

## SPANISH AND MALAY COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS STRATEGIES IN ACTS OF REFUSING INVITATION AND REQUEST

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### ABSTRACT

This research aimed to compare the linguistic strategies used by the Spanish and Malay in the context of refusing invitation and request. The respondents consisted of 40 Malay postgraduate students and 40 Spanish postgraduate students. The instrument used to collect data was the Discourse Completion Test, or DCT. Spanish respondents answered DCT in Spanish and Malay respondents also completed the same procedure in the Malay language. Data were analysed using the Beebe declining model, et al. The unit analysed was the statement written by the respondent in response to the situation raised in the DCT. The researchers found that respondents of both countries used more indirect strategies than direct strategies in both refusing contexts. However, based on the frequency of direct strategies, Spanish respondents refused directly more frequently compared to Malay respondents. Thus, although both respondents used the same strategy to refuse invitations and requests, the frequency and percentage of frequency of each strategy were different between the two races. This implies that the perceptions and values of both nations towards such strategies are different based on the values and norms accepted in their respective cultures and societies. Thus, understanding how other national societies perform linguistic practices is essential to avoid conflicts in intercultural communication that could affect universal harmony.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic; speech act; refusal; linguistic politeness; cross-cultural politeness

### Introduction

Linguistic strategy refers to the words, sentences or expressions used by a person when performing a linguistic act in order to retain respect and dignity. Linguistic strategies are based on social values and norms that are supported and held by a society. According to Rubin (1983), language behaviour reflects fundamental cultural values specific to a particular group of speakers. Therefore, an expression may be interpreted differently by different societies depending on those values and norms. Therefore, according to Rubin again, understanding the specific sociolinguistic markers or features in a society is essential so that the meanings of a speech can be interpreted accurately and effectively.

One of the relatively complex language behaviours that require various politeness strategies to be used in its expression is the language behaviour of refusal. According to Beebe et al. (1990), refusal is a linguistic behaviour that is difficult to implement and has the potential to trigger conflict. On the other hand, Brown and Levinson (1978) categorise refusal as a language act that can cause the interlocutor to lose face, and cause embarrassment and loss of respect. This

is because refusal equals rejection, or denotes a state of being unwilling or reluctance, which can then cause the listener to become offended or frustrated. Beebe et al. (1990) said that this can result in embarrassment not only for the listener but also for the speaker as well.

Beebe et al. (1990) says that refusals are complex and can be a source of conflict. To avoid conflict and reduce the likelihood of embarrassing the listener, the speaker will use various politeness strategies to express refusal. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), various politeness strategies are employed so that the speaker will spare the listener any embarrassment, so that they may be able to maintain daily communication. Again, such strategies serve as a tool that can prevent any embarrassment arising from certain speech acts.

The refusal of invitations and requests are difficult to implement and can even trigger conflict. Generally, invitations and requests are received from or extended to persons known by the respective parties. Such missives are not usually given to strangers. Declining these invitations and requests can trigger conflicts between neighbours, family members, and friends. The situation will become increasingly complex if it involves cross-cultural communication in which interlocutors from different cultures will use different linguistic forms in their refusal based on the values and norms of their respective different societies (Beebe et al., 1990). Failure to understand the meaning behind these linguistic forms can lead to misunderstandings and lead to a negative perception of one party towards another, affecting harmony in global communication.

Accordingly, this paper attempts to describe the linguistic strategies used by Spanish and Malay respondents in refusal speech acts towards invitation and request. The issues discussed in this paper are: What are the linguistic strategies used by Spanish and Malay respondents when refusing invitations and requests? Are there any similarities or differences between the two races in the two contexts? If so, what are the similarities and what are the differences?

### **Literature review**

Most cross-cultural refusal studies focus on the differences in politeness strategies used by native and non-native speakers of English. For example, a study conducted by Musha'al A. AlBugami (2019) on native and non-native speakers of English found that refusal by non-native speakers was strongly influenced by their mother tongue, which is Arabic. Moreover, both races were found to use both strategies, directly and indirectly, in their refusal. A study conducted by Homa Babai Shishavan & Farzad Sharifian (2016) on Iranians and Australians found that the linguistic strategies used by both races in presenting refusal are different from each other, thus reflecting the differences in social norms practised by both societies studied. In their refusal of interlocutors of different social status, Australian respondents used a more direct strategy towards their interlocutors than Iranian respondents.

A study attended by Wijayanto, A. (2019) on the Javanese and English races found that both races chose a direct strategy in their refusal. The sequence of frequency of strategy used by both races was also similar. However, the variation of strategies and the frequency of use of strategies demonstrated by Javanese respondents were influenced by the interlocutors' social status. While the variation of strategies and the frequency of use of strategies produced by English

respondents showed that it was more influenced by the level of refusal imposition than the social status of the interlocutor. This implies that social status is assessed differently by different societies. It depends on the values and norms that have been accepted and adopted in their respective societies.

Cross-cultural differences were also shown in politeness studies comparing Yemeni and Americans. The refusal expressed by Yemeni respondents towards those of equal and lower social status was found to be more direct than that of American respondents (Naimah, A. & Yasser, A., 2016). The difference was also indicated by the frequency of use of different strategies by the two races. In addition, some strategies were only used by one group of respondents, while another group did not use the strategy in their refusal. Social status was also found to strongly influence strategy in refusing respondents of both races. This was indicated by the variety of different strategies used by the two racial groups in their refusal of interlocutors of different social status, thus showing the existence of cross-cultural differences between the two races.

The findings of the cross-cultural politeness study reflect the similarities and differences of refusal strategies used by the two different societies, as well as the differences in values and norms. A study conducted by Živković, E. (2020) found similarities between Serbs and English using more indirect strategies than direct strategies in their refusal. However, the frequency of use of each strategy recorded by the two groups was different. Moreover, it was found that the percentage of direct strategy use to refuse lower status interlocutors was higher among Serbian respondents than English respondents. This indirectly illustrates that the perceptions or values placed by the two societies on social status are different.

