

การปฏิเสธทางอ้อมและกลยุทธ์: ตัวอย่างบทวิเคราะห์  
ในเรื่องสั้นของโรอัลด์ ดาห์ล เรื่อง *The Surgeon*

INDIRECT REFUSAL AND STRATEGIES: INSTANCES OF ANALYSIS  
IN ROALD DAHL'S SHORT STORY *THE SURGEON*

ศิวนนท์ นิลพานิชย์\*  
Siwanon Ninpanit

\* คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏวไลยอลงกรณ์ ในพระบรมราชูปถัมภ์  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University under the Royal Patronage  
E-mail : siwanon@vru.ac.th

Received : April 19, 2023

Revised : November 16, 2023

Accepted : December 30, 2023

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ศึกษาตัวอย่างการปฏิเสธทางอ้อมในฐานะวัจนกรรมปฏิบัติ ในเรื่องสั้น *The Surgeon* ของ โรอัลด์ ดาห์ล โดยศึกษาการใช้การปฏิเสธทางอ้อมและความสัมพันธ์กับกลยุทธ์ความสุภาพ รวมถึงตัวแปรทางสังคม ได้แก่ ระยะห่างทางสังคมของคู่สนทนา ความสัมพันธ์เชิงอำนาจ และการลดอัตราลงละเมิด ซึ่งอธิบายโดย Brown และ Levinson (1987) ผ่านการวิเคราะห์การตอบปฏิเสธต่อข้อเสนอและคำแนะนำในเรื่องสั้นดังกล่าว โดยนำผลการศึกษามาอธิบายด้วยการใช้กลยุทธ์ความสุภาพที่เสนอโดย Liang และ Min (2013) ผลวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่าการปฏิเสธทางอ้อมที่ตัวละครในเรื่องสั้น เช่น ระหว่างแพทย์กับคนไข้ที่เป็นเจ้าของร้าน สอดคล้องกับกลยุทธ์ความสุภาพ เช่น การใช้คำกล่าวอ้างหรือเหตุผล นอกจากนี้ตัวแปรทางสังคมมีบทบาทสำคัญในการปฏิเสธ โดยเฉพาะในการรักษาหน้าเชิงบวกของคู่สนทนาด้วยการให้เหตุผลการใช้กลยุทธ์นั้น ผลการวิจัยนี้สนับสนุนทฤษฎีความสุภาพที่เสนอโดย Brown และ Levinson

คำสำคัญ

วัจนกรรมปฏิบัติ การปฏิเสธทางอ้อม กลยุทธ์ความสุภาพ เรื่องสั้น

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the instances of indirect refusals as a speech act in *The Surgeon*, a short story written by Roald Dahl. The investigation examined the utilization of indirect refusals and their relationship with politeness strategies and the sociological variables, namely social distance (D), relative power (P), and absolute ranking (R) of imposition, as expounded by Brown and Levinson (1987). The analysis was conducted on negative responses to offers and suggestions in the story and the results were based on the politeness strategies put forth by Liang and Min (2013). The findings demonstrate that indirect refusals used by characters, such as those between the doctor and the prince-patient in the story, align with politeness strategies, with an example in the use of excuses or reasons. The sociological variables between them play a crucial role in their usage, particularly in preserving the interlocutor's positive face by providing a rationale for their deployment. These results offer evidence to support the politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson.

## Keywords

Speech Acts; Indirect Refusals; Politeness Strategies; Short Story

## Introduction

Refusals play an integral role in everyday conversational exchanges, where they serve as negative responses to offers, suggestions, requests, or invitations made by the addressee. The concept of refusal, as defined by Searle and Vandervken (1985, as cited in Al-kahtani, 2005), refers to the opposite of acceptance, indicating the speaker's unwillingness to comply with the addressee's wants. Refusals can potentially evoke negative emotions in the hearer, thus highlighting the significance of performing appropriate refusals in conversation. The choice of an appropriate refusal strategy is influenced by the sociological variables proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), including social distance (D) between the speaker and the hearer, relative power (P) of the hearer over the speaker, and the absolute ranking (R) of imposition in proportion to the expenditure of time and goods (Brown & Levinson, 1987). To elaborate, the absolute ranking of imposition refers to a ranking system that helps individuals determine the politeness strategies to employ when dealing with impositions. Impositions, such as requests that demand more time and resources (goods), may be perceived as more face-threatening, and, therefore, politeness strategies like indirectness are often employed to mitigate the imposition. On the other hand, impositions that are less time-consuming or resource-intensive may require fewer politeness strategies.

