14 different strategies, including two direct strategies, six indirect strategies, and six adjuncts to refusals.

Every strategy used by the NNES group was found in the NES group as the NES group also had examples of *bluntness* (e.g., “no”), *plain indirect* (e.g., “I’ll think about it”), *disagreement/criticism* (e.g., “I don’t see it as a problem”), *statement of principle* (e.g., “I just wouldn’t feel right doing it”), *willingness* (e.g., “I’d love to”), *gratitude* (e.g., “thanks”), *agreement* (e.g. “right, I know”), and *solidarity/empathy* (e.g., “I do understand”). The adjunct to refusals, *positive opinion*, was the only strategy used by the NES group (e.g., “that sounds great”) that did not appear in the NNES group. The NES group used a total of 15 strategies, including two direct strategies, six indirect strategies, and seven adjuncts to refusals. Of the strategies from Salazar et al. (2009), *avoidance* is the only strategy to not have any observed occurrences in either group.

#### ***4.2.2 Refusal Strategies in Prompts Used by Participants***

**Prompt 1.** The first prompt is a request from a manager to work on a religious holiday. Since the interlocutor is a manager, this places the participant in a lower power status role. The level of social closeness between the participant and interlocutor is acquaintance as the refuser would know their manager, but the two are likely not close. The strategies used by the participants are listed in Table 6.

**Table 6***Strategies of Prompt 1: Work on Tuesday Role Play*

Directness	Strategy	Number of NNES who used	NNES example	Number of NES who used	NES example
Direct	Bluntness	0	-	2	“No.”
	Negation	4	“I can’t work,”	4	“I’m not gonna be able to come in Tuesday,”
Indirect	Plain indirect	1	“So, I don’t know if I can be here or no,”	0	-
	Reason/Explanation	5	“I have something to do for my family”	5	“I have plans with my extended family”
	Regret/Apology	2	“Sorry,”	1	“Unfortunately,”
	Alternative	2	“I will try and find another employee if they can do it or not,”	1	“So... if I could switch with somebody else,”
Adjuncts	Willingness	0	-	1	“Otherwise I would work it.”
	Agree	1	“Yeah, I see that,”	0	-
	Clarification	2	“If I can’t come Tuesday, what’s going to happen?”	0	-
	Acceptance	2	“I can come, it’s not a problem.”	0	-

Four strategies are found in both groups: (a) *negation of proposition*, (b) *reason/explanation*, (c) *regret/apology*, and (d) *offering an alternative*.

*Reason/explanation* was the most common strategy found in both groups, with all participants using this indirect strategy. The next most common strategy used was *negation of proposition*, with four participants from each group using it. *Regret/apology*,

and *offering an alternative* were used more frequently by the NNES group than by the NES group.

The NNES group used *plain indirect*, *acceptance* and *clarification request*, none of which appeared in the NES group. *Bluntness* and *willingness* are the strategies used by the NES group that were not used by the NNES group in this scenario.

**Prompt 2.** The second prompt is an offer from a manager to work at a different location. Since the interlocutor is a manager, this places the participant in a lower power status role. The social closeness between the participant and interlocutor is acquaintance as the refuser would know their manager, but the two are likely not close. The strategies used by the number of participants are listed in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Strategies of Prompt 2: Downtown Location Role Play*

Directness	Strategy	Number of NNES who used	NNES example	Number of NES who used	NES example
Direct	Bluntness	0	-	1	“Umm, no,”
	Negation	1	“I can’t do that,”	1	“I won’t be able to work at that location,”
Indirect	Plain Indirect	2	“I don’t think I’ll be able to just move there,”	1	“I don’t know,”
	Reason/Explanation	3	“But it’s far from my house,”	4	“It’s just not feasible for me to get to that location from where I live.”
	Regret/Apology	1	“Unfortunately,”	1	“Unfortunately,”
	Alternative	1	“maybe I can do one shift there,”	0	-

Adjuncts	Positive opinion	0	-	1	“That sounds great!”
	Willingness	0	-	2	“if you guys are really stuck,”
	Gratitude	0	-	1	“I appreciate the offer.”
	Agreement	1	“Okay.”	2	“yeah,”
	Solidarity/ Empathy	0	-	1	“Yeah, no... I understand.”
	Clarification	2	“Do you want only in the summer?”	0	-
	Acceptance	3	“Okay, I can go downtown.”	1	“Other than Saturday mornings, if it’s possible, I’d love to work there.”

Six strategies were found in both groups: (1) *negation of proposition*, (2) *plain indirect*, (3) *reason/explanation*, (4) *regret/apology*, (5) *agreement*, and (6) *acceptance*. *Reason/explanation* was the most common strategy used by both groups. *Acceptance* was used by most participants in the NNES group and one participant in the NES group. All other strategies found were used by two or less of the participants for either group.

Two strategies were used by the NNES group that were not used by the NES group: *offering an alternative* and *clarification request*. The NES group had one instance of *bluntness*, which is not found in the NNES group. The NES group also used adjuncts to refusals not found in the NNES group: *positive opinion*, *willingness*, *gratitude*, and *solidarity/empathy*.

**Prompt 3.** The third prompt is an invitation from a co-worker to have dinner. Since the interlocutor is a co-worker, the refuser and interlocutor have an equal power status. The social closeness between the participant and interlocutor is acquaintance, as

the prompt specifies that the refuser does not know their co-workers well. The strategies used by the number of participants are listed in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Strategies of Prompt 3: Dinner with Co-Workers Role Play*

Directness	Strategy	Number of NNES who used	NNES example	Number of NES who used	NES example
Direct	Bluntness	1	“No,”	0	-
	Negation	2	“I can’t go tonight,”	0	-
Indirect	Plain indirect	1	“So, I don’t know if I can go with you or not,”	0	-
	Reason/Explanation	5	“I already have plans with my family... my wife for dinner,”	5	“I already have plans with my husband,”
	Regret/Apology	2	“I’m so sorry,”	1	“Unfortunately,”
	Alternative	5	“maybe next time I can join you.”	4	“Next time, invite me and I’ll go for sure.”
Adjuncts	Positive	0	-	1	“That sounds great!”
	Willingness	3	“I really don’t mind to come with you guys,”	4	“I’d love to,”
	Gratitude	1	“Thank you.”	0	-
	Clarification	2	“Oh, around seven?”	1	“Oh, tonight?”
	Acceptance	0	-	1	“Would it be okay if I invited (my partner) along?”

Five strategies were found in both groups: (1) *reason/explanation*, (2) *regret/apology*, (3) *offering an alternative*, (4) *willingness*, and (5) *clarification request*.

*Reason/explanation* was used by all participants in each group. *Offering an alternative* was used by all but one participant (i.e., Nolan from the NES group). *Willingness* was the third most common strategy for the NNES group and used as often as *offering an alternative* for the NES group.

The NNES Group used the direct strategies, *bluntness*, and *negation of proposition*, whereas the NES group had no examples of direct strategies. The NNES group also had a single instance of *gratitude*, which was absent from the NES group. Two adjuncts found in the NES group where not found in the NNES group: *positive opinion* and *acceptance*. Although *positive opinion* does not appear in the NNES group, three examples of *willingness*, which overlap with the act of expressing positive opinions in this scenario, do appear. For example, in Denise’s response for this role play she said, “that sounds great,” which was coded as *positive opinion* by the researcher, but expressing a positive opinion here implies a willingness to attend the dinner.

**Prompt 4.** The fourth prompt is a suggestion from a co-worker to use a more conveniently located garbage can. Since the interlocutor is a co-worker, the refuser and interlocutor have an equal power status. The social closeness between the participant and interlocutor is close, or acquaintance, as the employees would know each other and may or may not be close. The strategies used by the number of participants are listed in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Strategies of Prompt 4: Garbage Role Play*

Directness	Strategy	Number of NNES who used	NNES example	Number of NES who used	NES example
Direct	Bluntness	1	“no”	0	-

	Negation	1	“I can’t”	4	“so, I’m just going to keep taking it back here for now”
Indirect	Plain indirect	0	-	1	“I’ll think about it.”
	Reason/ Explanation	3	“because my manager, he told me I can’t took the garbage and leave it in, the...”	5	“the manager told me not to and I just want to do it the way she wants it done”
	Alternative	1	“next time to do this”	0	
	Disagreement/ Criticism	0	-	2	“I don’t see it as a problem”
Adjuncts	Willingness	1	“I will try”	0	
	Gratitude	0	-	1	“but thanks for the tip”
	Agreement	3	“yeah”	3	“yeah”
	Clarification	1	“why?”	0	-
	Acceptance	3	“yeah, sure, absolutely”	0	-

Three strategies were found in both groups: (1) *negation of proposition*, (2) *reason/explanation*, and (3) *agreement*. *Reason/explanation* was used by every participant in the NES group. *Agreement*, *reason/explanation*, and *acceptance* were the most frequent strategies found for the NNES group.

The NNES group had single instances of using the direct strategy, *bluntness*, and the adjuncts to refusals, *willingness*, and *clarification request*, while none of these strategies appeared in the NES group. Three participants from the NNES group accepted the stimulus, while no participants from the NES group did so. Indirect strategies, *plain indirect*, and *disagreement/criticism*, were used by the NES group, but neither strategy

was found in the NNES group. An example of this strategy would be Claire stating, “I don’t think it’s a big deal” to disagree with her co-worker after the co-worker states that it takes too much time to bring the garbage cans to the back.

It should be noted that the majority of the NNES group accepted the stimulus. Alex and Sam used no direct or indirect strategies. Messi did use the indirect strategy of providing a reason, but after several turns with the interlocutor Messi accepted the co-worker’s suggestion to use the garbage cans in the front by telling the co-worker he will follow the co-worker’s advice even though the prompt given to the participants stated, “You will only use the garbage cans in the back.”

**Prompt 5.** The fifth prompt is a request from a customer to return a pair of pants. Since the interlocutor does not work with the refuser, they have an equal power status. The social closeness between the participant and interlocutor is stranger as this is the first time they interact. The strategies used by the number of participants are listed in Table 10.

**Table 10**

*Strategies of Prompt 5: Customer Return Role Play*

<b>Directness</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Number of NNES who used</b>	<b>NNES example</b>	<b>Number of NES who used</b>	<b>NES example</b>
Direct	Bluntness	2	“I don’t allow you to bring it back”	0	-
	Negation	3	“we can’t do anything without tags, or without receipt”	4	“I won’t be able to accept this pair you want to return”
Indirect	Plain indirect	2	“so actually, I don’t know”	1	“I don’t think I would be able to accept your return”

	Reason/ Explanation	4	“the only reason that the policy of our store that I cannot return anything that is dirty or has no tag on it”	5	“it’s our policy, our store policy that we can’t take things back without the tags or a receipt”
	Regret/ Apology	3	“sorry about that”	5	“unfortunately”
	Alternative	4	“I can talk with my manager”	3	“we can maybe talk to the manager about it”
	Disagreement/ Criticism	4	“it’s dirty”	3	“these have dirt on them”
Adjuncts	Willingness	0	-	1	“well yeah, we can look it up”
	Gratitude	0	-	1	“thank you very much”
	Agreement	3	“okay, but”	2	“okay, sure”
	Empathy/ Solidarity	2	“totally understandable for the situation”	1	“I understand that.”
	Clarification	4	“you just tried, you don’t use it?”	2	“so, these don’t have tags?”