Pragmatic skills in multiple languages are a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors. According to Krulatz, A., & Dixon, T. (2020), cultural norms and solid knowledge in the first language are not determinants to pragmatic performance in other languages learned. They conducted a study to identify pragmatic similarities and differences in the language behaviour of Korean and Norwegian refusals. The study's findings indicated differences and similarities in the refusal produced by the two groups, although it was initially predicted that only differences would exist due to cultural differences underlying the two races.

A cross-cultural study conducted by Naimah A. & Ibrahim R. A. (2019) on Arab and American women found that although both groups used the same refusal strategy, the frequency of each strategy's use was different. American women were found to use more 'no' expressions in their rejection than Arab women. However, Arab women used more strategies of remorse and explanation than American women. This difference was due to cultural differences between Arabs and Americans and may reflect Arab collectivistic culture and American individualistic culture.

In addition, a study comparing refusal by native speakers with non-native speakers of a language was also conducted. Norma S., Siti Jamilah Ahmad Affandi B. & S. (2016) conducted a study on native English and Malay students learning English as a second language to identify differences and similarities in their refusal speech acts. The study found that native English speakers used a more direct strategy in their opposition against the Malay respondents and

showed that they were more direct in refusal than the Malay respondents. The reasoning strategies used in the refusal of both groups, in turn, reflected the individualistic western values and the collective eastern values represented by both groups of respondents studied.

The study conducted by Hieda, N, Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin & Mohammad Fadzeli Jaafar (2021) also found significant differences in a survey of Malay and Japanese respondents in terms of semantic formula frequency of use when expressing refusal in the native language of each. Malay respondents tended to use positive politeness, while Japanese respondents used negative politeness. However, Malay respondents appeared to modify their strategy when submitting the refusal in the Japanese language and when Japanese respondents were asked to assess it, they took it positively as a fair and neutral act. Generally, this study's results reflect the community's openness to reflect cross-cultural communication and Malay accommodative culture.

Based on the highlights above, it can be concluded that each race compared show differences in how they couch refusals. These differences imply that the perceptions and values of the strategies used in the refusal are different according to the respective cultures and societies. Understanding how other national societies perform linguistic practices is essential to avoid intercultural conflicts that can affect communication and universal harmony. Thus, this study aims to compare the strategy of politeness linguistics used by the Malay and Spanish in speech acts of refusal in the hope that all the differences and similarities identified will serve as a guide to both sides to enhance the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication further, thus enhancing mutual understanding and agreement between the two races. Furthermore, the findings of such studies can also be utilised to increase public awareness of the sociolinguistic rules that determine how a language works (Ala'Eddin Abdullah, Marlyna Maros, Ashinida Aladdin & Mouad Al-natour (2015) in a society.

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample***

40 Malay respondents and 40 Spanish respondents aged 30 to 40 years participated in this study. They were postgraduate students of social science streams at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and the University of Valladolid, Spain. Postgraduate students were selected as respondents due to their maturity and life experience, which would serve them well when responding to the questionnaire in the form of Discourse Completion Test (DCT).

### ***Instrument***

The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire in the form of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) in Malay for Malay respondents and Spanish for Spanish respondents. DCT is a questionnaire that contains situations that require respondents to perform the desired language behaviour by imagining themselves being in a given situation. DCT was introduced by Blum-Kulka (1982) and has been used extensively in studies involving language behaviour. A pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the DCT constructed. It was based on relevant past studies. The pilot study results were then used as a guide to improving the DCT to be used

in the actual study.

### **Data collection**

DCT in Malay were distributed to Malay respondents in Malaysia, while DCT in Spanish were distributed to Spanish respondents in Spain. Before filling out the DCT, respondents were given a brief explanation of the purpose of the study. The average time taken by respondents to complete the DCT was 15 minutes.

### **Data analysis**

Data were analysed using the Beebe refusal model et al. (1990). The unit analysed was the statement written by the respondent in response to the situation articulated in the TPW. For example, if the respondent refused by saying, “I am sorry I cannot attend (the event), I have a task to do” would be analysed as “Statement of regret”, “Negative willingness/ability” and “Excuse/reason”. On the other hand, in cases where the respondent refused by writing “Thank you. But I cannot attend (the event), I have an appointment with someone “, would be analysed as” Gratitude “, “Negative willingness/ability “and” Excuse/reason “.

### **Refusal strategy based on beebe et. al. (1990) model**

The following is a description of the refusal strategy based on the model of Beebe et al. (1990):

#### **Negative willingness/ability**

“Negative willingness/ability” refers to refusal that uses words such as, “*saya tidak boleh*” / “I can not”, “*saya tidak mahu*” / “I do not want”, “*saya tidak mampu*” / “I am unable”, and “*saya tidak akan*” / “I will not” contain an element of refusal contained in a request or invitation. Malay respondent mentioned “*Saya tidak boleh pergi ke majlis tu*” / “I can’t attend that party” or “*Saya tidak mampu lakukannya*” / “I am unable to do it” and more. Spanish respondent mentioned, “*No puedo ayudar* (I cannot help)”, “*No podré ir*” (I will not be able to go)”, “*Me es imposible acudir*” (I cannot attend (the party))” and others.

#### **Statement of regret**

It involves apology words such as “I am sorry”, “My apologies”, “Please accept my apologies” that are used to express guilt or frustration of the respondent for having to decline the interlocutor’s request or invitation. Malay respondents said, “*saya minta maaf, saya tak dapat hadir ke majlis awak*” / “I am sorry, I cannot attend your party” or “*maaf ya, saya tak boleh tolong awak kali ni*” / “I’m sorry, I can’t help you this time” and more. Spanish respondents, on the other hand, usually expressed “*Lo siento, no podré ir*” (Sorry, I can’t go)”, “*Perdona que no pueda asistir* (Sorry I cannot attend)” or “*Cuanto lo lamento, pero no puedo* (I’m very sorry, but I cannot)” and others.