Refusal, being a face-threatening act, can pose a threat to the positive-face want (the want of approval) by indicating that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings or wants, thereby undermining the hearer's wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987). To mitigate such a threat, indirect refusals, as opposed to direct refusals, are often employed for politeness purposes. The selection of an appropriate politeness strategy for indirect refusals should be based on the three aforementioned social variables (D, P, and R). This is in line with the notion

that the speaker's choice of politeness strategy should take into consideration the social dynamics of the conversational exchange.

Previous studies examining the speech act of refusal have primarily employed a discourse completion task (DCT) as a means of collecting data. The DCT involves presenting participants with a prompt requiring them to generate a refusal response. This method is favored for its ease and practicality when compared to alternative methods, such as the collection of spontaneous speech data (Wongsittikan, 2022). In addition, literature-based studies exploring speech acts have largely focused on classifying and analyzing different types of speech acts, with examples including investigations into Aesop's fables (Abdulla & Abdulla, 2022), Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (Olfati & Yarahmadi, 2011), and works by Oscar Wilde, Colin Howard, and Colin Galsworthy (Altikriti, 2011).

The current study utilized "The Surgeon," a short story by Roald Dahl, as a source for data collection since Dahl is widely regarded as the most renowned British author for children (Maynard & Mcknight, 2002, as cited in Sriphachan, 2019). The objective of this study is to examine the applicability of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to the dialogues presented in the story, with a specific focus on the speech act of refusal. This analysis aims to shed light on the interplay between politeness and the use of refusals in fictional discourse.

In this short story, the protagonist, Robert Sandy, is a doctor who holds steadfast to his belief of not accepting payment from patients. However, after successfully treating one of the sons of the King of Saudi Arabia, he is offered a diamond worth over a million dollars. The central theme of the story revolves around this valuable diamond and the occurrence of indirect refusals as the speaker declines offers or suggestions regarding the diamond.

## Literature Review

This literature review explores the concepts surrounding refusal speech acts as a form of face-threatening act, with an emphasis on the use of indirectness and their relationship with politeness strategies as proposed by Liang and Min (2013) and politeness theory, along with its sociological variables, as described by Brown and Levinson (1987).

### 1. The Speech Act of Refusal

Refusal is a speech act that falls under the umbrella of commissives, which are utterances that obligate the speaker to some future course of action (Huang, 2007). Refusals serve as a means of countering the listener's expectations and preconceived notions (Al-Eryni, 2008, as cited in Mohammad et al., 2012). Thus, a speaker who engages in a refusal is effectively declining to participate in the proposal made by the interlocutor, resulting in a disharmonious exchange.

Speech acts are a central concept in the field of linguistics, having been first introduced by J. L. Austin and later developed by his student, John R. Searle. A speech act comprises three distinct components: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. The locutionary act refers to the production of a meaningful and linguistically well-formed utterance. For example, when a speaker says "I have a prior engagement" in response to an invitation to go out, such as "Could you go out with me tonight?", they are performing a locutionary act. Additionally, this utterance constitutes an

illocutionary act, as it conveys the intended meaning of refusing the invitation. The perlocutionary act, on the other hand, refers to the effects or consequences of the speech act on the hearer, such as feelings of disappointment or anger.

The act of refusal can be considered a face-threatening behavior, and as such, it is often performed indirectly rather than directly. Indirect forms of refusal may be achieved through the utilization of semantic formulae or categorization. In the literature of cross-cultural pragmatics, the terms "semantic formula" and "strategy" are frequently used interchangeably to refer to the same concept (Sattar et al., 2011).