Nine strategies were found in both groups: (1) *negation of proposition*, (2) *reason/explanation*, (3) *plain indirect*, (4) *regret/apology*, (5) *offering an alternative*, (6) *disagreement/criticism*, (7) *agreement*, (8) *solidarity/empathy*, and (9) *clarification request*. The most used strategies by the NNES group were *reason/explanation*, *offering an alternative*, *disagreement/criticism*, and *clarification request*, with all but one participant using each of these. The most common strategies for the NES group were *reason/explanation*, and *regret/apology* with all five participants using both strategies. The third most common strategy for the NES group was *negation of proposition*.

The NNES group had two instances of the direct strategy, *bluntness*, where the NES group did not use this strategy. The NES group had single instances of adjuncts to refusals not found in the NNES group (i.e., *willingness* and *gratitude*).

**Prompt 6.** The final prompt is a request from a manager to handle a pork product. Since the interlocutor is a manager, this places the participant in a lower power status role. The social closeness between the participant and interlocutor is *acquaintance*, as the refuser would know their manager but the two are likely not close. The strategies used by the number of participants are listed in Table 11.

**Table 11**

*Strategies of Prompt 6: Pork Rice Role Play*

Directness	Strategy	Number of NNES who used	NNES example	Number of NES who used	NES example
Direct	Bluntness	0	-	1	“no”
	Negation	2	“I can’t use it”	2	“I can’t work with this product”
Indirect	Plain indirect	0	-	1	“I don’t know.”
	Reason/Explanation	2	“I don’t like ham, touch the ham”	0	-
	Regret/ Apology	3	“I’m so sorry”	1	“sorry”
	Alternative	4	“I can do something else”	3	“but if there’s another product I can pass out without the pork or anything I’ll be able to pass it out”
	Statement of Principle	2	“I’m my religion can’t do any promotion for any product that includes ham or something like that”	5	“I’m kind of against selling meat products”

Adjuncts	Gratitude	0	-	1	“thanks”
	Agreement	2	“okay, but...”	1	“yeah”
	Empathy/ Solidarity	1	“as you know”	1	“you know”
	Clarification	3	“oh, does it have ham?”	3	“this has pork in it, right?”
	Acceptance	1	“okay, no problem”	0	-

Seven strategies were found in both groups: (1) *negation of proposition*, (2) *regret/apology*, (3) *offering an alternative*, (4) *statement of principle*, (5) *agreement*, (6) *empathy/solidarity*, and (7) *clarification request*. The most common strategy found in Prompt 6 was *offering an alternative* for the NNES group and *statement of principle* for the NES group. Both groups had three participants use the adjunct to refusals, *clarification request*.

The NES group has a single instance of the direct strategy, *bluntness*, and one instance of the adjunct to refusals, *gratitude*, neither of which are found in the NNES group.

To summarize, the results of the analysis of refusals indicate that the NNES group and the NES group appear to prefer indirect strategies, with *reason/explanation* being the most-used strategy by both groups. The adjuncts to refusals, *clarification request* and *acceptance*, were used more often by the NNES group than the NES group. The NNES group accepted the stimulus nine times, while the NES group only had two examples of the participant accepting the stimulus (Table 5). The only strategy to be used by every participant in both groups was *reason/explanation* in Prompt 1, Prompt 3, and Prompt 5.

Hence, to answer the first research question, NNEs and NESs use similar strategies in an entry-level customer service position, with NNEs using 14 of the 15 strategies used by NESs in the current study. The most-used strategy by both NNEs and NESs is *reason/explanation*. NNEs employ *offering an alternative*, *clarification request*, and *negation of proposition* as their next most used strategies. NESs use *negation of proposition*, *offering an alternative*, *regret/apology*, and *agreement* as their next most used strategies. Overall, NNEs accepted the stimulus more often than NESs.

### **4.3 Research Question 2: Reasons For Use of Strategies**

Stimulated recall interviews were conducted after the role plays to answer the second research question which looked at the reasons behind the use of particular refusal strategies. As described in Chapter 3, the participants met with the researcher one-on-one to watch a video recording of their role plays and comment on their thoughts during the process. These verbalizations were then analyzed to understand the reasons why the participants employed particular strategies in forming the refusals.

#### **4.3.1 Verbalized Thoughts by Strategy**

Refusal strategies used by participants in the role play that occurred immediately before, during or after a thought verbalized by a participant during the SRI were counted as an instance of a relevant thought for that strategy or those strategies. Thoughts were often verbalized near multiple strategies, thus the values in Table 12 may include verbalized thoughts that did not have a direct influence on the strategy used but were stated around the time the participant used that strategy. The findings in Table 12 are explained in terms of the strategies each category of verbalized thoughts seem to influence the most, and verbalized thoughts present in the most frequently used strategies (see Table 5) of each group (i.e., thoughts participants shared around their use of

*reason/explanation, offering an alternative, negation of proposition, clarification request, and regret/apology*). For example, during the SRI for Prompt 2 Sam speaks about trying to make the interlocutor aware of the situation, “I have to explain how and when and why to explain why I can’t do it,” after pausing the role play immediately after a point Sam used the strategies, *reason/explanation* (“it is very far from where I live, so it’s going to be a bit hard to get there”), *plain indirect* (“I don’t think I will be able to just move there”), and *offering an alternative* (“maybe I can do a shift”). The verbalized thought was coded as making the interlocutor aware, and counted once for each strategy for Table 12. Thoughts that were verbalized outside of, and not close to a refusal strategy, were recorded but not accounted for in Table 12, as they were not considered relevant to a particular strategy.

**Table 12**

*Verbalized Thoughts Expressed Near a Strategy*

	Strategy	Verbalized thoughts	NNES Group	NES Group	Total	
Direct Strategies	Bluntness	Provision of reasons	1	1	2	
		Making the interlocutor aware	2	-	2	
		Obeying a rule	1	-	1	
		Difficult refusing	-	1	1	
Negation of proposition	Negation of proposition	Acceptability	1	-		
		Provision of reasons	7	4	11	
		Personal experience	2	4	6	
		Making the interlocutor aware	5	6	11	
		Obeying a rule	1	1	2	
		Canadian workplace expectations	1	2	3	
		Difficulty refusing	-	5	5	
Indirect Strategies	Plain indirect	Provision of reasons	4	-	4	
		Making the interlocutor aware	1	1	2	
		Difficulty refusing	-	3	3	
	Reason / explanation	Reason / explanation	Acceptability	1	-	1
			Provision of reasons	10	6	16
			Personal experience	2	7	9
			Making the interlocutor aware	5	7	12
			Common sense	-	1	1
			Obeying a rule	1	1	2
Canadian workplace expectations	2	2	4			

		Difficulty refusing	-	6	6
Regret / apology		Provision of reasons	7	3	10
		Personal experience	3	4	7
		Making the interlocutor aware	4	6	10
		Canadian workplace expectations	1	-	1
		Difficulty refusing	-	3	3
Alternative		Provision of reasons	10	3	
		Personal experience	1	2	
		Making the interlocutor aware	2	4	
		Difficulty refusing	-	2	
Disagreement / criticism		Provision of reasons	2	3	5
		Personal experience	-	2	2
		Making the interlocutor aware	3	3	6
Statement of principle / philosophy		Acceptability	-	1	1
		Provision of reasons	2	1	3
		Making the interlocutor aware	1	1	2
		Canadian workplace expectations	-	3	3
		Difficulty refusing	-	2	2
Adjuncts to Refusals	Positive opinion	Provision of reasons	-	1	1
		Making the interlocutor aware	-	1	1
Willingness	Provision of reasons	Provision of reasons	2	3	5
		Personal experience	-	1	1
		Making the interlocutor aware	1	-	1
		Difficulty refusing	-	2	2
	Gratitude	Provision of reasons	1	-	1
		Interlocutor awareness	-	1	1
		Difficulty refusing	-	1	1
Agreement	Acceptability	1	-	1	
	Provision of reasons	4	1	5	
	Personal experience	-	3	3	
	Making the interlocutor aware	2	2	4	
	Obeying a rule	1	1	1	
	Canadian workplace expectations	1	3	4	
	Difficulty refusing	-	3	3	
Solidarity / empathy	Provision of reasons	1	-	1	
	Difficulty refusing	-	1	1	
Clarification request	Provision of reasons	9	1	10	
	Making the interlocutor aware	2	-	2	
	Obeying a rule	1	-	1	
	Canadian workplace expectations	-	1	1	
	Difficulty refusing	2	-	2	
Acceptance	Acceptability	1	-	1	
	Provision of reasons	6	1	7	
	Making the interlocutor aware	1	1	2	

As seen in Table 12, verbalized thoughts of acceptability (e.g., “I don’t eat meat, but I feel like you should be able to sell meat. Someone who is vegan or religious might

feel different, but to me that shouldn't matter from a sales perspective"), common sense (e.g., "of course you had a lot of employees book it off, it makes a lot of sense), and obeying a rule (e.g., "the rule is rule") were only observed a few times in this study. Each of these verbalized thoughts appeared no more than once for each strategy they were verbalized around. A participant from the NNES group, Sam, does provide us with an example of explicitly linking the verbalized thought of the stimulus (in this case a co-worker's suggestion) to a strategy, *acceptance*. In Prompt 4, Sam accepts the interlocutor's suggestion to use a garbage can that the manager instructed Sam not to use by responding "yeah sure absolutely". During the SRI, Sam articulated "I'm not going to listen to someone making my life harder, so honestly, so whatever, I'm just going to throw it there" as the explanation for why he accepted the stimulus. No verbalized thoughts of common sense, or of obeying a rule were explicitly linked to a strategy.

Provision of reasons (e.g., "at this location it maybe takes a lot of time to be there and I have a lot of things to do at the same time") is the most common verbalized thought by the NNES group for *negation of proposition, plain indirect, reason/explanation, regret/apology, offering an alternative, disagreement/criticism, statement of principle, willingness, agreement, and clarification request*. The NES group also verbalized thoughts of provision of reasons at least once for *bluntness, negation of proposition, reason/explanation, regret/apology, offering an alternative, disagreement/criticism, statement of principle, positive opinion, willingness, agreement, clarification request, and acceptance*. Provision of reasons was the most verbalized thought by the NES group for the adjunct to refusals, *willingness*. For other strategies, the NES group had more or the same number of instances of other verbalized thoughts as provisions of reasons.

Making the interlocutor aware of the situation (e.g., “in this situation I have to think to explain to my manager why I can’t do that”) was the most common verbalized thought from the NNES group for the direct strategy, *bluntness*. The NES group verbalized thoughts of making the interlocutor aware for *negation of proposition*, *reason/explanation*, *regret/apology*, *offering an alternative*, *disagreement/criticism*, and *acceptance* more often or as frequently as any other category. For example, the NES group verbalized both provision of reasons (e.g., “I’d have to offset it with the travel costs and the inconvenience since I took the job because it was convenient for me to get to”) seven times and thoughts of making the interlocutor aware (e.g., “it sounds like I’m blowing them off. How do I make it sound like, well, I am sincere because I do want to spend time with my co-workers but I already have plans?”) seven times for the indirect strategy, *reason/explanation*.