#### **Wish**

This strategy refers to expressing the respondent’s desire or expectation to fulfil the interlocutor’s request or invitation. The Malay respondents uttered “I wish I can go but ...” or “If only I could help, but ...” and many others. Spanish respondents said “*Espero que pueda ir pero...* (“I hope I can go, but...)”, “*Espero que todo salga bien* (“I hope everything goes well)”

or “*Espero que la próxima vez pueda ser*” (Hopefully next time it is possible for me to attend it)” and others.

### ***Excuse/reason***

It refers to the reasons, excuses or explanations, whether general or specific, given by the respondents to show that their refusal is justifiable or reasonable. Common excuses do not contain precise details such as, “*saya tak dapat pergi kerana saya ada hal*” / “I cannot go there because I am otherwise engaged” or “*saya tak boleh pergi kerana ada urusan*” / “I cannot go because I have something to do”, and more. While the specific reason refers to the reason that is accompanied by such details “*saya tidak dapat tolong kerana saya terpaksa menjaga tiga orang anak kakak saya yang sedang berkursus di luar negara selama sebulan*” / “I can’t help because I have to take care of my sister’s three children as she is attending a course abroad for a month” or “*saya tak boleh pergi ke majlis tu kerana saya telah berjanji dengan suami untuk mengikutnya balik kampung kerana ada kenduri saudaranya di sana*”, / “I can’t attend the ceremony because I promised my husband to accompany him back to his hometown to attend a family event”, and more. Spanish respondents said “...*estoy muy ocupada estos días* (I am swamped these days)”, “*Tengo un compromiso pendiente para ese día* (I have an unfinished commitment that day)” or “... *esta semana tengo mucho trabajo* (... this week I have a lot of work)” and others.

### ***Statement of alternative***

This strategy refers to presenting suggestions or other options to the interlocutor so that the refusal does not seem too much of a rebuff, at the same time mitigating any embarrassment. Malay respondents said, “...*apa kata kalau awak tukar tarikh majlis tu ke minggu depan?*” / “... What if you change the date of the ceremony to next week?”. The Spanish respondent said, “*Creo que el vecino puede ayudarte*” (I think the neighbor can help you) and others.

### ***Future acceptance***

The respondent’s indirect strategy is to refuse the interlocutor’s request or invitation by making predictions or hypotheses about their ability to accept or attend it in the future. For example, the Malay respondents said “*jika kenduri tu bulan depan, saya boleh hadir*” / “If the feast ceremony to be organised next month, then I can attend it” atau “*kalau tarikh kenduri tu minggu depan, saya tak ada masalah untuk hadir*” / “Should the date of the feast is next week, I have no problem attending”, and more. While the Spanish respondent said “... *otra vez será*. (... Next time maybe)”, “*A la próxima no faltaré....* (Next time I will not miss it...)” or “... *otro día estaré libre* (...I will be free maybe another day) and many others.

### ***Statement of philosophy***

“Statement of philosophy” is a statement or notification of a person’s principles or beliefs on something to refuse the interlocutor’s request or invitation to a ceremony. For example, the Spanish respondent stated, “...*debo decirte que me parece muy oportuno ir a la fiesta*.” (I must tell you that it is in appropriate for me to attend the party),” ... *no sería procedente....* (... It is

not appropriate ...)” or “... “...*creo que no debo ir a ese tipo de fiestas*” (... I think I should not go to a party like that) and others. Malay respondents said, “I rarely attend such ceremony” or “I do not like to go to a place where there are many people” and many others.

### ***Threat***

This strategy refers to using words that intimate threat or the possibility of adverse consequences if the request or invitation is met. The purpose is to convince the interlocutor that the refusal was something done out of compulsion rather than intentionally, thus hopefully reducing resentment on the interlocutor who expects their request or invitation to be met. Malay respondents said, “*saya dah janji dengan mak nak balik kampung, kalau saya pergi ke kenduri tu, nangislah mak tunggu saya*” / “I promised my mother to come home, if I go to the party, she would cry and wait for me”. In contrast, the Spanish respondent said “*Lo siento pero si acudo podría dar lugar a mal entendidos por parte de los demás invitados* (Sorry but if I was present, it could cause other guests to misunderstand)”.

### ***Statement of negative feeling***

“Statement of negative feeling” refers to the negative words uttered by the respondent. It includes criticism of the request or invitation presented by the interlocutor to create guilt on the interlocutor and then show that his rejection is justified. For example, the Malay respondent said, “...*tak boleh tukar tarikh lain ke, tu kan hari kerja, macam mana nak pergi?*” / “...Would it be possible to postpone (the event to) another date, it is a weekday, how is it possible for me to attend it?” and the Spanish respondent, for example, said, “*no tenemos tanta relación como para que acuda a tu fiesta* (... we are not that close for to attend your party)”,

### ***Request for empathy***

It is an indirect strategy used by respondents by asking the interlocutor to consider or assess the reasons that prevent them from attending the request or invitation. Malay respondent mentioned, “*Mak saya tak sihat, takpe kan saya tak pergi sebab saya kena dahulukan mak saya*” / “My mother is unwell, I can’t attend it because I prioritise my mother” or “*saya ada urusan penting hari tu, memang hari tu je saya ada masa, takde masalah kan kalau saya tak hadir*” / “I have an important matter to do that day, it’s the only day that I have, it won’t matter if I’m not present” and more. The Spanish respondent, said “...*este año tengo muchos compromisos familiares y he de priorizar mis gastos* (... This year I have a lot of family commitments and I have to prioritise my budget), “...no puedo, el fin de semana es el único momento para ver a mi familia y amigos.... (... I cannot do it. It is only during the weekend I can meet family and friends...)” or “*Ya tengo planes y no puedo faltar porque es muy importante* (I already have a plan and I cannot miss it because it is important) and others.