## 2. The Concept of Face: Face Wants and Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

The concept of face, as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987), refers to "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61). These authors decompose face into two distinct facets: negative face and positive face. Negative face represents the desire for freedom of action and unimpeded behavior, while positive face is associated with the desire for approval and appreciation. Culpepper (2001, as cited in Lewis, 2008) posits that "any action that impinges in some degree upon a person's face is a face-threatening act" (p. 183).

In light of this, refusal can be considered a face-threatening behavior as it contradicts an interlocutor's expressed opinion, thereby threatening the interlocutor's positive face. Given the potential impact of face-threatening acts, it is essential to carefully consider the appropriate politeness strategy before engaging in an act of refusal.

## 3. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that "face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (p. 61). This suggests that both the speaker and the addressee must be mindful of avoiding face-threatening acts that could impact their negative or positive face. Based on this premise, it is important to consider the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson when engaging in acts such as refusals, in order to minimize the potential threat to face and ensure a smooth and respectful interaction. The politeness strategies are shown in the chart:

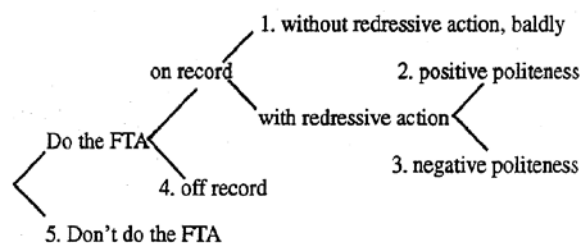


Figure 1 Five politeness strategies

Source: Brown & Levinson (1987)

Face-threatening acts (FTAs) can be performed using either on-record or off-record communication. On-record communication involves a clear intention behind an utterance, while off-record communication allows for multiple interpretations and often involves indirect expression of a speaker's intention. An act performed baldly, without redressive action, is characterized by direct and clear expression, while redressive action typically involves the use of positive or negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness aims to minimize potential face threats by being friendly or preserving solidarity between the speaker and hearer, while negative politeness serves to respect the hearer's desire to maintain autonomy and avoid imposition. In some cases, FTAs can be avoided through nonverbal communication such as facial expressions. This paper aims to investigate the usage of indirect refusals in the short story "The Surgeon" and their association with the politeness strategies. Refusal, being a face-threatening act (FTA), can pose a threat to the hearer's positive face, necessitating the use of indirect refusals and accompanying politeness strategies.

To that end, the researcher adopts the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and described by Liang and Min (2013) to examine indirect refusals found in the short story. The strategies include positive politeness (strategy 1: claim common ground or solidarity; strategy 2: offer of repair/new solution; strategy 3: use of an excuse; strategy 4: promise; strategy 5: show sympathy and consideration), negative politeness, and bald on-record strategies (strategy 6: explicit and direct expression of refusal), as well as off-record strategies (strategy 7: giving hints; strategy 8: being ambiguous; strategy 9: being evasive; strategy 10: using body language).

Brown and Levinson (1987, as cited in Lewis, 2008) posit that the seriousness of a face-threatening act depends on three sociological variables, which will be analyzed in the context of indirect refusals in the short story. These variables are social distance (D) between the speaker and hearer, relative power (P) between the speaker and hearer, and the absolute ranking (R) of imposition in a given culture or situation.

In conclusion, the study seeks to demonstrate the importance of considering these politeness strategies and sociological variables in the performance of indirect refusals.

## Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1. To what extent can the indirect refusals in the short story "The Surgeon" be related to the politeness strategies outlined by Brown and Levinson?
2. Does the application of the social variables proposed by Brown and Levinson assist in explaining the use of indirect refusals in this particular literary work?

## Research Methodology

### Data Collection

The researcher carefully reviewed the short story and identified some instances of conversational exchanges related to negative indirect refusals in response to offers and suggestions.

