

# REFUSAL AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN RELATION TO SOCIAL STATUS: A CASE OF A FACE-THREATENING ACT AMONG INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**REFUSAL AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN RELATION TO SOCIAL STATUS:  
A CASE OF A FACE-THREATENING ACT AMONG INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS**

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**Abstract**

The present study aimed at investigating how Indonesian students refuse offers, invitations, and suggestions to persons having different social statuses. Refusal and politeness strategies were the focus of this study. The social variable involved in this study was the social status represented in lower to higher social-status (LHSS), higher to lower social-status (HLSS), and equal social-status (ESS) relationships. The data were obtained through discourse completion test (DCT) distributed to 161 students. The DCTs resulted in 2898 corpus data. Data analysis suggested that in general, the refusal strategy across social-status relationships and across initiating acts is consistently patterned, i.e. indirect strategy was more dominantly performed by the research participants. Criticizing, presenting other agenda, showing a preference, and stating self-limitation were the semantic formulas that were frequently used for refusing indirectly. Turning to politeness strategy, LHSS group used the highest number of redressive expressions, followed by HLSS and ESS groups. The politeness strategies occurring in the three groups were the use of redressive expressions and the use of wordy refusals. This study proved that social-status does not influence much to the choice of refusal strategy, but it contributes to the choice of politeness strategies.

Key words: speech act, refusal strategy, politeness strategy, social status

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Refusal, like any other speech act, is believed to be universal and culturally distinctive. The act is present across languages in the world, but how and where it is realized is different across cultures. The studies by Sattar et al (2013), Wijayanto (2013), Morkus (2009), and Nadar et al (2005) confirm that the speech act of refusal is indeed culturally distinctive. Likewise, politeness is universal and specific. The concept of politeness is present in all languages, but each language has its own way in realizing politeness. Being direct can be regarded as polite in a certain culture, but it might be considered impolite in other ones.

Refusal, an act which commonly occurs in every day communication, is a rejection to suggestions, invitations, offers, or requests. It might result in offense in the part of addressee since his/her choice of actions is not positively responded. In order to minimize the offense, politeness is necessarily called for whenever the act of refusal is realized. The choice of strategies in realizing a threatening act, like refusal, are determined by social distance, relative power (social status), and severity of the act (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 74). Having a culture whose characteristic is collectivistic, Indonesian people, I think, are quite sensitive to those three social factors. As such, the strategy to realize the act of refusing is

significantly influenced by the social status of an addresser and his/her addressee, their closeness, and the severity of the refusal.

By far, studies on Indonesian refusals can be classified into three groups: those focusing on the comparison between the realization of English and Indonesian refusals among Indonesians learning English, those investigating the differences between Indonesian and other speech community, and those studying characteristics of Indonesian refusals among Indonesian native speakers.

Two studies focusing on refusals in English among Indonesian EFL learners confirm how sociocultural norms affect their performance in refusals (Herman et al (2013), and Wijayanto, 2013). Herman et al (2013) found that in their refusals, Indonesians EFL learners tended to use indirect strategies—the ones commonly used by Indonesian native speakers—in refusing invitations, suggestions, offers, and requests. Likewise, Wijayanto (2013) reported that refusal strategies performed by Javanese learners of English (JLE) and native speakers of Javanese (NJ) were more similar than to those of British native speakers of English (NSE). Those findings contrast with the one by Amarien (1997). Her study revealed that in their refusals to offers, Indonesian speakers speaking English (ISSE) used ‘intercultural’ strategies, in the sense that the strategies were uninfluenced by L1 norms and yet not the norms of L2. As such, sociocultural norms of L1 do not affect the realization of refusal in the target language.

Another comparative study is the one conducted by Nadar et al (2005). Their study, however, did not touch upon the existence of pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2, but rather it focused on how two distinct speech communities—English and Indonesian—differ in realizing the speech act of refusal. Their study suggested that in terms of the combination of speech acts used to refuse, native speakers of English and Indonesian are different. English refusals are mostly realized in a single act or the combination of two acts. Few English refusals are expressed in three or four acts. By contrast, Indonesian refusals are mostly realized in the combination of three acts, and a few of them are realized in a single act (p. 169).

Other studies on Indonesian refusals focus on how this act is realized by Indonesian native speakers. Kartomiharjo’s (1990) study was concerned with verbal forms of refusals to invitations, offers, and requests among Indonesian speakers in the East Java province. The social variables involved in his study were: age, gender, ethnicity, social status, social distance, and topic. The study proved that people from East Java tended to use hints to express a refusal.

Aziz (2000) looked at speech acts commonly performed by Indonesian speakers in face-threatening situations and politeness strategies used to minimize the threat. The study revealed that direct refusal, indirect refusal, direct acceptance, and indirect acceptance were the strategies which were commonly performed by Indonesian speakers when they are hypothetically presented in situations in which they are pressured to make refusals. Out of those strategies in refusal, his study suggested that indirect strategies were more favorable among Indonesian speakers (2000). In addition, Gintings’s (2014) study revealed that the people of South Sumatra use direct and indirect strategies in refusing.