### ***Off the hook***

“Off the hook” is an expression or word used by the respondent to reduce the interlocutor’s anxiety or worry due to the refusal that the respondent had to do. For example, the Malay

respondents said, “*saya tak boleh hadir majlis tu, tapi jangan risau saya doakan segalanya berjalan lancar nanti*” / “I can’t attend the ceremony, but don’t worry, I’ll pray everything goes well later” or “*saya ada urusan hari tu, jangan bimbanglah, insyaAllah majlis tu akan tetap meriah tanpa saya*” / “I have a task to do that day, don’t worry, insyaAllah your event will be just as merry without me” and others. The Spanish respondent, said, “*No te preocupes, todo saldrá bien* (You do not have to be worried, as everything will go well).

### ***Repetition of the part of the request***

This strategy refers to the repetition of a partial word or phrase of invitation proposed by the previous interlocutor, intended to momentarily escape the interlocutor’s attention, in turn giving the respondent room to postpone the refusal. For example, Malay respondents said “*Majlis? Minggu depan ya? Mmm, rasanya tak boleh datang*” / “The event? Next week huh? Mmm, I don’t think I can come”. The Spanish respondent also said “*¿Ayudarte? ¿Pero tengo de prisa*” (Helping you? But I am in a hurry).

### ***Postponement***

“Postponement” refers to the postponement of the decision submitted by the respondent to either accept or refuse the interlocutor’s request or invitation. Malay respondent said, “*Tengok keadaan dulu, nanti saya fikirkan macam mana*” / “It depends on the situation, I’ll think about it and let you know”, and Spanish respondent said “*... no veo que pueda, pero ya te avisaré con lo que sea*. (I don’t think I can do it, but I will let you know later anyway)” or “*Lo tendrá que mirar, pero me parece que tengo un compromiso* (I have to think about it first, but I think I commit)”.

### ***Hedging***

“Hedging” refers to the refusal of a request or invitation in a way that the respondent gives a confusing, vague, uncertain or inconclusive answer. Malay respondents said, “*Tak pasti boleh pergi ke tidak, kalau ikutkan saya ada urusan waktu tu*” / “I’m not sure if I can attend it or not. I think I have something to do at that time” atau “*Macam mana ya, tak boleh nak janji lagi ni sebab anak tak berapa sihat*” / “I can’t promise now because my child is sick”. The Spanish respondent also said, for example, “*No sé si podré ir, estoy muy ocupada estos días*. (I am not sure if I can go, I have been swamped these days) or “*... no te lo puedo confirmar. Tengo trabajo acumulado y necesito descansar*. (... I cannot confirm it yet. I have much work, and I need to rest)”.

### ***Statement of positive opinión/agreement***

This strategy refers to any positive words in the form of congratulations. It is expressed by the respondent to minimise the possibility of offense and embarrassment on the part of both parties. Malay respondents said, “*Tahniah ya, tapi maaf saya tak dapat hadir...*” / “Congratulations, but I am sorry I am unable to attend...” or “*Bagusnya, tapi saya tak boleh pergilah, ada urusan*” / “That’s great, but I cannot go, I have something to do” and more. Meanwhile, a



Spanish respondent said “*¡Enhorabuena! Me alegro mucho* (Congratulations! I am thrilled)”, “...me siento muy halagada por esta invitación.... (... I am very excited about this invitation...)” or “... *sería muy bonito* (... it will be beautiful) and many more.

### ***Statement of empathy***

“Statement of empathy” refers to a refusal that contains words that describe the speaker’s understanding of the situation, feelings and also the purpose of the interlocutor making a request or invitation. For example, the Spanish respondent said, “*Cuanto lo lamento, sobre todo al tratarse de algo tan importante para ti, pero no puedo asistir* (I’m very sorry, I know it is very important to you, but I can not attend it)” or “*¡Oh, qué pena! Me coincide con otro cuento al que no puedo decir que no* (Oh what a pity! It happens that I have other engagements that I can not refuse). Malay respondents uttered “*Alaaa kasihannya, tapi saya nak kena gerak sekarang ni, tak boleh tolong*” / “I am so sorry to hear that, but I have to get going now, I can’t help (you)”, and more.

### ***Pause fillers***

It refers to a phrase without meaning uttered to fill the gap in the conversation like, “Hrm ...”, “Mmm ...” or “erm ...” and many others in the Malay culture and “*¡Vaya! ... (Wow!)*”, “*A ver...* (Mmm...)” or “*Pues, (Good...)*” etc. in Spanish culture.

### ***Gratitude***

“Gratitude” refers to an expression to show respect, appreciation or gratitude to the person you communicate with. Malay respondent said, “*Terima kasih kerana menjemput saya, ...*”, “*Terima kasih tapi...*” / “Thank you for inviting me,” “Thank you but...” or “*Terima kasih ya, tapi...*” / “Thank you, but...” and more. Spanish respondents said “*Muchas gracias por tu invitación* (Thank you very much for your invitation)”, “*Muchas gracias por invitarme* (Thank you very much for inviting me)” or “*Gracias por acordarte de mí* (Thank you for remembering me)” and many more.

### **Findings**

Data analysis was divided into two parts, namely, invitation refusal analysis and request refusal analysis.

### ***Analysis of invitation refusal***

A total of 572 strategies were produced by the Malay respondents, while the Spanish respondents produced 575 strategies. Most respondents from both groups chose to refuse by adopting indirect strategies. The percentage frequency of strategies based on direct and indirect categories is shown in chart 1 below.