### Data Analysis

The present study leveraged the politeness strategies proposed by Liang and Min (2013) to analyze the negative responses to offers and suggestions present in the short story, *The Surgeon*. In particular, the study employed Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of politeness strategies, which encompasses positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record strategies, and bald on-record strategies, in order to explain the indirect refusals observed in the text. In addition, the study took into consideration the relationships between the characters, as these are believed to impact the choice of indirect refusals according to the three social variables proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), which are: social distance (D), relative power (P), and absolute ranking (R) of imposition. The relationships analyzed in this study include the doctor (Robert Sandy) with a prince patient, a male patient, the doctor's wife (Betty Sandy), and a jeweler (Harry Gold) with a customer (Robert Sandy).

### Results & Discussion

Following the systematic classification of the indirect refusals present in Roald Dahl's short story, *The Surgeon*, the researcher identified five instances of refusal of suggestions and four instances of refusal of offers. With regard to the speech act of refusal, it is widely accepted that this act poses a threat to the positive face wants of the recipient. However, it is also acknowledged that various politeness strategies can be utilized to mitigate this threat, including positive politeness, negative politeness, and other strategies (Liang & Min, 2013). To facilitate analysis, the findings were analyzed in a chronological manner within the context of the short story.

"You have done extraordinarily well," Robert Sandy said, seating himself behind the desk. "It's altogether a splendid recovery. I don't think there's any need for you to come and see me anymore." The patient finished putting on his clothes and said to the surgeon, "May I speak to you, please, for another moment?" "Of course you may," Robert Sandy said. "Take a seat".

(a) **A Male Patient:** "I suppose you refuse to take a fee?"

**The Doctor (Robert Sandy):** "I work entirely for the National Health Service and they pay me a very fair salary".

The male patient initiated the interaction with an indirect speech act, utilizing an interrogative construction in the form of an affirmative statement, with the intention of offering a fee to the doctor. However, the doctor, Robert Sandy, held a conviction of not accepting fees from his patients and therefore declined the offer. To execute the refusal, Robert Sandy employed an indirect refusal strategy, specifically using an explanation or reason. This form of indirect refusal was perceived as polite and can be analyzed as utilizing a positive politeness strategy, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and further explained by Liang and Min (2013), which involves strategy 3: offering an excuse. This choice of strategy may have been influenced by the desire to remove the implication of a direct refusal, as the use of an excuse provides an alternative explanation for the potentially face-threatening behavior, as described by Coppock (2005 as cited in Liang and Min, 2013).

Given the social distance between the physician and the patient, who may be meeting for the first time, it is imperative that the physician adopt a polite demeanor. The social distance (D) between the communicator and the recipient may dictate that the response preserves the latter's positive face. This is due to the significant social distance that exists between the two parties. By citing receipt of salary as the reason, the physician effectively declined the patient's offer in a polite manner, rather than resorting to a confrontational approach. This strategy preserves the patient's face, despite the rejection of their offer.

*(After having seen the doctor kept refusing his offer),* the prince said, "But dash it all, you saved my life", tapping the palm of his hands on the desk. "I did no more than any other competent surgeon would have done," Robert Sandy said. The prince took his hands off the desk and clasped them on his lap. "All right", Mr Sandy, even though you refuse a fee, there is surely no reason why my father should not give you a small present to show his gratitude." ... The prince took from his jacket pocket a small pouch made of black velvet and he pushed it across the desk... Robert Sandy looked suspiciously at the black pouch, but he made no move to take it.

- (b) **The Prince Patient:** "My father said also to tell you that in his eyes my life is without price and that nothing on earth can repay you adequately for having saved it. This is simply a ... what shall we call it ... a present for your next birthday. A small birthday gift."

**The Doctor:** "He shouldn't give me anything."

Upon recuperation, the princely patient expressed a strong desire to gift the attending physician. The physician declined the offer with due deference. Subsequently, the prince informed the physician that his father, the king, wished to present a gift. The physician proffered an alternative suggestion, politely declining the offer and suggesting that the king need not provide any gifts. This indirect refusal can be interpreted as an instance of the positive politeness strategy 2, namely "offer of repair/new solution", employed to mitigate the impact of the rejection on the prince.