Personal experience (e.g., “the store I worked at didn’t have much seasonal, I guess a little”) was verbalized more often by the NES group than the NNES group. Sarah and Dema from the NNES group and Denise from the NES group were the only participants to not verbalize any thoughts of personal experience. *Reason/explanation* had the most instances of verbalized thoughts of personal experience from the NES group (e.g., “that’s something I’d try to tell my staff, just because the other staff do it this way, do it the way that I tell you”).

Verbalized thoughts of Canadian workplace expectations (e.g., “when you’re in Canada, religious discrimination is not acceptable in the workplace”) of participants from the NNES group and the NES group were found. The NNES group had two or fewer instances for each strategy it appeared for. The NES group had three instances where

thoughts of Canadian workplace expectations were verbalized when using the indirect strategy, *statement of principle*. These take place during Prompt 6, when a manager requests an employee to handle a pork product (see Table 14).

Difficulty refusing (e.g., “I would feel nervous in this situation”) was only verbalized by the NNES group for the adjunct to refusals, *clarification request*. The NES group verbalized thoughts of difficulty refusing at least one time for most strategies (i.e., *bluntness, negation of proposition, plain indirect, regret/apology, offering an alternative, statement of principle, willingness, gratitude, agreement, solidarity/empathy, and acceptance*), but not for *clarification request*. Difficulty refusing was the most common verbalized thought by the NES group when using the strategies of *plain indirect* and *solidarity/empathy*. Difficulty refusing was verbalized when using the adjunct to refusals, *agreement*, as frequently as any other thought verbalized near that adjunct.

In terms of frequency, the most common strategy used by the two groups was *reason/explanation*. The NNES group articulated provision of reasons when they used the indirect strategy of *reason/explanation* more than any other thought. For example, when Sarah used the indirect strategy of *reason/explanation* in Prompt 1, she verbalized “I can’t go work on Tuesday because I have something with my family, I can’t go on Tuesday” during her SRI because she was considering the situation and the reasons why she would be making the refusal. The NES group also verbalized provision of reasons when using the strategy of *reason/explanation*, however, the NES group verbalized thoughts of their personal experience and wanting to make the interlocutor aware of the situation more often. For example, for Prompt 2, Thomas verbalized his personal experience in the following way: “This is basically my rehearsed response. The store I

worked at didn't have much seasonal work, I guess a little, the store during the summer, it was busier, not much during the winter," during the SRI after pausing the video when Thomas explained to his manager that it was difficult for Thomas to travel to downtown when being offered the opportunity to work at the downtown location. Wanting to make the interlocutor aware of their situation was verbalized by Zach as: "You want their respect and friendship. Try to balance wanting to do the right thing without offending anyone, he must have a good reason," in Prompt 3, when speaking about the purpose of telling the interlocutor the reason Zach could not accept the invitation.

The second most common strategy for the NNES group was *offering an alternative*. The NNES group used provision of reasons as the most common type of thought for *offering an alternative*. For example, Messi verbalized it as "I think I am working on this place, and I am still working on this place, so maybe next time I can join them," during his SRI when he uses the strategy of *offering an alternative*, in Prompt 3. Provision of reasons was also articulated by the NES group when *offering an alternative*, but the NES group reported attempts to make the interlocutor aware of the situation more often. For example, Claire said, "it's important to let my co-worker know that I still want to socialize, just not this time," during her SRI when she offered to join her co-workers for dinner another time in Prompt 3.

*Negation of proposition* was the fourth most common strategy used by the NNES group and the second most common used by the NES group. The NNES group verbalized provision of reasons around uses of *negation of proposition*. Verbalized thoughts of making the interlocutor aware of the situation were most common for the NES group,

followed by verbalized thoughts of difficulty of refusing, provision of reasons, and personal experience.

*Clarification request* is the third most used strategy by the NNES group. Most verbalized thoughts around *clarification request* by the NNES group were provision of reasons. However, a participant from the NNES group, Alex, provides clear insight into his use of *clarification request* when he finds it difficult to refuse by verbalizing, “I was thinking about to earn time. To think about what I will answer you. To make you think about other thing, and I will answer your question,” during his SRI for Prompt 1.

*Clarification request* was used less often by the NES group, but Claire stated “It is important to ask for clarifications and ask questions. If there is anything that is confusing or you want to know more about the work that you do, you should have the right to refuse,” as an explanation of why she used *clarification request* for Prompt 6.

Every participant from the NES group and most participants from The NNES group used the indirect strategy of *regret/apology*. The NNES group verbalized provisions of reasons most often when using *regret/apology*. The NES group verbalized making the interlocutor aware most often when using the strategy of *regret/apology*. For example, Nolan verbalized, “You always want to apologize because it is an inconvenience on their end and you want them to feel good so that they will continue shopping at your store,” during her SRI after she apologized to a customer in Prompt 5.

#### **4.3.2 Verbalized Thoughts by Prompt**

Each prompt in this study had different variables: stimuli (request, offer, invitation, and suggestion), power dynamics (lower than interlocutor, or equal to interlocutor), and social closeness (stranger, acquaintance, and close). According to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, power dynamics and social closeness

influence the strategies a speaker uses in a face-threatening act. This section examines the verbalized thoughts of the NNES group (Table 13), and the NES group (Table 14) with consideration of the variables used to design the prompts. Verbalized thoughts that occur during each prompt may provide insight into how the variables of a prompt influence the thought process of the participant. For example, Salazar-Campillo (2013) found that the only instances participants verbalized thoughts about wanting to obey a rule was when they were refusing to a professor, which might suggest that being concerned about rule following is influenced by the interlocutor's social status.

Table 13 presents the participants from the NNES group who verbalized a thought of a particular category for each of the prompts.

**Table 13**

*NNES Group Participants Verbalized Thoughts by Prompt*

<b>Verbalized Thought</b>	<b>Prompt 1</b>	<b>Prompt 2</b>	<b>Prompt 3</b>	<b>Prompt 4</b>	<b>Prompt 5</b>	<b>Prompt 6</b>	<b>Total</b>
Acceptability	-	-	-	Sarah Sam	-	Dema	3
Provision of reasons	Messi Sarah Dema Sam	Messi Alex Sarah Dema Sam	Messi Alex Sarah Dema Sam	Messi Alex Dema	Messi Sarah Dema Sam	Messi Alex Sarah Dema Sam	26
Personal experience	Messi Alex Sam	-	-	-	Sam	Messi	5
Making the interlocutor aware	-	Sam	Alex Dema Sam	Messi	Messi Alex Sarah Sam		9
Common sense	-	-	-	-	-	-	0

Obeying a rule	-	-	-	-	Alex	-	1
Canadian workplace expectations	Messi	-	-	Messi	-	-	2
Difficulty refusing	Alex	-	-		Alex	-	2

As can be seen in Table 13, provision of reasons is either the most common, or tied to be the most common, verbalized thought in any of the prompts. When dealing with a stranger in Prompt 5, most participants in the NNES group expressed thoughts of making the interlocutor aware of the situation. Although there were nine instances where participants from the NNES group accepted a stimulus, there is only one example (Sam in Prompt 4) when a participant thought about the fact he would accept the stimulus (i.e., a suggestion from a co-worker) if presented with a similar situation in real life. All three men of the group shared personal experiences when refusing a manager's request, but none of the women in the NNES group shared any personal experiences. There were no instances where a participant from the NNES group verbalized an appeal to common sense.

Table 14 presents the participants from the NES group who verbalized a thought of a particular category for each of the prompts.

**Table 14**

*NES Group Participants Verbalized Thoughts by Prompt*

Verbalized Thought	Prompt 1	Prompt 2	Prompt 3	Prompt 4	Prompt 5	Prompt 6	Total
Acceptability	-	-	-	-	-	Thomas	1
Provision of reasons	Nolan	Denise Nolan	Claire Denise Nolan	Claire Denise	Claire Thomas Zach	Claire Nolan Zach	15

	Zach						
Personal experience	Thomas Zach	Thomas	Zach	Thomas Zach	Claire Thomas Nolan Zach	-	10
Making the interlocutor aware	Thomas Zach	-	Claire Thomas Denise Nolan	Claire Nolan Zach	Claire Denise Nolan Zach	Thomas	14
Common sense	Denise	-	-	-	-	-	1
Obeying a rule	-	-	-	Nolan Zach	-	-	2
Canadian workplace expectations	Claire	-	-	Thomas Denise Nolan	-	Claire Thomas Denise Zach	8
Difficulty refusing	Thomas Denise Nolan Zach	Claire Zach	Thomas Nolan	Nolan Zach	Denise	Thomas Denise Nolan	14

As can be seen in Table 14, provision of reasons was the most common verbalized thought, with an example being provided by at least one participant in the NES group for every prompt. Having difficulty refusing was also a thought expressed by at least one participant in all prompts. Thoughts of making the interlocutor aware of the situation were expressed by at least one participant in Prompt 1, Prompt 3, Prompt 4, Prompt 5, and Prompt 6. The offer from a manager in Prompt 2 is the only role play that does not have any instances where the participant reports thinking about making the interlocutor aware of the situation. Thinking of personal experience was verbalized by at least one participant in the NES group in every prompt except for Prompt 6.

To summarize, the NNES group articulated provision of reasons the most with 13 of the 14 strategies used in this study. The NES group articulated provision of reasons for

12 of the 15 strategies used in this study. The NNES group tended to verbalize desires to make the interlocutor aware of the situation, with specific examples given for the indirect strategies of *reason/explanation*, *regret/apology*, and *offering an alternative*. The NES group verbalized thoughts of expectations of a Canadian workplace, and the difficulty to form a refusal more often than the NNES group. Alex provided a clear example of using *clarification request* to gain more time to refuse, and Claire verbalized that she used *clarification request* to ensure that her expectations of a Canadian workplace are being met.

Provision of reasons is present for the majority of the NNES group (Table 13) in all scenarios when refusing. Verbalized thoughts of making the interlocutor aware were absent from all requests from a manager but appeared in a request from a customer. Consideration of the provision of reasons was present by at least one participant from the NES group for all scenarios when refusing. Difficulty refusing was verbalized by at least one participant from the NES group for each prompt.

These findings indicate that the use of most strategies seem to stem from the participants in both groups considering aspects of a given situation when forming refusals. NNESs reported thinking of the circumstances and details of the situation with most strategies and during all scenarios. NESs also consider aspects of the situation when forming a refusal for most strategies and in all scenarios examined in this study, however, NESs expressed concern with how to make the interlocutor aware of the situation for frequently used indirect strategies, such as *reason/explanation*, *regret/apology*, and *offering an alternative*, more often than considering aspects of the situation when forming a refusal. The two groups could also use the same strategies for different reasons.

That is, participants from the NNES group may use *clarification request* to gain more time to form their refusals, while participants from the NES group may use *clarification request* to ensure that their expectations of the workplace are being met.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter discusses the results of the current study in terms of the two research questions investigated. The first section discusses the findings for the first research question which aimed to investigate the strategies used by non-native English speakers (NNES) and native English speakers (NES) in an entry-level customer service context through role plays. The next section addresses the findings for the second research question which aimed to investigate the reasons behind the use of strategies by NNESs and NESs in an entry-level customer service context through stimulated recall interviews (SRI). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the pedagogical implications and limitations of the study as well as future research directions in the research of refusals.