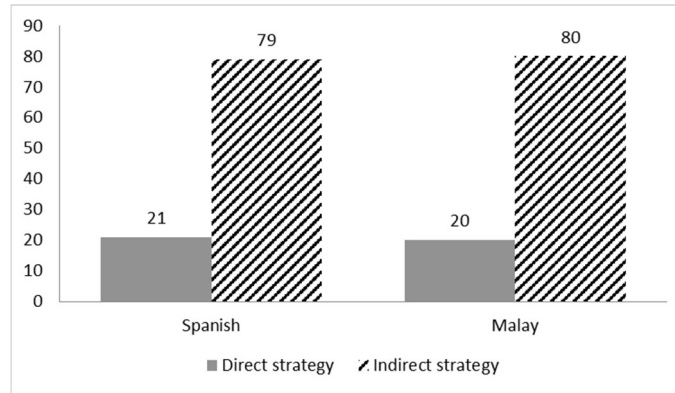


CHART 1. Refusal Frequency Percentage Based on Direct and Indirect Strategy in two groups, Malay and Spanish

As shown in chart 1 above, indirect strategies recorded a higher percentage of frequency of use among respondents of both groups, as compared to direct strategies. The frequency of indirect strategies application by Malay respondents was 80%, whereas that of Spanish respondents was 79%. On the other hand, direct strategies recorded a 20% frequency of use among Malay respondents and 19% among Spanish respondents. This indicates that both countries prefer to use indirect strategies when refusing invitations to an event.

Data from the study uncovered a total of sixteen different strategies employed by Malay and Spanish respondents. Below is a table showing the frequency and percentage of frequency of each strategy produced by the respondents of both groups.

TABLE 1. Frequency and Frequency Percentage of Each Strategy Produced by Respondents of Both Groups in Invitation Refusal.

Indirectness	Strategy	Spanish		Malay	
		F	%	F	%
Direct strategy	Negative willingness/ability	123	21.4	114	20
	Statement of regret	72	12.5	178	31
	Wish	30	5	36	6.3
	Excuse/reason	122	21	158	27.6
	Statement of alternative	0	0	1	0.2
	Future acceptance	7	1.2	9	1.6
	Statement of philosophy	37	6.4	0	0
Indirect strategy	Threat	1	0.2	1	0.2
	Statement of negative feeling	1	0.2	1	0.2
	Request for empathy	6	1	5	0.8
	Off the hook	1	0.2	9	1.6
	Postponement	2	0.3	1	0.2
	Repetition of part of request	0	0	1	0.2
	Hedging	3	0.5	5	0.8

Statement of positive opinion/agreement	49	9	21	3.7
Statement of empathy	3	0.5	0	0
Pause fillers	5	0.8	7	1.2
Gratitude	113	19.8	25	4.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>100</b>

In total, 18 different strategies were found in the rejection data of both groups. These strategies are, “Negative willingness/ability”, “Statement of regret”, “Wish”, “Excuse/reason”, “Statement of alternative”, “Future acceptance”, “Statement of philosophy”, “Threat”, “Statement of negative feeling” “Request for empathy”, “Off the hook”, “Postponement”, “Repetition of part of request”, “Hedging”, “Statement of positive opinion/agreement”, “Statement of empathy”, “Pause fillers” and “Gratitude”.

Malay and Spanish respondents each used 16 different strategies in their refusals. Three strategies that the Malay respondents most frequently used were “statement of regret” (178 times), “excuse/reason” (158 times) and “Negative willingness/ability” (114 times). In comparison, the three most frequently used strategies by Spanish respondents were “Negative willingness/ability” (123 times), “Excuse/reason” (122 times) and “Gratitude” (113 times). Two strategies that did not exist in Malay refusal but existed in Spanish refusal data was “Statement of philosophy” (37 times) and “Statement of empathy” (3 times). The two strategies that were not used by Spanish respondents but used by the Malay respondents were “Statement of alternative” (once) and “Repetition of part of the request” (once).

As shown in the table above, several strategies showed significant frequency differences between the two groups. For example, the “Statement of regret” strategy. The Malay respondents used it by 178 times compared to 72 times by Spanish respondents. The strategy of “Gratitude” also recorded a significant difference, with 133 recorded instances among Spanish respondents compared to only 25 by Malay respondents. In addition, a “Statement of positive opinion/agreement” was used 49 times by Spanish respondents compared to only 21 times by Malay respondents. While the strategy of “Statement of philosophy” was found 37 times in the Spanish respondents’ refusal but not in Malay refusal data. The table below shows the position of the strategies based on the frequency of use in both groups, Malay and Spanish.

TABLE 2. Position Strategy Based on Usage Frequency in two groups, Malay and Spanish.

Spanish		Malay	
1.	Negative willingness/ability	1.	Statement of regret
2.	Excuse/reason	2.	Excuse/reason
3.	Gratitude	3.	Negative willingness/ability
4.	Statement of regret	4.	Wish
5.	Statement of positive opinion/agreement	5.	Gratitude
6.	Statement of philosophy	6.	Statement of positive opinion/agreement
7.	Wish	7.	Future acceptance

8. Future acceptance	8. Off the hook
9. Request for empathy	9. Pause fillers
10. Pause fillers	10. Request for empathy
11. Hedging	11. Hedging
12. Statement of empathy	12. Statement of alternative
13. Postponement	13. Threat
14. Threat	14. Statement of negative feeling
15. Statement of negative feeling	15. Postponement
16. Off the hook	16. Repetition of part of request

As shown in the table above, the position of each strategy, except “Excuse/reason”, was different in the two groups. For example, the strategy “statement of regret” occupies the top spot for Malays, compared to fourth place in the Spanish group. On the other hand, the strategy of “Negative willingness/ability” is in the top spot among Spanish respondents, but it is in third place among Malay respondents. In addition, the strategy of “Gratitude” is in third place among Spanish respondents but fifth among Malay respondents. Other strategies are also in different positions in each group. Such differences illustrate that the values and perceptions of the two races as to which method is more appropriate and more persuasive to refuse are different.