The social distance (D) between the physician and the princely patient necessitated that the refusal be executed in a polite manner, owing to their significant social distance. Although the relative power (P) dynamic between the two (the patient over the doctor) could have been a factor, the researcher posits that it played a secondary role in this particular scenario. This is likely because, despite being a prince and the son of a king, the patient was also a patient of the physician. Hence, the social distance between the two was deemed sufficient to warrant the conclusion that the physician's indirect refusal was polite and maintained the patient's positive face.

From (b), "Good gracious me," Robert Sandy said, looking at it [the pouch] but not yet touching it. "What is it?"

(c) **The Prince Patient:** "It's a diamond. Pure white. It's not especially large but the colour is good."

**The Doctor:** "I really can't accept a present like this. No, it wouldn't be right. It must be quite valuable."

In this conversation exchange, the prince attempted to entice the physician to accept his gift, a diamond, by highlighting its desirable qualities. This was a strategy aimed at persuading the physician to accept the gift. Despite these efforts, the physician declined the prince's offer, stating that it would not be right, or it can be seen as unethical for a doctor to receive a diamond from a patient. The physician's response was characterized by an indirect refusal, which was accompanied by a reason. This reason appears to align with positive politeness strategy 3, specifically the use of an excuse, as a means of declining the offer while preserving the positive face of the prince.

Two crucial social variables were evident in this situation. Firstly, the social distance (D) between the physician and the prince, as they were unfamiliar with one another, needed to be taken into account. Secondly, the absolute ranking (R) of imposition was significant, as the prince was offering a diamond, a substantial gift, rather than a more modest offering such as a cup or food, which placed it in a high position in terms of impositions of goods. The magnitude of the prince's offer was too significant for the physician to accept, and it was an unprecedented gesture for any physician. Therefore, it was appropriate for the physician to initially employ a moderately direct refusal, stating, "I really can't accept a present like this" since it might be perceived as a moral misconduct or unethical behavior to receive a valuable diamond from the patient. However, due to the concern of upsetting the prince, the physician then provided a plausible reason, stating, "It [the diamond] must be quite valuable." To maintain politeness, the physician further elucidated why the gift could not be accepted. This suggests that, in addition to the social distance (D) between the speaker and hearer, the absolute ranking (R) of imposition also influenced the choice of the politeness strategy employed in the indirect refusal in this scenario.

From (c), The prince smiled at him. "I must tell you something, Mr Sandy." He said. "Nobody refuses a gift from the King. It would be a terrible insult. It has never been done." Robert Sandy looked back at the prince. "Oh dear," he said. "You are making it awkward for me, aren't you?"

(d) **The Prince Patient:** "It is not awkward at all," "Just take it."

**The Doctor:** "You could give it to the hospital."

Despite persistent attempts by the prince to convince the physician to accept the gift, the prince stated that it would be a severe affront if the physician declined the gift from the king. The physician attempted to decline the offer by suggesting that the prince could donate the diamond to the hospital where the physician worked. The indirect refusal employed by the physician could be perceived as a statement of alternative. Additionally, the physician's refusal could be linked to positive politeness strategy 2: offer of repair/new solution. This strategy was used to politely decline the prince's offer and to mitigate any negative impact on the prince.

In the conversation exchange, the choice of politeness strategy employed by the doctor in declining the prince's offer was influenced by the social distance (D) between the two parties and the absolute ranking (R) of imposition. Given the lack of familiarity between the prince and the doctor, using indirect refusals was deemed to be a more polite approach. The doctor's continued refusal of the diamond gift highlights that such an offer went against his personal beliefs and ethical principles. While relative power (P) between the prince and the doctor could potentially have a bearing on the refusal, it was deemed to play a minor role in this scenario as it was attributed to the prince's father, the King of Saudi Arabia, who was not a participant in the conversation. Ultimately, the doctor's offering of an alternative solution as an indirect refusal was considered polite and appropriate, preserving the positive face of the prince.