### 5.1 Refusal Strategies of NNESs and NESs in an Entry-Level Customer Service

#### Context

This section discusses the results from the role plays in terms of common strategies used, refusals of different stimuli (i.e., refusals of requests, refusals of offers, refusals of invitations by peers, refusals of suggestions by peers), the level of directness used by the refuser, and observed instances of unsuccessful refusals.

#### 5.1.1 Frequently Used Strategies

The current study found the NNES group used 14 strategies when refusing, and the NES group used 15 strategies when refusing. The most common strategies for the NNES group were *reason/explanation*, *offering an alternative*, *clarification request*, and *negation of proposition*, while the most common strategies for the NES group were *reason/explanation*, *negation of proposition*, *offering an alternative*, and *regret/apology*. This study found the same most common strategy for both groups, the indirect strategy of *reason/explanation* (e.g., “I have plans with my family”). This is in line with previous

studies (e.g., Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Codina-Espurz, 2013, Farnia & Wu, 2012; Riddiford & Holmes, 2015; Salazar-Campillo, 2013; Schnurr & Zayts, 2013) that find *reason/explanation* or an equivalent strategy to provide an account as to why the stimulus is being refused as either the most common strategy, or one of the most common strategies for refusals.

The second most common strategy found in this study was the direct strategy, *negation of proposition* (e.g., “I can’t”). This contrasts with previous findings (e.g., Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Codina-Espurz, 2013; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) where direct refusals were less common than certain indirect refusals (i.e., *regret/apology*, *offering an alternative*). Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) puts forward the notion that when a speaker’s desire to efficiently express a face-threatening act (FTA) is greater than their desire to maintain face, the speaker does not do the work necessary to minimize the threat of the FTA. In an entry-level customer service context, there may be some situations that clarity of the employee’s unwillingness or inability to accept a request, offer, invitation, or suggestion is greater than the employee’s desire to maintain face, as not following through with the acceptance might lead to worse tension and greater loss of face than what would be lost by being direct when refusing. This can be seen in prompt 1, where Nolan and Zach use both direct strategies, *bluntness* (e.g., “no”), and *negation of proposition* (e.g., “I can’t”) to ensure that the manager understands that the employee will not be working on the holiday. Ensuring the manager knows the employee will not come in might prevent tension between the manager and employee that could occur if the manager expects the employee to work on the holiday, and the employee does not work on the holiday.

The third and fourth most common strategies found in the current study were the indirect strategies, *offering an alternative* (e.g., “maybe next time I can join you”) and *regret/apology* (e.g., “sorry”). *Offering an alternative* was used most often by the NNES group (e.g., “maybe next time I can join you”) when refusing an invitation from a co-worker, but instances of it can also be seen in the NNES group when refusing a manager’s request to work on a holiday (e.g., “I will try and find another employee if they can do it or not”), an offer from a manager (e.g., “maybe I can do one shift there”), a suggestion from a co-worker (e.g., “next time to do this”), a request from a customer (e.g., “I can talk to my manager”) and a request from a manager to handle pork (e.g., “I can do something else”). Like the NNES group, the NES group used *offering an alternative* most often when refusing an invitation from a coworker, but instances of it can also be seen in the NES group when refusing a manager’s request to work a holiday (e.g., “so, if I could switch with somebody else”), a customer return (e.g., “we can maybe talk to the manager about it”), and a manager’s request to handle a pork product (e.g., “but if there’s another product I can pass out without the pork or anything I’ll be able to pass it out”). *Regret/apology* was used by most of the NNES group when refusing a customer’s request (e.g., “sorry about that”) and when refusing a manager’s request to handle a pork product (e.g., “I’m so sorry”). The NNES group also used *regret/apology* when refusing a manager’s request to work on a holiday (e.g., “sorry”), and a manager’s offer (e.g., “unfortunately”). All five participants in the NES group used *regret/apology* when refusing a customer’s request (e.g., “unfortunately”) but some members of the NES group also used regret when refusing a manager’s request to work on a holiday (e.g., “unfortunately”), a manager’s offer to work downtown (e.g., “unfortunately”), a co-

worker's invitation (e.g., "unfortunately"), and a manager's request to handle pork (e.g., "sorry"). The frequent use of these strategies is in line with findings from previous studies that have found *offering an alternative* (e.g., Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; Schnurr & Zayts, 2013) or *regret/apology* (e.g., Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Codina-Espurz, 2013; Riddiford & Holmes, 2015; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) to be used frequently by participants.

### **5.1.2 Refusals of Requests in the Workplace**

The current study investigated three requests, two from a manager and one from a customer. The most common strategy used to refuse the first request from a manager (i.e., the manager asks the employee to work on a holiday) and the request from a customer (i.e., the customer asks the employee to process a return) was the indirect strategy, *reason/explanation* (e.g., "I have something to do for my family" and "it's our policy, our store policy, that we can't take things back without the tags or a receipt"). This is in line with previous research (e.g., Al Masaeed, 2020; Codina-Espurz, 2013; Riddiford & Holmes, 2015; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) which has found *reason/explanation* to be the most, or second most, commonly used strategy when refusing a request. The second request from a manager (i.e., the manager asks the employee to handle a pork product) had only two of the participants using *reason/explanation* (e.g., "I don't like ham, touch the ham"), which contrasts with findings from previous research. This might be because two NNEs (i.e., Messi, and Sam) and all five NESs (i.e., Claire, Thomas, Denise, Nolan, and Zach) used the indirect strategy *statement of principle* (e.g., "I'm kind of against selling meat products") which, like *reason/explanation*, can provide an account of why the request is being refused.

### **5.1.3 Refusals of Offers in the Workplace**

In addition to requests, the current study investigated refusals to an offer from a manager (i.e., the manager offers the employee more shifts at a different location), which saw only one NES provide a statement of regret (e.g., “unfortunately”), and no NESs offered an alternative (e.g., “maybe I can do one shift there”). This is in line with Beebe et al. (1990), and Keshavarz, et al. (2006), who found that NESs typically did not use the indirect strategies of *regret/apology* or *offering an alternative* when refusing a boss’s offer for a raise on the condition the employee moves.

The current study also found four participants (i.e., Alex, Sarah, Dema, and Denise) accepted the offer (e.g., “okay, I can go downtown”), which might suggest that this offer was challenging, particularly for Alex and Sarah, who used indirect refusal strategies (i.e., *plain indirect*, and *reason/explanation*) before accepting the offer. This is in line with the findings of Taguchi (2013), who found that language learners had more difficulty refusing a higher status interlocutor (e.g., a teacher or a boss).

### **5.1.4 Refusals of Invitations from Peers**

The current study found that most participants from the NNES group and NES group used the three strategies, *willingness* (e.g., “I’d love to”), *reason/explanation* (e.g., “I already have plans with my husband”), and *offering an alternative* (e.g., “maybe next time I can join you”) in their refusals to a co-worker’s invitation (i.e., a co-worker asks the employee to have dinner), suggesting that most of the NNESs refuse in a way that resembles the refusals of NESs. This is in line with the findings from Bella (2011), who found that Greek learners with extensive contact with native Greek speakers formed refusals of invitations that resembled those made by native Greek speakers, as the current study’s participants in the NNES group were working in customer service positions in

Canada that likely required them to interact with native English-speaking customers, co-workers, and superiors on a regular basis. This finding contrasts with Félix-Brasdefer (2003), who found that second language (L2) Spanish learners could not form appropriate refusals to invitations in the target language (i.e., Spanish). An explanation for this is that the participants in Félix-Brasdefer's study were attending an American university at the time the study was conducted and were not living in a similar context to which the study was set in (i.e., a Latin American country), whereas the NNES group of the current study were living in a similar context to which the current study is set (i.e., working in an entry-level customer service job in Canada). Another explanation for the contrasting findings between Félix-Brasdefer (2003) and the current study is that Félix-Brasdefer's study looked at non-native speakers of Spanish, and the current study is investigating non-native speakers of English. It is possible that refusing in Spanish in a Latin American context is harder for non-native Spanish speakers, than it is for NNESs to refuse in English, as refusing an invitation in the Spanish speaking Latin American context often involves responding to insistence on the part of the person issuing the invitation (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003).

#### ***5.1.4 Refusals of Suggestions***

The current study found that while every participant from the NES group formed a refusal to a suggestion from a co-worker (i.e., advice to not follow a supervisor's instructions in the interest of time), most of the participants in the NNES group (i.e., Messi, Alex, and Sam) accepted the suggestion and agreed to follow the co-worker's advice. This is in line with Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993), who found that NES students formed successful refusals to a professor's suggestion of courses to enroll in (i.e., the refusal was acknowledged by the professor and the student did not take the

course recommended by the prof) while NNES students were more likely to not form successful refusals (i.e., the refusal was not acknowledged by the professor or the student enrolled in the recommended course against the student's own wishes).

The current study found when refusing a suggestion from an equal there were no instances of *bluntness* (e.g., “no”) in the NES group and no instances of *gratitude* (e.g., “but thanks for the tip”) in the NNES group. This is in contrast with Al-Eryani (2007) who found examples of NES and NNES participants using *bluntness* and *gratitude* when refusing a peer. A reason for this might be because of the different prompts (i.e., the current study has advice on how to do a task at work quicker whereas Al-Eryani's suggestion from an equal is diet advice). The personal nature and an implication of the refuser needing to lose weight may result in the refuser having a thought of a past negative experience of being judged resulting in the use of *bluntness*. Some research (e.g., Salazar-Campillo, 2013) has shown that thoughts of past negative experiences can result in the refuser using *bluntness*. Consequently, *gratitude*, an adjunct to refusals that does work to maintain face, might be used to soften the refusal once a refuser is aware of their use of *bluntness*.

#### **5.1.5 Level of Directness**

Previous research on refusals of different language proficiency levels tend to show that lower proficiencies are more likely to use direct strategies to refuse (e.g., Bella, 2014; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018), possibly due to a lack of pragmalinguistic knowledge of gentler ways to refuse. This can be seen in the way direct strategies are used by two NNESs, Dema and Sarah, when refusing a co-worker's invitation. Dema and Sarah were the only participants of either group to use direct strategies. Every NESs provided a reason (e.g., “I already have plans with my husband”) with four NES using *willingness*

(e.g., “I’d love to”) and *offering an alternative* (e.g., “next time invite me, and I’ll go for sure”). Similarly, Messi, Alex, and Sam used *willingness* (e.g., “I really, don’t mind to come with you guys”), *reason* (e.g., “I already have plans with my family...my wife for dinner”), and *offering an alternative* (e.g., “maybe next time I can join you”). Dema and Sarah, like all participants, used *reason/explanation* and, like most of the other participants (i.e., Messi, Sam, Alex, Claire, Thomas, Denise, and Zach), used *offering an alternative*, which suggests Dema and Sarah have some sociopragmatic knowledge of how an invitation might be refused in this context. Dema uses the most direct strategy, *bluntness* (e.g., “no”), followed by another direct strategy, *negation of proposition* (e.g., “I can’t”). Similarly, Sarah starts her refusal with *regret/apology* (e.g., “sorry”), followed by *negation of proposition* (e.g., “I can’t go tonight”), before giving a reason (e.g., “I have something else to do”) and *offering an alternative* (e.g., “I can go for next Sunday”). Dema only uses one of the adjuncts to refusals, *agreement*, and Sarah only uses two adjuncts to refusals, *agreement* and *gratitude*. Since Dema and Sarah both demonstrated some sociopragmatic knowledge through structuring their refusals in a similar manner to the other participants (i.e., ending with *reason/explanation* followed by *offering an alternative*), it might be an issue where Dema and Sarah are both lacking knowledge of the pragmalinguistic forms of the different adjunct to refusals that leads them to using direct strategies more often. This is in line with previous research (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Al Masaeed, 2020; Bella, 2014) which has found that language learners tend to use more direct strategies when refusing than native speakers (like the finding of the current study where none of the NESs used *bluntness* as a refusal strategy to refuse an

invitation), likely due to a lack of pragmalinguistic knowledge (i.e., lack of knowledge on different conventions to refuse).