***Analysis of request refusal***

The Spanish respondents produced 544 strategies, while the Malay respondents produced 547 strategies. Most respondents from both groups chose to refuse by employing indirect strategies. The frequency for direct and indirect refusal strategies can be seen in chart 2 below.

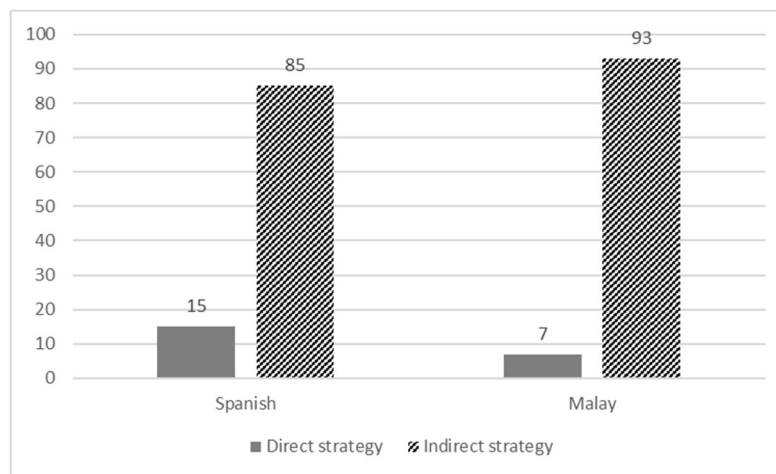


Chart 2. Refusal Frequency Percentage Based on Direct and Indirect Strategy in two groups, Malay and Spanish

As shown in chart 2 above, indirect strategies recorded a higher percentage of frequency of use compared to direct strategies among respondents of both groups. The frequency of indirect

strategies among Spanish respondents was 85%, while among Malay respondents it was 93%. Direct strategy recorded a 15% frequency of use among Spanish respondents and 7% frequency among Malay respondents. This illustrates that respondents from both countries were more likely to use indirect strategies when refusing interlocutor requests.

Similar to invitation refusal, in the request refusal data, both groups used 16 different strategies. The following is a table showing the frequency and percentage of frequency of each strategy produced by the respondents of both groups.

TABLE 3. Frequency and Percentage of Frequency of Each Strategy Produced by Respondents of Both Groups in Invitation Refusal

Indirectness	Strategy	Spanish		Malay	
		F	%	F	F
Direct					
strategy	Negative willingness/ability	81	14.9%	40	7.3%
	Statement of regret	119	21.9%	154	28.2%
	Wish	2	0.4%	3	0.5%
	Excuse/reason	173	31.8%	175	32.0%
	Statement of alternative	25	4.6%	39	7.1%
	Future acceptance	9	1.7%	5	0.9%
	Statement of philosophy	7	1.3%	2	0.4%
	Threat	15	2.8%	14	2.6%
Indirect					
strategy	Statement of negative feeling	23	4.2%	10	1.8%
	Request for empathy	14	2.6%	34	6.2%
	Off the hook	5	0.9%	1	0.2%
	Self-defence	5	0.9%	0	0.0%
	Repetition of part of request	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
	Postponement	41	7.5%	47	8.6%
	Hedging	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
	Statement of positive opinion/agreement	11	2.0%	5	0.9%
	Pause fillers	11	2.0%	16	2.9%
	Gratitude	3	0.6%	0	0.0%
	Total	544	100%	547	100%

Similar to invitation refusal, a total of 18 different strategies were found in the invitation refusal data of both groups. These strategies were, “Negative willingness/ability”, “Statement of regret”, “Wish”, “Excuse/reason”, “Statement of alternative”, “Future acceptance”, “Statement of philosophy”, “Threat”, “Statement of negative feeling” “Request for empathy”, “Off the hook”, “Self-defense” “Repetition of part of request”, “Postponement”, “Hedging”, “Statement of positive opinion/agreement”, “Statement of empathy”, “Pause fillers” and “Gratitude”.

Spanish and Malay respondents each used 16 different strategies in their refusals. The three

most frequently used strategies by Spanish respondents were the “Excuse/reason” strategy (173 times), “Statement of regret” (119 times) and “Negative willingness/ability” (81 times). In comparison, the three most common strategies used by Malay respondents were “Excuse / Reason” (175 times), “statement of regret” (154 times) and “postponement” (47 times). Two of these strategies did not exist in Spanish refusal data but existed in Malay refusal data, the “repetition of part of the request” and “Hedging”. The strategies that existed in Spanish refusal data but did not exist in Malay refusal data were “self-defence” and “Gratitude”.

Based on the table above, it can be noted that the strategy of “Negative willingness/ability” used by Spanish respondents was recorded twice as often compared to the Malay respondents (81 versus 40). The Malay respondents used the strategy “statement of regret” 154 times, compared to 119 times by Spanish respondents. The strategy “Statement of negative feeling” was also used twice as frequently among Spanish respondents (23 times) compared to the Malay respondents (10 times). While the strategy of “Request of empathy” was recorded twice as often amongst Malay respondents (34 times) compared to Spanish respondents (14 times). In addition, a “Statement of alternative” was used 39 times by Malay respondents compared to 25 times by Spanish respondents. In the context of refusing this request, it was also found that both groups of respondents used many “Excuse/reason” strategies to refuse the interlocutor’s request. The table below shows the position of the strategy based on the frequency of use for Malay and Spanish.

TABLE 4. Position Strategy Based on the frequency of use in the request refusal by two groups, Malay and Spanish.