He [Robert Sandy] picked up the diamond and placed it in the palm of one hand. "There's never been a diamond in our family before," he said. "Gosh, it is beautiful, isn't it. You must please convey my thanks to His Majesty and tell him I shall always treasure it."

- (e) **The Prince Patient:** "You don't actually have to hang on to it." "My father would not be in the least offended if you were to sell it."

**The Doctor:** "I don't think I shall sell it."

This analysis will focus on examining instances where suggestions are refused in the discourse. During the conversation, the prince made a proposal that the physician should sell the diamond. The physician's rejection of the suggestion was executed in an indirect manner through the use of a promise not to dispose of the diamond, potentially as a means of avoiding the potential irritation of the prince. The prince's suggestion was politely declined through the utilization of strategy 4, which involves making a promise and is considered a way of demonstrating the speaker's positive intention to preserve the addressee's suggestion or positive face wants, as identified by Liang and Min (2013).

The social factors, including the social distance (D) between the prince and the physician, played a significant role in shaping the physician's response to the prince's suggestion. Additionally, the absolute ranking (R) of imposition acted as a reminder for the physician to properly refuse the suggestion. Given that the physician had received a diamond of potentially substantial monetary value, it was deemed inappropriate and impolite to decline the suggestion directly. In an effort to avoid causing offense to the hearer, the physician opted to indirectly refuse the suggestion not to sell the diamond through the use of a promise.

- (f) **The Jeweler: (Harry Gold)** "in case it [the diamond] interests you, makes it worth about half a million dollars in the trade and over one million dollars if you bought it in a shop."

**The Doctor:** "You are making me nervous."

Physician Robert Sandy, having made the decision to accept the gift, sought to ascertain the value of the stone and approached Harry Gold, a jeweler, for clarification. After a thorough examination of the stone, the jeweler provided an estimated price, stating that if the physician were to sell the diamond, it would fetch over a million dollars. However, the physician declined to accept the jeweler's valuation of the diamond and instead chose to indirectly refuse

the suggestion through a form of indirect criticism of the requester (Beebe et al., 1990). Although this indirect method of refusal may not appear explicitly polite, it served as an attempt to dissuade the interlocutor. It is a way of conveying hesitancy and reluctance without directly refusing.

In this specific instance, the employment of indirect refusal in response to the jeweler's suggestion appeared to be an appropriate course of action. The social distance (D) between physician Robert Sandy and jeweler Harry Gold was relatively limited, thus rendering the indirect refusal as a means to exhibit the amicable relationship between the jeweler and the customer. This can be construed as a demonstration of solidarity or the establishment of common ground (strategy 1). Furthermore, the absolute ranking (R) of imposition seemed to play a pivotal role in this scenario, given that the jeweler's estimate of the diamond's value was deemed exorbitant, making it challenging for the physician to embrace it.

- (g)     **The Doctor:** "We should do it now [go to the bank to get the diamond deposited safely]."  
           **His Wife:** "It's Friday night my darling. All the banks are closed till next Monday."

Upon discovering that the diamond was valued at over one million dollars, the physician, Dr. Robert Sandy, brought the news home with excitement. However, he remembered that he and his wife had plans to go out the following morning and was faced with the challenge of where to securely store the valuable gem. Initially, he proposed carrying it with him, but his wife expressed concerns over the possibility of losing it. Recognizing the risks involved in carrying such a valuable item, Dr. Sandy suggested placing it in a safe deposit box at the bank. His wife, however, declined this idea, pointing out that it was Friday evening and all banks in the area were closed. She employed two positive politeness strategies in her indirect refusal, which included using the endearing term "darling" and providing a valid explanation for the unavailability of the banks over the weekend.

In this particular instance, the wife's use of the term "darling" indicates a close relationship between the doctor and his wife. This endearing term is a positive politeness strategy aimed at maintaining social harmony and showing affection towards the doctor. As the doctor was asking his wife to change their plans and go to the bank on a Friday night, a direct or confrontational rejection of his suggestion could have led to a failed resolution or even escalated into a disagreement. Therefore, the wife employed positive politeness strategies to soften her refusal while still maintaining the couple's social harmony.