The invitation from a co-worker was the only prompt where no participants from the NES group used a direct strategy. In all other prompts there was at least one instance of a participant from each group who used a direct strategy. *Bluntness*, the most direct strategy that does the least work to maintain face, was used by at least one participant in the NES group when refusing a manager, while no participants from the NNES group used *bluntness* when refusing a manager. Although in a different language (i.e., the study investigated Arabic language learners' refusals), this is similar to Al Masaeed et al. (2020), who found that the native Arabic speakers were more direct than non-native Arabic speakers when refusing a superior at work. A possible reason for the similar findings might be that the less proficient a NNES is, the more difficult it is for them to refuse a superior (Taguchi, 2013), thus, an employee using their first language in the workplace may be willing to use an unmitigated refusal strategy (e.g., *bluntness*) to ensure the success of the refusal (e.g., native Arabic speakers being more direct in Al Masaeed et al., [2020]), unlike employees with varying degrees of proficiency using their L2 in the workplace who may be uncomfortable using *bluntness*.

#### **5.1.6 Unsuccessful Refusals**

Unsuccessful refusals – refusals that either are not understood to be a refusal by the interlocutor or the intended outcome of refuser does not occur – are rarely observed in simulated data with many studies not finding a single instance of an unsuccessful refusal (e.g., Farnia & Wu, 2012; Salazar-Campillo, 2013). This study, however, found multiple cases of unsuccessful refusals, particularly those made by NNEs, where each participant in the NES group accepted at least one stimulus. This corroborates the findings from

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993), where NESs produced no instances of unsuccessful refusals, but more than one third of NNESSs' refusals were unsuccessful. The success rate of the refusals was able to be determined by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) because the researchers could observe the outcome. The current study cannot verify that a refusal is successful through witnessing if the desired outcome of the refuser occurs, as the role play has no real outcome. The choice to accept the stimulus may also have been conscious in some cases, such as when Sam accepted a suggestion from a co-worker but revealed that he accepted the suggestion because he agreed with the co-worker and would have accepted it at his actual workplace.

The current study had some cases where no direct or indirect strategies were used prior to accepting the stimulus (e.g., Dema accepted the manager's offer without any attempt to refuse), which may be because the participant did not intend to refuse the stimulus despite being prompted to. This was confirmed for a participant from the NNESS group, Sam, who accepted a co-worker's suggestion without any attempt to use any direct or indirect refusal strategies, as he stated during the SRI, "I'm not going to listen to someone (i.e., the not present supervisor) making my life harder, so honestly, so whatever, I'm just going to throw it there (i.e., where the co-worker suggests)." Of the 11 instances where the stimulus was accepted, five participants did not use any direct or indirect strategies. Four of the NNESSs (i.e., Messi, Alex, Sarah, and Dema) and one NES (i.e., Nolan) accepted the stimulus after the use of an indirect strategy (i.e., *reason/explanation*, *plain indirect*, or *offering an alternative*) or the direct strategy, *negation of proposition*. In the case for the NNESSs, the stimulus was accepted after some insistence on the part of the interlocutor. Language learners not being able to form a

successful refusal with an insistent interlocutor is in line with Félix-Brasdefer (2003), where an interlocutor's insistence led to 80% of L2 participants reporting having negative emotions, and Félix-Brasdefer (2008), where even advanced language learners had difficulty refusing an insistent interlocutor appropriately. In the case where a NES (i.e., Nolan) appears to have accepted an invitation, she responded to the co-worker's invitation with the indirect strategy, *reason/explanation* (e.g., "the thing is, me and my partner have plans for dinner that I can't really cancel"), followed by requesting that her partner join ("would it be okay if I invited them along too?"). This is considered an unsuccessful refusal because she used an indirect strategy, suggesting she was attempting to refuse, and she agrees to go to dinner on the condition her partner also come, even though the prompt instructed her to not change her plans. Nolan may have formed an unsuccessful refusal because she did not intend to refuse, but her use of an indirect strategy implies that she did attempt to form a refusal. She may have used the adjunct to refusals, *acceptance*, to give her more time to form a refusal, for example, she may have accepted the invitation in the moment to end the FTA, with the intention of later refusing. It also may have been because this was during a role play, where the consequences of accepting the invitation have no impact on Nolan's real life (i.e., Nolan does not need to change plans with her partner). As a result, Nolan may have felt that accepting the invitation was the easiest option to end the FTA.

In line with Cheng et al.'s (2020) finding that NNEs working in entry-level jobs in Canada report difficulty communicating with customers, co-workers and supervisors, and Douglas et al.'s (2020) participants reporting communication breakdown with the same groups, the current study observed unsuccessful refusals of the NNE group with a

superior at work (e.g., three NNES participants accepted a manager's request, and three NNES participants accepted a manager's offer), and a co-worker (e.g., three NNES participants accepted a co-worker's suggestion). However, in contrast with the reports found in Cheng et al. (2020), and Douglas et al. (2020), all five NNESs from the current study were able to refuse a customer's request, suggesting that the scenario (i.e., a customer requests to return a dirty item) was not a challenge for the NNES participants.

The NNESs were able to form successful refusals in every role play where the participant verbalized thoughts of a similar situation to the role play during the SRI (e.g., "this has happened before with me in real life, it's exactly like this"). This suggests that previously experiencing similar situations may make it easier for the NNES participants to successfully refuse. An explanation for every NNES participant being able to successfully refuse a customer's request to return an item might be that the NNES participants have experienced similar situations since they all have experience working in customer service. Participants who were unable to form a successful request in other situations (i.e., a request from a manager to work on a holiday, an offer from a manager to work at a different location, a suggestion from a co-worker to ignore the supervisor's instructions) may have not had similar experiences.

## **5.2 Insights from Stimulated Recall Interviews**

To address the second research question, this section discusses the results from the stimulated recall interviews in terms of the themes found, reasons behind the use of strategies, sociopragmatic knowledge of participants, how social status influences the thought process when refusing, and difficulty empathizing with the refuser in some situations by some participants.

### ***5.2.1 Themes Found in Stimulated Recall Interviews***

The SRIs revealed themes of acceptability, provision of reasons, personal experience, desires to make the interlocutor aware of the situation, common sense, obeying a rule, Canadian workplace expectations, and difficulty refusing in the thoughts reported by the participants. This is in line with Salazar-Campillo (2013), who found examples of six of the eight themes observed in this study (i.e., she found examples of acceptability, provision of reasons, personal experience, wanting to make the interlocutor aware of the situation, common sense, and obeying a rule). The theme of Canadian workplace expectations is unlikely to have been found in a context that is not in a Canadian workplace, or with participants who have experience in a Canadian workplace, so it is logical that it does not appear in Salazar-Campillo (2013). The presence of the theme of refusals being difficult in the current study contrasts with Salazar-Campillo (2013) who did not report any participants' thoughts on how difficult it is to refuse in the situation. One explanation for this may be the participants who verbalized thoughts on how difficult it was to refuse their interlocutor were from the NES group (i.e., Claire, Thomas, Denise, Nolan, and Zach), with the only participant from the NNES group (i.e., Alex) stating he was thinking of how difficult it was to refuse during two scenarios. This might be because non-native speakers have additional things to consider when forming a refusal such as grammar, vocabulary, and translating thoughts from another language (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008).

In terms of themes most often appearing in the SRIs, the current study found that every participant from the NNES group and the NES group both reported provision of reasons at least once. This is in line with other studies (e.g, Farina & Wu, 2012; Riddiford & Holmes, 2015; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) which found that participants were concerned

with various aspects of the situation to justify their refusal. An explanation for this is that providing a reason or explanation to the interlocutor is one of the most common strategies used when refusing (e.g., Beebe et al., 1990; Bella, 2014; Salazar-Campillo, 2013), and if the refuser is able to think of a justification for the refusal they might be able to express that as an explanation to the interlocutor.

The current study also found that all participants from each group reported thoughts on their desire to make the interlocutor aware of the situation. This is in line with other studies (e.g., Riddiford & Holmes, 2015; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) that found examples of both themes provided by a participant when reflecting on their refusal in a role play. Similar to the explanation provided on why every participant shared provision of reasons during the SRIs, every participant reporting thoughts of wanting to make the interlocutor aware of the situation might be related to their use of the common strategy, *reason/explanation*, as the way to make the interlocutor aware of the situation would be to provide them with an account (i.e., a reason, an excuse, or an explanation) for the refusal.

### ***5.2.2 Evidence of Reasons Behind Strategy Use Through Stimulated Recall***

The current study found instances where participants explained the thought process behind their use of some strategies, such as *reason/explanation* (e.g., Zach wishes to make the interlocutor aware of the situation, “You want their respect and friendship. Try to balance wanting to do the right thing without offending anyone, he [the refuser] must have a good reason”), *offering an alternative* (e.g., Claire wishing to make the interlocutor aware of the situation, “it’s important to let my co-worker know that I still want to socialize, just not this time”), and *statement of principle* (e.g., Denise reporting her expectations of a Canadian workplace, “when you’re in Canada, religious

discrimination is not acceptable in the workplace”) when refusing in an entry-level customer service position. Participants explaining why they use a strategy was seen with Salazar-Campillo (2013) who, through SRIs, was able to find a reason why some participants chose to use the direct strategy, *bluntness*. The awareness of why the participant is using a particular strategy suggests that some participants are conscious of their pragmalinguistic knowledge, and their sociopragmatic knowledge, which should enable them to form a successful refusal.

### ***5.2.3 Signs of Pragmatic Knowledge of Language Learners***

In line with Félix-Brasdefer (2008), Keshavarz et al. (2006), Riddiford and Holmes (2015), and Salazar-Campillo (2013), the current study found some evidence of language learners’ explicit sociopragmatic knowledge through the SRIs. Like Salvadore in Riddiford and Holmes’ (2015) study displayed increasing awareness of the differences in how refusals are formed in his new workplace, in this study, Messi showed knowledge of differences between work in Canada and work in his home country when refusing a manager’s request to work on a holiday (e.g., “It depends sometimes on the culture. I think in my culture a lot of times we accept everything even if sometimes I will make my family sad ... But when I came to Canada, I learned you have to take a right, and this is my right. If I can [work on a holiday] it’s okay, but if I can’t, it’s okay also”). Furthermore, like the participant from Riddiford and Holmes (2015), Messi learned about how a power imbalance between an employee and a superior may impact refusals in the workplace (i.e., both Salvadore and Messi felt that it was not appropriate to refuse anything from a boss in their home countries and had become aware that this was not necessarily a requirement in their new workplaces).