Spanish		Malay	
1.	Excuse/reason	1.	Excuse/reason
2.	Statement of regret	2.	Statement of regret
3.	Negative willingness/ability	3.	Postponement
4.	Postponement	4.	Negative willingness/ability
5.	Statement of alternative	5.	Statement of alternative
6.	Statement of negative feeling	6.	Request for empathy
7.	Threat	7.	Pause fillers
8.	Request for empathy	8.	Threat
9.	Statement of positive opinion/agreement	9.	Statement of negative feeling
10.	Pause fillers	10.	Future acceptance
11.	Future acceptance	11.	Statement of positive opinion/agreement
12.	Statement of philosophy	12.	Wish
13.	Off the hook	13.	Statement of philosophy
14.	Self-defence	14.	Off the hook
15.	Gratitude	15.	Repetition of part of request
16.	Wish	16.	Hedging

As shown in the table above, the “Excuse/reason” and “Statement of regret” strategies are at the top in both groups. However, apart from the following three strategies, namely “Excuse/reason”, “Statement of regret”, and “Statement of alternative”, the position of other strategies in each group are different. For example, the strategy of “Negative willingness/ability” is in third place for Spanish refusal data, but for Malay data, it ranks fourth. On the other hand, the strategy of “postponement” is in fourth place in the Spanish group, but a group of Malay is in third place. In addition, a “Statement of negative feeling” is in sixth place in the Spanish group compared to ninth place in the Malay refusal data. Strategy “Pause fillers” ranks tenth in the Spanish refusal data, but in and Malay refusal data, it ranks seventh. Next, the strategy of “Wish” is at the bottom of the sixteenth in the Spanish group compared to the twelfth place in the Malay group.

## Discussion

In general, both groups used more indirect strategies than direct strategies in both the contexts of refusal, invitation and request. However, the frequency of indirect strategies in request refusal was higher than that of invitation refusal. This implies that the values placed by respondents of both groups on the two contexts tested were the same, i.e. it was more difficult to refuse a request than to refuse an invitation. These prompted respondents of both groups to use various indirect strategies to refuse requests to reduce the likelihood of causing embarrassment or offense.

A comparison of the respondents also found that the frequency of indirect strategies among Malay respondents was higher than compared to Spanish respondents. On the other hand, the frequency of use of the direct strategy among Spanish respondents was higher than that of the Malay respondents. This implies that Spanish respondents were more direct in their refusal compared to Malay respondents. The proof is further reinforced using philosophical expression strategies among Spanish respondents, i.e. stating their principles or holding in the refusal put forward primarily against invitations. The existence of the same strategy twice in Malay refusal data also indicates that it is not customary in the culture of the Malays to impose one’s principles or beliefs on others when one refuses. This illustrates that the values placed by the two societies on the matter are different. For Spain, straightforwardness highly regarded, but perhaps this does not apply to the Malays.

For the Malays, considering the feelings of others is more important than saying what one really thinks. Despite refusing, their refusal is still grounded and lined with various strategies or indirect expressions to prevent it from sounding too direct and offending others. This is illustrated by using a “statement of regret” among Malay respondents far more frequently than Spanish respondents. This strategy was used more often in the refusal of invitations rather than the refusal of requests, reflecting a greater amount of guilt in refusing the former compared to the latter. This illustrates the importance of community spirit amongst the Malays. In addition, being apologetic and regretful is a sign of humility, which is significant as it shows that the one refusing feels guilt for not accepting the invitation. The use of this strategy was lower among Spanish respondents, at the same time showing that fewer Spanish respondents feel that refusing

an invitation to the event equates as an offence against the community. If they cannot attend an event, the response as “can not” is adequate because the straightforwardness among the people was much higher and more acceptable than the same value in the Malay community.

In this study, it is interesting that the significant differences in the frequency of use of the “Statement of regret” and “Gratitude” strategies between the two groups in the context of invitation refusal revealed the different focus of each group on the invitation. Spanish respondents were more focused on feeling appreciated when invited. Thus, they began the refusal with thanks. However, Malay respondents focused more on the guilt of having to refuse. Hence, most of their refusals started with an apology. For the Spanish respondents, invitations are a sign of appreciation, so refusals were accompanied by expressions of gratitude. Only certain people are invited to the event in their culture, so it is a great honour to receive an invitation. In the Malay community, invitations to events are common and not necessarily something exclusive. The custom does not make those invited special as it has become a tradition to invite all acquaintances. It is this same custom that causes the Malays to feel very guilty if one can not accept an invitation, causing them to precede their refusal with an apology. The Spanish try not to disappoint the interlocutor by expressing thanks as a token of appreciation for the invitation. On the other hand, the Malays showed their regrets for not being able to accept the invitation by apologising. Thus, both races try to convey their regrets for refusing the invitation in different ways, based on the values and norms held and accepted in their respective societies. However, the strategy of “Gratitude” was only used three times by Spanish respondents in refusing the request, while Malay respondents did not use it.

The “Statement of regret” strategy also reported exciting findings. Spanish respondents used this strategy more often to refuse requests compared to invitations, while Malay respondents used the same strategy more often to refuse invitations rather than requests. This suggests that Spanish respondents feel more guilty for refusing a request than they are refusing an invitation. At the same time, the Malay respondents feel more guilty for refusing an invitation rather than a request. This shows that the two groups are different in terms of which context makes them feel more guilty to refuse, thus implying that the values and norms held by both societies regarding certain concepts are also different.

In both, the context of refusal of invitation and request, the “Excuse/reason” strategy was used frequently by respondents from both groups. However, the frequency of its use in the refusal of requests was higher than in invitations. This implies that requests are not easy to refuse in both cultures, thus forcing respondents to put forward various reasons for it. Furthermore, in both contexts, this strategy was more often employed by Malay respondents compared to Spanish respondents. The reasons given were to support or reinforce their refusal. By giving reasons, guilt can be reduced, and they feel calm as it makes the refusal logical and appropriate. Both races believed that their refusal was justified by giving reasons and would be well received by the interlocutor.