- (h)     **His Wife:** "We'd better hide it [the diamond] somewhere in the house."  
           **The Doctor:** "I don't think that's a very good idea."

The doctor's wife proposed the idea of hiding the diamond within the house; however, the doctor expressed his disagreement with her suggestion through the utilization of negative politeness or bald on-record strategy, explicitly expressing his refusal with the phrase "I don't think...". This utterance can be perceived as an indirect refusal, as it aimed to discourage the wife's proposal by critiquing her idea and demonstrating its inefficacy. The employment of

negative politeness strategy in this instance indicates a dynamic interplay between power relations and politeness strategies within the conversation.

In this scenario, the degree of social distance (D) between the speaker and listener was established to be close, as evidenced by the long-standing nature of their relationship as a couple with three adult children, which is mentioned in the short story. This close relationship is further reinforced by information provided in the short story, where it is stated that the male protagonist, Robert Sandy, engages in daily bicycle commutes to work, a routine that not only keeps him physically fit but also allows his wife to have access to a car. Given this close relationship, it is plausible to conclude that the indirect refusal expressed in the conversation about the safekeeping of the diamond, which has significant monetary value, may not have been perceived as impolite. The ranking of imposition (R) in this situation is also appropriate, as the conversation pertains to the safeguarding of a valuable asset that could potentially lead to their financial stability. This underscores the importance of the matter at hand.

- (i) **The Doctor:** "Shall we bury it [the diamond] under the soil of the azalea plant in the sitting-room? No one's going to look there."

**His wife:** "It's not one hundred percent safe."

The doctor, Robert Sandy, suggested hiding the diamond under the soil of the azalea plant in the sitting-room. However, his wife politely declined the suggestion by expressing her concern that the diamond may be discovered by a potential intruder who could knock over the pot and spill the soil, thereby revealing the diamond's presence. Her response can be considered an instance of the positive politeness strategy, as she employed an excuse or explanation to indirectly decline the proposal. This indirect refusal can be attributed to the close social distance (D) between the couple, as they have a long-standing relationship as a married couple with three adult children. The absolute ranking (R) of imposition is also relevant, given the importance of the diamond's value and the need for a secure location to store it. By using polite language, the wife's refusal was perceived as appropriate and respectful.

The analysis presented demonstrates that the indirect refusals in the short story are consistent with the politeness strategies described by Brown and Levinson (1987). However, it is important to note that the refusal strategies proposed by Liang and Min (2013) may not encompass the full range of indirect refusals commonly used in everyday language interactions. In the course of the analysis, the researcher confirmed that using an excuse can function as a reason or explanation, citing Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) to support this assertion.

Furthermore, in the instance of the doctor's indirect refusal, expressed as "You are making me nervous," this response does not align with any of the strategies identified by Liang and Min (2013). In fact, the researcher determined that this response might represent an indirect form of criticism utilized to decline the requester's suggestion without overtly stating refusal, as discussed by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). Given these findings, future research endeavors could explore ways to enhance the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the refusal strategies proposed by Liang and Min (2013), potentially by integrating additional linguistic and sociological factors.

The findings of this analysis suggest that the sociological factors proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) are applicable to the use of indirect refusals in the short story. Social distance (D), relative power (P), and absolute ranking (R) of imposition are, to a large extent, effective in accounting for the characters' use of indirect refusals. Another noteworthy point of discussion is that, given Roald Dahl's British background, British cultural norms may influence the use of indirect refusals in his works. As highlighted by Iliadi and Larina (2017), in their study comparing Russian and British individuals' performance of refusal speech acts using a discourse completion task, the results revealed that British participants were more inclined to employ politeness strategies to mitigate refusals. Consequently, they tended not to use explicit negatives, a behavior aimed at preserving the interlocutors' face.