#### 5.2.4 Status and Refusals

The current study found that when refusing a superior (e.g., a manager or supervisor) the NNES group mostly reported justifications for the refusal (e.g., “I think it’s good to take more extra hours but it has to be comfortable with me if I get this extra hour”). This is in line with previous research findings (e.g., Farina & Wu 2012; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) where NNES participants reported similar themes of thoughts when refusing someone with a higher social status (e.g., a student refusing a teacher, a subordinate refusing a superior) in a retrospective report. This might suggest that the NNES group is establishing thoughts that would help them perform the indirect strategy, *reason/explanation*, when refusing a superior. Some evidence of this can be seen in every NNES role play with a refusal to a manager, as each successful refusal included the participant providing the manager with an account of why they are refusing (i.e., using the indirect strategies of *reason/explanation* or *statement of principle*), and reported provision of reasons to justify their refusals (e.g., “at this location it maybe takes a lot of time to be there and I have a lot of things to do at the same time”). Providing an interlocutor with an explanation for the refusal is a common strategy that is often the most frequently used type of strategy found in studies (e.g., Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Codina-Espurz, 2013, Farnia & Wu, 2012; Riddiford & Holmes, 2015; Salazar-Campillo, 2013; Schnurr & Zayts, 2013), however, refusals to superiors might require special attention, and in many cases a combination of strategies to mitigate the refusals. This was seen in an authentic interaction involving a refusal from a subordinate to a superior in Schnurr and Zayts (2013). As such, it might be beneficial for language learners to consider other things (e.g., expectations in the workplace, power dynamics, etc.) when refusing.

In the current study, each NES reported thoughts of how difficult it was to refuse a superior (e.g., “I would feel nervous in this situation, which explains my tone”) in at least one role play where the participant had a lower social status (i.e., Prompt 1, Prompt 2, and Prompt 6). This contrasts with the findings of some other studies (e.g., Farina & Wu, 2012; Salazar-Campillo, 2013) that did not report participants thinking of how difficult it is to refuse a higher status interlocutor. This could be understood as some employees are hesitant to refuse an employer, such as in Riddiford and Holmes (2015), where the participant shared his fear of losing his job if he refused a request from his superior. Another reason every participant of the NES group may have reported thoughts of how difficult it is to refuse when refusing a higher status interlocutor could be because of negative personal experiences (e.g., perceiving a previous employer to not be a leader) that may cause negative feelings (e.g., uncomfortable, impatient, annoyed, etc.). For example, during a SRI, Zach voiced a thought about feeling awkward in the situation and worried about the outcome when he refused his manager’s request to work on a holiday (“I’d probably feel awkward because I can’t do it. Definitely be worried about upsetting the boss”); this was because of a personal experience he had when working in retail (“my experience from working customer service is that bosses are much more bosses rather than a leader”). The refuser’s negative feelings (i.e., feeling nervous) or thoughts of past negative experiences (i.e., not respecting a superior) may explain the reason why the participants reported difficulty to refuse, as negative feelings might lead to less appropriate refusals being formed. This is in line with Félix-Brasdefer (2003), who found that the most appropriate refusals were formed by the participants who did not report negative feelings during a retrospective verbal report.

The NNES group mostly reported justifications for their refusals (e.g., “I want to go, but you can ask me for another date because I am busy”) when refusing someone of equal status (e.g., a co-worker or a customer), similar to the thoughts the NNES group reported when refusing someone of higher status (i.e., a manager). This is in line with Farina and Wu (2012), who found that NNESs provided reasons for refusals with an equal. The NNES group of the current study also reported justifications for their refusals when refusing a superior more than any other thought. The same thoughts being reported when NNESs refuse equals, and when NNESs refuse superiors is in line with Farina and Wu (2012) who also found that NNESs reported the same thoughts when refusing equals (e.g., a friend) and refusing superiors (e.g., a teacher). This might suggest that the interlocutor’s role may not change the thought process of some NNESs when forming refusals, which might lead to some refusals being considered inappropriate (e.g., refusing in an overly formal way to a peer, or a refusal that is too casual for the context).

When refusing an equal status interlocutor, the NES group also provided reasons (e.g., “If I already have plans I shouldn’t have to cancel those plans to socialize with my co-workers, I’ll have other opportunities for that. I’ll have other opportunities to spend with my significant other, but I had those plans first”), and desires to make the interlocutor aware of the situation (e.g., “how do I make it sound like, well I am being sincere because I do want to spend time with my co-workers, but I’m already have plans?”). This is in line with Farina and Wu (2012) who found provision of reasons to be one of the most reported verbalized thoughts when refusing an equal status interlocutor. The NES group’s most reported thoughts when refusing an equal (i.e., provision of reasons and wanting to make the interlocutor aware) were different from their most

reported thoughts when refusing a higher status interlocutor (i.e., how difficult it is to refuse). This shift of thoughts verbalized by the NES group depending on their interlocutor's status is in line with Salazar-Campillo (2013) who found that thoughts about needing to obey a rule only occur when dealing with a higher status interlocutor, which may suggest that the status of the interlocutor has an influence on the type of thought the refuser has. This might suggest that NESs have a different thought process when refusing equals than they do when refusing superiors, which might lead to more appropriate refusals for the context.

### ***5.2.5 Difficulty Empathizing***

The current study found several instances where the participants reported difficulty empathizing with the person they were playing in the role play. For example, to explain why he accepted the suggestion in the role play despite the prompt instructing him to refuse, the NNEs participant, Sam, explained that he would have accepted a suggestion from a co-worker to disregard a supervisor's instructions at his actual place of work ("yeah, sure, just absolutely. Like very direct, I'm not going to listen to someone making my life harder, so honestly, so whatever, I'm just going to throw it there"). Participants reporting difficulty empathizing with the refuser is consistent with the findings from Salazar-Campillo (2013), where most participants reported that they would not refuse the interlocutor if they found themselves in the same situation as the refuser for one of the role plays. This may suggest that in some cases when a participant does not form a successful refusal during a role play, it might be because that participant has made the conscious choice to not refuse.

One role play (i.e., refusing a manager's request to handle a pork product) had two NES group participants (i.e., Thomas and Nolan) reporting difficulty empathizing with the scenario. This can be seen by verbalized thoughts of Thomas:

“I found this situation a little harder to empathize with. To me, I feel like the mark of a good salesperson is that you shouldn't be able to be using the product to be able to sell it well. A lot of male staff at the store I work in are uncomfortable selling sports bras. I didn't understand that at all, it shouldn't matter that I'm a man, I'm a good salesperson. I can sell a sports bra to any woman. I understand that I might be vegan or that I might not eat pork for religious reasons. I just found that harder to empathize with that scenario. It shouldn't matter. Well, I don't eat meat, but I feel like you should be able to sell meat. Now someone who is vegan or has religious objections might feel differently, and I'm sure they do. But, to me, that shouldn't matter from a sales perspective. So, that's what I was thinking about.”

Nolan also expressed her struggle to empathize with the refuser in the same role play:

“I was trying to come up with a reasonable reason of why I couldn't do it. And for me, personally I only buy animal products that are ethically farmed, so if I were to actually have a reason to not push a commercial product more successfully, that would be the reason. Mass produced products are not ethically sourced or handled. It doesn't come as easily to me to have that conversation because I would find it harder to give a valid argument. I'm having more trouble of living in this skit. Which is why I'm stumbling more.”

These verbalized thoughts suggest that neither Thomas nor Nolan believe that there is a valid reason to not handle pork products despite both being aware of a potential ethical dilemma with handing animal products, and in the case of Thomas, having an awareness of it potentially being for religious reasons. Nolan also voiced annoyance with the refuser during her SRI (“I would be really annoyed with someone refusing that request”). As stated earlier (see Chapter 3), the design of the prompt for this scenario was based on reports of similar incidents given by clients of the WLT program. Additionally, one of the participants of the NNES group (i.e., Messi) disclosed that he encountered a similar experience (i.e., being asked to hand out a pork product). The difficulty to empathize expressed by Thomas and Nolan supports Douglas et al.’s (2020) reports from newcomers that there is affective tension (e.g., annoyance, interlocutor insensitivity) in entry-level jobs in Canada between some NESs and NNESs. A lack of empathy on the part of these two NES participants is not evidence of how they interact with co-workers in their actual workplaces but believing that reasons to refuse a task are not valid could lead to refusals being unsuccessful if the refusals are not acknowledged by the interlocutor. An unwillingness to empathize might also justify some newcomers’ perceptions that some interlocutors hold a negative attitude towards newcomers. These newcomers’ perceptions of the interlocutor’s negative attitudes towards newcomers can lead to further communication breakdown (Douglas et al., 2020), which may result in more affective tension in the workplace.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

A refusal is a difficult face-threatening act that requires knowledge of the forms used to express a refusal while having it understood by the interlocutor (i.e.,

pragmalinguistic knowledge of refusals), and the knowledge of when to use which strategy to form an appropriate refusal (i.e., sociopragmatic knowledge of refusals). This can pose an extra challenge for language learners, as the knowledge of refusals from one context will vary in another context. The current study has shown which strategies are used by non-native English speakers, and native English speakers working in entry-level customer service positions using role plays. The results from these role plays suggest that NNESs use *reason/explanation*, *offering an alternative*, and *clarification request* most often while NESs use *reason/explanation*, *negation of proposition*, *offering an alternative*, and *regret/apology* most often. Although both groups use many of the same strategies, in some situations such as an invitation from a co-worker, some NNESs used direct strategies (i.e., *bluntness* and *negation of proposition*), while in the same situation all NESs avoided the use of direct strategies. The NNESs had five instances of unsuccessful refusals and four instances where no attempt to form a refusal was observed. The NESs formed a greater number of successful refusals, with only one unsuccessful refusal, and one instance where no attempt to form a refusal was observed.

The current study has also shown some possible reasons the NNESs and NESs use certain strategies when refusing in an entry-level customer service context through stimulated recall interviews. SRIs revealed NNESs were mostly concerned with justifying their refusal in each of the scenarios, where the thoughts of NESs refusing changed somewhat based on the social status of their interlocutor, with more participants reporting thoughts of difficulty when refusing a manager's request than with any other scenario. The SRIs also revealed some of the reasons behind the use of some strategies such as *reason/explanation*, *statement of principle*, *offering an alternative*, and

*clarification request*. This suggests that these participants are explicitly aware of some of the strategies they are using and how to use those strategies. Some NES participants had a difficult time empathizing with the scenario that involved a refusal to handle pork.

Based on the current study, the last sections discuss the pedagogical implications, limitations of the current study, and suggestions for future research directions.