Several other strategies showed significant differences in frequency of use between the two study contexts. For example, the strategies “Statement of alternative”, “Threat” and “Postponement” are often recorded in the data of refusal requests, but only a few were found in



the data of refusal invitations. The “Statement of alternative” strategy did not exist at all in the Spanish invitation refusal data. While the strategy of “Statement of positive opinion/agreement” was more often used by both groups to refuse invitations rather than requests. It implies that the attitudes and stances of both races on the need to use such strategies in the context of a particular refusal are similar. For example, to refuse a request, both groups felt it was necessary to come up with various alternatives, consider the adverse effects if the request is accepted as well as postpone the decision on whether to accept or refuse the request in the hope that the interlocutor could understand it as a refusal even if not articulated directly. As for refusal of the invitation, both groups considered that these strategies should not be used too much.

## Conclusion

The more frequent use of indirect strategies than direct strategies by respondents of both groups in both refusal contexts illustrates that the perspectives of both races on refusal language behaviour are similar, i.e. it is a complex language behaviour, and so various indirect strategies have to be used to reduce the possibility of causing offense. Furthermore, as both the Malay and the Spanish people have the same views on the nature of speech acts that may cause conflict, it should be neutralised by various indirect strategies to avoid conflict.

The variety of indirect strategies used by the two groups illustrate the fact that linguistic politeness is still the practiced by both Malays and Spanish in their everyday communication. This is because refusal is a speech act which happens as a daily occurrence, as it is a linguistic act that results from human reactions to other linguistic acts such as requests, invitations, suggestions, proposals, and offers. Therefore, both the Malays and the Spanish races still practice linguistic politeness in their daily lives.

Although both groups of respondents used similar strategies in both contexts of their refusal, the frequency and percentage of frequency of each strategy differed by race. These differences imply that perceptions and values of such strategies differ according to their respective cultures and societies. For example, among the Malays, the culture of apology is very prevalent, so it is widely used in their refusal. Whereas in Spanish culture, appreciating one’s invitation, even if it cannot be fulfilled, is a norm and is given a very high value. Thus, the use of the strategy of “Gratitude” is incorporated frequently in the Spanish respondents’ refusal compared to the refusal of the Malays. However, the study’s findings also illustrate that the Spanish community is firm in refusing an invitation. The use of the “Statement of philosophy” in their refusal, in direct contrast to the Malay respondents who do not employ that strategy at all, reflects their principles and values of self-belief, which are in no way compromised even when delivering a refusal.

The high frequency of using the “Excuse/reason” strategy in both groups shows that presenting various reasons is a global method to justify a person’s refusal of both requests and invitations. This strategy, which is higher in refusal requests than invitations, suggests that refusing requests is more complex than refusing invitations in both groups studied. The difficulty prompted respondents to use a variety of reasons to refuse. Malay respondents’ more frequent use of excuses as when refusing compared to Spanish respondents in both contexts implies that the

Malays feel more guilty in refusing compared to the Spanish. In the context of invitations, it implies that invitations, no matter what the occasion, is difficult to refuse as they are usually received from known parties such as relatives, friends, peers and neighbours. Failure to fulfil the invitation can trigger various conflicts such as family, friendship and neighbourhood conflicts. Therefore, giving reasons for a refusal indirectly reflects family, friendship, and community values in the communities of both the Malay and the Spanish.

In conclusion, both groups of respondents used a variety of linguistic strategies in both contexts of refusal studied. There are similarities and differences between the two races in using such strategies, which are based on the values and norms that have been held and agreed upon by the members of their respective communities. Something familiar in one culture may be uncommon in another culture. Understanding how other national societies perform linguistic practices is essential to avoid conflicts in intercultural communication that could jeopardise universal harmony.

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## Appendix

### Classification of Refusals (Beebe et al. 1990)

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#### Direct Refusal

A. Performative (e.g., "I refuse")

B. Non performative statement

1. "No"

2. Negative willingness/ability ("I can't", "I won't", "I don't think so")

#### Indirect Refusal

A. Statement of regret (e.g., "I'm sorry...", "I feel terrible...")

B. Wish (e.g., "I wish I could help you...")

C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., "I already have a family gathering that day")

D. Statement of alternative

1. I can X instead of Y (e.g., "I'd rather...", "I'd prefer...")

2. Why don't you do X instead of Y (e.g., "Why don't you ask someone else?")

E. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., "I'll do it next time", if you had asked me earlier, I would have...")

F. Statement of principle (e.g., "I never do business with friends")

G. Statement of philosophy (e.g., "Such things can happen to anyone")

H. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor

1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (e.g., "You won't be able to understand my handwriting" to refuse lending class notes)

2. Statement of negative feeling: Criticism of the request/requester, guilt trip (e.g., "you are lazy")

3. Request for help, empathy and assistance (e.g., "I hope you can understand my situation")

4. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., "don't worry about it", "That's okay", "you don't have to")

5. Self-defence (e.g., "I'm just following the course program", "I'm doing my best")

#### Avoidance

1. Verbal

A. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., "Did you say Monday?")

B. Postponement (e.g., "I'll think about it")

C. Hedging (e.g., "Gee, I don't know" "I'm not sure")

2. Nonverbal
  - A. Silence
  - B. Hesitation
  - C. Do nothing
  - D. Physical departure

Adjuncts to Refusals

1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement (e.g., “That’s a good idea...”, “I’d love to...”)
2. Statement of empathy (e.g., ‘I realize you are in a difficult situation”)
3. Pause fillers (e.g., “uhhh”, “well”, “oh”, “uhm”)
4. Gratitude/Appreciation