## Conclusion

This research paper investigates how politeness strategies, as outlined by Liang and Min (2013), interact with sociological factors as described by Brown and Levinson (1987), particularly in the context of refusal, a speech act known for its potential face-threatening nature. The analysis and interpretation of selected conversational instances reveal that characters in the short story employ various politeness strategies in the form of indirect refusals to mitigate the speech act of refusal, which depends on the magnitude of the social variables involved. Overall, this study lends support to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, with a specific emphasis on the three sociological variables.

However, in this research paper, only a limited number of nine instances of indirect refusals have been subjected to examination. There might be other examples in the story that are available for inclusion. It is also crucial to acknowledge that the analysis presented herein is subjective in its interpretation and should be considered with some reservations. Nevertheless, this study has successfully achieved its objectives by establishing a discernible correlation between indirect refusals and politeness strategies. Furthermore, it underscores the pivotal role played by three social variables in shaping politeness in communicative exchanges, particularly within the selected dialogues in the short story.

For researchers interested in further exploring this area of analysis, data can be collected from both native speakers and L2 learners of English. Written sources, such as novels, dramas, and movies, offer examples of conversational data suitable for analysis. Moreover, future research endeavors may involve validating the sociological factors proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) by examining the impact of age and gender on the selection of politeness strategies or by determining the values of the social variables since they can be culture-specific, whether hierarchical in eastern cultures or egalitarian and individualistic in western ones. Such investigations would significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of politeness theory and the underlying mechanisms of language use.

## REFERENCES

- Abdulla, L. A., & Abdulla, I. A. (2022). An analysis of speech acts in Aesop's fables. *Polytechnic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(2), 164-170. DOI: 10.25156/ptjhss.v3n2y2022
- Al-Kahtani, S. A. (2005). Refusals realizations in three different cultures: A speech act theoretically-based cross cultural study. *Lang.& Transl*, 18, 35-57.  
<http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/saad/Documents/Refusal.pdf>
- Altikriti, S. F. (2011). Speech act analysis to short stories. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(6), 13741384. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.2.6.1374-1384>.
- Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. In R. C. Scarcella, E. S. Andersen, and S. D. Krashen (Eds.), *On the development of communicative competence in a second Language* (pp. 55-73). Newbury House.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Dahl, R. (1992). *The collected short stories of Roald Dahl*. Penguin.
- Huang, Y. (2007). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Iliadi, P. L., & Larina, T. V. (2017). Refusal strategies in English and Russian. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, 8(3), 531-542. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2299-2017-8-3-531-542>.
- Lewis, D. (2008). The dynamics of face in the fictional dialogue of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*. *INNERVATE leading Undergraduate Work in English Studies*, 1, 182-189.
- Liang, Z. P., & Min, G. (2013). Politeness strategies in refusal. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 10(12), 920-924.
- Mohammad, G., Alireza, B., & Shirin, M. (2012). Investigating cross-linguistic differences in refusal speech act among native Persian and English speakers. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 2, 49-63.  
<http://www.consortiacademia.org/index.php/ijrsl/article/download/214/173>
- Olfati, N., & Yarahmadi, M. (2011). Speech act analysis of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, 1(12), 2522-2527.
- Sattar, H. Q., Lah, S. C., & Suleiman, R. R. (2011). Refusal strategies in English by Malay university students. *GEMA Online™ Journal of Language Studies*, 11(3), 69-81.  
[http://www.ukm.my/ppbl/Gema/GEMA%20vol%2011%20\(3\)%202011/pp69\\_81.pdf](http://www.ukm.my/ppbl/Gema/GEMA%20vol%2011%20(3)%202011/pp69_81.pdf)
- Sriphachan, S. (2019). *Children's rights in Roald Dahl's selected young people's fiction* [Doctoral dissertation]. <http://202.28.34.124/dspace/bitstream/123456789/64/1/58010162003.pdf>.
- Wongsittikan, N. (2022). Patterns in declining an invitation: Cross-cultural differences in Korean and Thai refusals. *Manusat Paritat: Journal of Humanities*, 44(1), 129-158.