### **5.3.1 Pedagogical Implications**

Pedagogical implications are first given in terms of how the results of the current study could be used for English L2 teachers, particularly those who are teaching English for the workplace. Then, pedagogical implications are given for elements that should be addressed with teaching refusals for the workplace with an example of the researcher's suggestion for the design of a module on refusals in entry-level customer service for the clients enrolled in the WLT program. As stated earlier, the module consists of an online component to be completed by the client, and a one-on-one session with a volunteer language trainer (VLT), thus both will be addressed here. Briefly, other implications for professional development, and policy for settlement programs are given.

Refusals can be challenging for language learners, as could be seen in this study through the number of times a successful refusal was not formed by NNEs, and in some SRIs, such as with Alex, who shared thoughts of trying to gain more time to think of how to form his refusal. Thus, explicit teaching of the strategies used to refuse in the workplace can be helpful to improve the pragmalinguistic knowledge of the learner. This should include the direct and indirect strategies, particularly the most common ones found here such as: (1) *reason/explanation*, (2) *negation of proposition*, (3) *offering an alternative*, and (4) *regret/apology*. Other less frequently used strategies might also be found in certain scenarios and those might be helpful to teach within those contexts.

These strategies include, expressing willingness (e.g., “I’d love to, but”) when refusing an invitation from a peer, providing the interlocutor with a statement of principle (e.g., “this kind of goes against my religion”) when asked to do something that conflicts with personal ethical dilemmas or religious objections. It would also be useful to have learners reflect on previous and current experiences, as reflecting on the reasons a refusal was successful or unsuccessful may help the learner improve their sociopragmatic knowledge.

The ability to relate to the scenario would be helpful to learners, as the current study observed a few instances where participants seemed uninterested in forming a refusal, whether from apathy or a lack of empathizing with the situation. Thus, when preparing tasks with refusals for learners, teachers should try to keep them relevant to the learners. Teachers should also ensure that refusals being made during tasks are successful in that they are acknowledged by the interlocutor when applicable, or in cases with no interlocutor (e.g., a solo task), teachers should ensure that at least one direct or indirect strategy is being used. Teachers can also encourage the use of *reason/explanation* in most scenarios. *Negation of proposition* (e.g., “I can’t”) in combination with an indirect strategy (e.g., “sorry, I can’t”), or an adjunct to refusals (e.g., “I’d love to, but I can’t”) can also be encouraged to be used in tasks where the clarity of the refusal is especially important.

#### **5.3.1.1 Recommendations for the Design of Lessons on Workplace Refusals.**

Here the researcher will address his recommendations for the design of a lesson on workplace refusals, with design for the module on refusals for the settlement program’s WLT program. The examples given for the design of the online module and the session with a volunteer language trainer (VLT) can be altered to create a lesson on refusals that

suit the needs of other language learners. The current study found that some NNEs used direct strategies (i.e., *bluntness*, and *negation of proposition*) in situations where NESs did not. As demonstrated through previous research, lower proficiency levels tend to use more direct strategies, possibly due to a lack of pragmalinguistic knowledge (e.g., Bella, 2014; Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018). Presenting examples of indirect strategies such as *plain indirect* (e.g., “I don’t think I can”), *reason/explanation* (e.g., “I’ll be at work”), *regret/apology* (e.g., “I’m sorry”) *offering an alternative* (e.g., “maybe next time”), *disagreement/criticism* (e.g., “I don’t think it’s a big deal”) and *statement of principle* (e.g., “I won’t eat meat”) along with adjuncts to refusals such as *positive opinion* (e.g., “that sounds great”) *willingness* (e.g., “I’d love to”), *gratitude* (e.g., “thanks for thinking of me, but”), *agreement* (e.g., “yeah, but”) *solidarity/empathy* (e.g., “I know how hard it has been for you”) and *clarification request* (e.g., “do you mean tonight?”) in situations where these strategies are used appropriately would be beneficial to some clients. For the online component of the WLT program, these strategies can be presented explicitly, and appear in text of a refusal scenario. For example, a video could be made of an interaction with an employee refusing a boss’s offer to work at a different location. In the scene, the employee can use *willingness* (e.g., “I’d like to work more hours, but”), *reason/explanation* (e.g., “it’s difficult for me to get downtown”), and *gratitude* (e.g., “I really appreciate the offer”). The VLT can examine utterances with the intention of refusing (e.g., “I’d love to, but I’m busy”) with the client to discuss possible situations these utterances may be a response to, the way the client would refuse in that invented situation, the perceived politeness of the utterance (e.g., ask the client if the utterance

seem rude, or polite, or neither), and if the learner has seen a similar utterance used in their current workplace.

As seen with previous research (e.g., Riddiford & Holmes, 2015), reflecting on previous experiences and differences between a new and old workplace context can lead to a language learner forming more appropriate refusals in the workplace. The current study found two NNES participants (i.e., Messi and Alex) reflecting on personal experiences more than once. Both participants were able to form successful refusals in all but one role play (i.e., the suggestion from a co-worker). Thus, it may be useful to use tasks that incorporate reflection on experiences where the client wanted to refuse in their current or recent workplace, that incorporate reflection on experiences where a co-worker's refusal was witnessed, and that incorporate reflection on differences in how refusals are approached between their workplace in Canada compared to their workplace in the country of the client's origin. For example, the client can be instructed to think back to an experience where they were offered something that they could not accept, and have them answer questions (e.g., "What was the offer?" and "How did you tell the person that you could not accept the offer?"). This could be included in both the online component, and the VLT session to help the learner improve their sociopragmatic knowledge.

The current study found multiple instances of unsuccessful refusals (i.e., accepting the stimulus after using a direct or indirect strategy), and of instances with no apparent attempt to refuse (i.e., accepting the stimulus without the use of a direct or indirect strategy). As was observed by Taguchi (2013), some situations are more difficult for learners to refuse appropriately to than other situations. In the current study, the

NNES group had examples of two unsuccessful refusals to both a request from a manager, and an offer from a manager. This suggests that scenarios involving a superior at work pose a particular challenge to some of the clients. It would then be beneficial to include similar scenarios in the online component and for the VLT session. The current study also found one scenario (i.e., a suggestion from a co-worker) with two examples of no apparent attempt to refuse. Additionally, during the SRIs, one NNES participant, Sam, stated that he would not refuse a suggestion from a co-worker that he agrees with. It may then be useful to implement a scenario of refusing a co-worker's suggestion that clients can relate to. This can be done in the VLT session by having the client reflect on advice they had been given by co-workers, and if there was any advice they did not agree with. In the case of advice the client does not agree with, the VLT can then discuss with the client how the client has refused or would refuse the co-worker's suggestion.

The current study found that the adjunct to refusals, *clarification request*, were sometimes used as a strategy to give the refuser more time to form their refusal. Language learners have reported time pressure in the workplace leading to communication breakdown (Cheng et al., 2020). It may then be useful for the VLTs to practice refusing with the client through open role plays. This will give the client an opportunity to apply their pragmalinguistic, and sociopragmatic knowledge of refusals with some time pressure for responding like they would in the workplace.

The study found that most NNES participants (i.e., Alex, Sarah, Dema, and Sam) did not report thoughts on Canadian workplace expectations. This may suggest clients are not considering their expectations of a workplace when refusing. As was stated by a NNES participant (i.e., Messi), as well as in other research (e.g., Riddiford & Holmes,

2015) there are differences in the expectations of workplaces between different countries. Thus, it might be useful for some clients to complete a task in the online component where the client compares their perceived expectations at their current workplace to a workplace in their country of origin. A discussion of these perceived differences with the VLT may also be useful, particularly if the VLT has knowledge of common expectations in the Canadian workplace and is able to discuss the rights of employees (e.g., the right to refuse work that infringes on religious rights, such as handling pork if you do not eat pork for religious reasons).

The intention of including a module based on refusals is not meant to prescribe how the clients should refuse in the workplace, but rather to provide both a model of how other employees might refuse, and the pragmalinguistic forms used in refusals while helping them grow their sociopragmatic competence to refuse in the workplace. As has been seen in Keshavarz et al. (2006), higher proficiency language learners sometimes decide to use different strategies when refusing than NESs to reflect their language background. A client's desire to use strategies that reflect their own personality and language background should be respected. Strategies that may lead to affective tension in the workplace (e.g., *acceptance* with no intention of accepting the stimulus) can be discussed, and learners can be made aware of potential misunderstandings or consequences. This is not to say that learners should be told which strategies to use, or which strategies to avoid. Instead, the strategies should be in the module to help the client improve their pragmalinguistic knowledge of refusals in English with opportunities to practice using the strategies and reflect on personal experiences to help the client improve

their sociopragmatic competence. The client can then form refusals the way that is effective for them based on their pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge.

### ***5.3.2 Other implications of the current study.***

In addition to language training, this study also has other implications. For example, the lack of empathy of two NES participants for a refusal involving pork suggests a professional development training in the workplace related to empathy and attitudes might be beneficial. Douglas et al. (2020) put forward the idea that training on attitudes towards NNEs might prevent communication breakdown (which would include NNEs' refusals not being successful), as changing attitudes can improve communication and comprehension between NESs and other speakers of English (Kubota, 2001). This training could focus on developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences, and ways to create a more accepting workplace in a customer service context. This training can be offered to both NNEs and NESs to increase sensitivity of some concerns that newcomers may come against. Additionally, to prevent some tension in the workplace, it might be beneficial for settlement programs to be aware of possible situations that might make a newcomer uncomfortable (e.g., a situation where a newcomer may be asked to handle pork). Settlement programs can then inform the newcomers of possible situations or tension that might make the newcomer uncomfortable, so the newcomer can be somewhat prepared to enter the workplace, or make the decision to not work there. The settlement programs can also work with employers to come up with ways to handle situations that might make a newcomer uncomfortable to lessen tensions in the workplace which may lead to positive outcomes such as job retention, perceptions of co-workers and the employer, and job satisfaction.

### **5.3.3 Limitations**

The present study had several limitations due to the way data were collected (i.e., in role plays, and stimulated recall interviews). Refusals in role plays might not capture the exact wording and strategy use of a refusal in an actual workplace (Riddiford & Holmes, 2015). For example, the participants are not in the actual situation of the role play, so they may not feel the same pressures that would be placed on the employee they are assuming the role of because the participant does not experience the same consequences they might in the actual workplace (e.g., offending an interlocutor that they work with regularly). Other factors may also have an impact on the role play, such as where the experiment was conducted, the lack of an existing relationship with the researcher in the role plays where the researcher was an acquaintance or close friend, and the participant's knowledge of the role plays being videotaped.

The stimulated recall interviews also have limitations. SRIs rely on the participant to share the thoughts that they experience during the role play. As pointed out by Gass and Mackey (2000) SRIs must assume that the thoughts the participant is verbalizing are accurate. In other words, the SRI must assume that participants are aware of all thoughts they had, the thoughts they express are accurate, and that they share all thoughts with the researcher. Additionally, because the researcher does not speak the NNES group participants' first language, Arabic, the SRIs were carried out entirely in English. This may have provided an extra challenge for the NNES group to share a recalled thought with the researcher that would not be present for the NES group. Additionally, the analysis of the SRIs was dependent on interpretation of the researcher and the second coder from the inter-rater reliability check. It is then possible that the meaning of a

verbalized thought from a SRI could have been misinterpreted from the intended meaning of the participant.

#### **5.3.4 Future research directions**

The current study addressed a gap in the research of refusals of NNES newcomers in an entry-level customer service position in Canada, but it has highlighted some potential directions for future research. To begin with, the role play that included an offer had the least number of successful refusals, with three NNESs (i.e., Alex, Sarah, and Dema) and one NES (i.e., Denise) forming unsuccessful refusals (i.e., accepting the stimulus after using a direct or indirect strategy), or showing no attempt to form a refusal (i.e., accepting the stimulus without the use of a direct or indirect strategy). Of the four stimuli to refusals used in the current study (i.e., requests, offers, suggestions, and invitations), refusals of offers appear to have received the least amount of attention in studies known to the researcher, however, as seen in this study, refusals to offers may prove to be especially difficult for NNESs and NESs alike in the context of the current study. Similarly, refusals to equals has been observed to be easier for language learners to form than refusals to higher status interlocutors (Taguchi, 2013). This study found that most NNES participants (i.e., Messi, Alex, and Sam), and one NES participant (i.e., Nolan) did not form a successful refusal to a co-worker. This might suggest that refusing co-workers with an equal status can be difficult, although apathy towards a particular scenario can be seen with Sam, who revealed that he had no intention to refuse his co-worker in a role play because he agreed with the co-worker.

NNESs may be more direct in certain situations, which can lead to misunderstandings and tension in the workplace. The current study found that some NNES participants were more direct in certain scenarios (e.g., Sarah and Dema were the

only participants to use direct strategies when refusing a co-worker's invitation), but as this study was not controlled for varying levels of proficiency, an understanding of how different proficiency levels refuse in the workplace might prove useful in gaining understanding of how NNEs refuse in this context.

Research on the attitudes of employees and managers in customer service positions in Canada, particularly around issues that might impact religious minorities, would add to the understanding of communication breakdown. This study found conflicting ideas of Canadian workplace expectations (i.e., Denise said that religious discrimination is not acceptable in the workplace and that supervisors should accommodate employees in Canada, which conflicts with Thomas's view that a personal objection to working with a product for ethical or religious reasons is irrelevant from a sales perspective). Although observing how the participants interact with actual co-workers and subordinates is beyond the scope of the present study, it is reasonable to assume that holding opposing expectations of how the workplace should operate can change the dynamics between employees possibly leading to increased tension and communication breakdown. An understanding of attitudes, and Canadian workplace expectations held by entry-level employees and superiors in customer service might prove useful in preparing newcomers for potential challenges in their workplace.

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## Appendices

**Appendix A****Ethics Clearance**

Office of Research Ethics  
503 Robertson Hall | 1125 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6  
613-520-2600 Ext: 2517  
[ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

**CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE**

The Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (CUREB-A) has granted ethics clearance for the research project described below and research may now proceed. CUREB-A is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2).

**Ethics Protocol Clearance ID:** Project # 111665

**Project Team Members: Mr. Neil Lapierre (Primary Investigator)**

Michael Rodgers (Research Supervisor)

Dr. Eva Kartchava (Research Supervisor)

**Project Title:** Refusals in Customer Service

**Funding Source** (If applicable):

Effective: **October 18, 2019**

Expires: **October 31, 2020.**

**Please ensure the study clearance number is prominently placed in all recruitment and consent materials: CUREB-A Clearance # 111665.**

**Restrictions:**

This certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-A via a Change to Protocol Form. All changes must be cleared prior to the continuance of the research.

3. An Annual Status Report for the renewal of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the renewal date listed above. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. A closure request must be sent to CUREB-A when the research is complete or terminated.
5. During the course of the study, if you encounter an adverse event, material incidental finding, protocol deviation or other unanticipated problem, you must complete and submit a Report of Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems Form, found here: <https://carleton.ca/researchethics/forms-and-templates/>

Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement*:

*Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

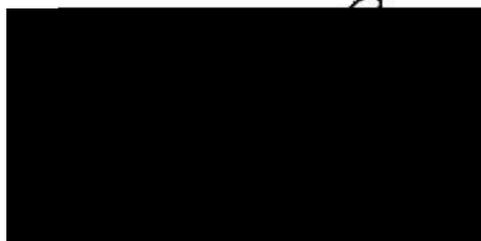
Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s).

Please contact the Research Compliance Coordinators, at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca), if you have any questions.

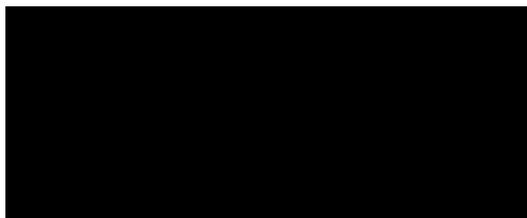
**CLEARED BY:**

**Date: October**

**18, 2019**



Natasha Artemeva, PhD, Chair, CUREB-A



Janet Mantler, PhD, Vice-Chair, CUREB-A

## **Appendix B**

### **E-mail to Participants**

I am writing to invite you to consider participating in a study on refusals in entry-level customer-service positions. The study is open to native English speakers who have had at least 2 years of experience in a customer service position. You will be asked to act out role-plays, complete a short questionnaire, and to have an interview about the role-plays. Everything will take place in one sitting in a mutually convenient, safe location. Your participation will take under 60 minutes. With your consent the role-plays will be video-taped and the interviews will be audio-recorded.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason, up until December 15, 2019. If you choose to cease participation in the study, you will be able to do so at any point. Should you choose to participate, your identity will be confidential.

All research data, including audio/video-recordings and any notes will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet at Carleton University. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher and a research team member.

This ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research. Should you have questions or concerns related to your involvement in this research, please contact: Chair of CUREB-A, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)).

## Appendix C

### Invitation to participate in a research project

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study on refusals in the workplace. This study aims to understand what strategies employees use when making a refusal. The study will be lead by me, Neil Lapierre, and will be supervised by Eva Kartchava and Michael Rodgers.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in six (6) role-plays, fill out a questionnaire, and answer questions in an interview about the role-plays. Your participation will be completed in one sitting that will take less than one hour. With your permission these role-plays will be video-taped and the interviews will be audio-recorded.

You will have the right to end your participation in the study for any reason until March 15, 2020. You can withdraw by contacting the lead researcher and/or his supervisors using the information supplied below. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provided will be immediately destroyed.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research (CUREB-A Clearance project # 111665. Clearance expires on: October 31, 2020).

CUREB-A:

If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Chair of CUREB-A, the Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)).

**If you would like to participate in the study, or you have any questions, please contact me, Neil Lapierre, through e-mail or the number provided below.**

**Researcher contact information:**

Neil Lapierre  
Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies  
Carleton University  
Tel: [REDACTED]  
Email: [neil.lapierre@carleton.ca](mailto:neil.lapierre@carleton.ca)

## **Appendix D**

### **Consent Form**

**Title:** Refusals in Customer Service

**Protocol Number:** 111665

**Funding Source:** Ottawa Community Immigration Services Organization (OCISO)

**Date of ethics clearance:** October 18, 2019

**Ethics Clearance for the Collection of Data Expires:** October 31, 2020

Neil Lapierre, a master's student in the School of Linguistics and Language Studies at Carleton University, is leading this project to gain an understanding the strategies employees make when forming a refusal in a customer-service position. As a participant, you will be asked to participate in six role-plays, fill out a questionnaire, and answer questions in an interview about the role-plays.

The role-plays will consist of 6 situations in customer service. There is no right or wrong thing to say, the purpose of the study is to compare role-play responses between native speakers and non-native speakers of English. Please note that, with your permission, the role-plays will be videotaped for research purposes. The video will not be shared with any one and will only be seen by you and the lead researcher. If you do not agree for the role-plays to be videotaped you must withdraw from the study. The questionnaire is short and is only to provide background information about your English training history. The interview will take place after you complete the questionnaire. The interview will be based on your responses during the role-plays. The interview will be audio-recorded for the researcher to reference later. This audio will not be shared with anyone other than the lead researcher. If you do not agree to be audio-recorded during the interview, you must withdraw from the experiment.

At all times of this study, your identity will be confidential and protected. You will be given a fake name that will be associated with your role-plays, questionnaire answers, and your answers from the interview. This means that your name, the time and the date of the interview will be replaced with a code, and your responses will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher. OCISO will only receive the overall general results from the questionnaire and interview process, and not individual answers.

You have the right to end your participation in the project for any reason. You can choose to leave the project by March 15, 2020. This can be done by contacting the researchers using the contact information below. If you leave the study, all information you have given during the interviews will be destroyed.

Once the project is completed, all research data will be kept for five years and potentially used for other research projects on this same topic. At the end of five years, all research data will be securely destroyed (electronic data will be erased and hard copies will be shredded).

If you would like a report of the finished project, you are welcome to contact the lead researchers.

The project was reviewed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board.

**CUREB-A:**

If you have any concerns with the study, please contact Chair of CUREB-A, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)).

**Researcher contact information:**

Neil Lapierre  
Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies  
Carleton University  
Tel: [REDACTED]  
Email: [neil.lapierre@carleton.ca](mailto:neil.lapierre@carleton.ca)

I (print name) \_\_\_\_\_, choose to participate in this study. I have read and understand what is being asked of me, and understand that I may choose to leave the project under the terms described earlier in the document.

I agree to be audio-recorded: \_\_\_Yes\_\_\_ No

I agree to be video-recorded: \_\_\_Yes\_\_\_ No

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant (Print)	Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher (Print)	Signature of Researcher	Date

## Appendix E

### Stimulated Recall Interview Guide

Adapted from Gass and Mackey (2000) stimulated recall protocol, pp. 43-44.

Instructions for participants:

What we're going to do now is watch the video of your six role-plays. I am interested in

what you were thinking at the time you were telling me you wouldn't do something I asked. I can hear what you were saying by looking at and listening to the video, but I don't know what you were thinking. So, what I'd like you to do is tell me what you were thinking, what was in your mind at that time while you were talking to me in the video.

You can pause the video any time that you want. So if you want to tell me something about what you were thinking, you can push pause. If I have a question about what you were thinking, then I will push pause and ask you to talk about that part of the video.

Instructions for researcher:

Read the instructions for the participants and model pausing the video.

If the participant pauses the video, listen to what they say.

If you pause the video, only ask general questions such as:

- "What were you thinking at this point?"
- or "I see you're laughing here, what were you thinking?"

If the participant says "I don't remember" accept the comment and move on. Do not "fish" for answers.

Do not give concrete reactions to participants responses. Respond with "oh" "mhm" "I see" "ok" etc...

## Appendix F

### Questionnaire

1. What languages do you speak at home?
  
2. How many years do you have of studying English?
  
3. How many years of formal education do you have?
  
4. How many years of years of customer service do you have?
  
5. Age:
  
6. Gender: m/f/ na
  
7. Who do find it to be the most difficult to say “no” to at work? (circle one)  

Customers	co-workers	manager/supervisor
-----------	------------	--------------------
  
8. Please give an example of a recent situation where you had a difficult time saying “no” to a person at work. Consider the following questions when answering: What happened? Who was it with? What did you want to say “no” to doing?
  
9. Please give an example of a recent situation where you had a difficult time saying “no” to a outside of work. Consider the following questions when answering: What happened? Who was it with? What did you want to say “no” to doing?