Those studies, however, did not portray a specific group of Indonesian speakers such as university students. This research, then, intends to fill in the gap. This research is intended to view how Indonesian university students realize the speech act of refusal to offers, invitations, and suggestions to persons having different social statuses. More specifically, the goals of the present study were (1) to investigate strategies used by Indonesian university students in realizing the act of refusal to higher, lower, and equal status persons; and (2) to investigate politeness strategies to minimize the threat.

## II. POLITENESS IN THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT

Politeness is one of cultural aspects. As such, the politeness enacted in a certain group community is not separable from the culture of the community. Barnes (2006) believed that Indonesian culture is collectivistic. Likewise, Kadarisman (2009) accounted that social harmony is the prominence among Indonesians since the culture is collectivistic (p. ...). Politeness in the Indonesian culture is built from the *Prinsip Saling Tenggang Rasa* or Principle of Mutual Consideration (PMC) covering:

- a). avoid using expressions to your interlocutor which you would not like to be addressed to you if you were in his/her shoes;
- b). Use expressions to your interlocutors which you would like to be addressed to you if you were in his/her shoes (Aziz, 2000, p. 303).

In his further explanation, Aziz (2000) explains that the principle contains four values:

- a). Harm and Favor Potential; this sub-principle reminds us to be careful in uttering expressions since they are potentially either to harm or favor others.
- b). Shared-feeling Principle; this sub-principle reminds us that our addressee has the same feeling as we do. We are not happy with harmful expressions, and neither do they. We are happy with favorable expressions, and so do they. In consequence, do not state expressions which make you unhappy if the expressions are addressed to you.
- c). *Prima Facie* Principle; this sub-principle stresses the importance of impression in the first sight since it is the point at which our addressee evaluates our politeness manner.
- d). Continuity Principle; this sub-principle suggests that the continuity of our communication is dependent on the present communication (p. 303-304).

In some ways, PMC is similar with the politeness principle by Brown and Levinson. The *harm and favor* and *shared-feeling* principles are relatively similar with politeness strategies to fulfill the addressee's positive and negative face wants. This is because the *harm and favor* and *shared-feeling* principles guide speakers how to empathize with others. Do not create utterances which might harm your addressee because he/she is not happy with harmful utterances. This value is equal with the principle of minimizing face loss in Brown and Levinson's theory. PMC, however, is provided with other values, i.e. *prima facie* principle highlighting the importance of the ability to create positive impression in the first sight and continuity principle stressing the prominence to maintain the sustainability of communication. The existence of the last two values is the point of difference between PMC and the politeness theory by Brown and Levinson.

## III. METHODS

### A. Participants

The present study involved 161 Indonesian university students, ranging in age from 19 to 23 years old. They were students of State Islamic Institute of Tulungagung (SIIT), East Java, Indonesia and the ones of the School of Culture Studies at Universitas Brawijaya (UB), Malang, East Java, Indonesia. They are all native speakers on Indonesian. The rationale of choosing university students is that this community is believed to be egalitarian. Being egalitarian, this group of people might realize a face-threatening act such as a refusal in very different ways from other people.

### B. Research Instrument

The data of this study were collected by using discourse completion test (DCT). The DCT was in the form of situations requiring the participants to give responses from which the act of refusal emerged. The DCT consisted of 18 situations, and they were classified into three different social-status relationships: lower-to-higher-social status (henceforth LHSS), higher-to-lower-social status (henceforth HLSS), and equal-social-status (henceforth ESS) relationships. In each relationship, the research participants were required to refuse offers, invitations, and suggestions, each of which was represented in two situations. The detailed description of the instrument is displayed in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
DESCRIPTION OF THE DCT

Social-Status Relationship	Social Roles		Initiating Acts of Refusal	Situations
	Addresser	Addressee		
LHSS	Employee	Employer	OFFER	An employee has to refuse an offer from his/her employer to occupy his house free of charge (situation A).
	Thesis Advisee	Thesis Adviser		A thesis advisee has to refuse a part-time- job offer given by his/her adviser (situation B).
	Administrative staff	Superior	INVITATION	Administrative staff has to refuse an invitation to dinner extended by his/her superior (situation G)

	Lodger	House mother		A lodger has to refuse an invitation to a party in a five-star hotel extended by his/her house mother (situation H).
	Thesis Advisee	Thesis Adviser	SUGGESTION	A thesis advisee has to refuse a suggestion for applying a job in a bank, the suggestion is given by his/her thesis adviser (situation M)
	Student Taking a Community-service course	Village Leader		A student taking a community-service course in a certain village has to refuse a suggestion for running for an English course given by the leader of the village (situation N).
HLSS	Senior Member of an organisation	Junior Member of the same organisation	OFFER	A senior in an organization has to refuse a part-time job offer given by his/her junior (situation C).
	Master	Housemaid		A master has to refuse an offer of some oily food given by his/her housemaid (situation D).
	Thesis Adviser	Thesis Advisee	INVITATION	A thesis adviser has to refuse an invitation to dinner extended by his/her thesis advisee (situation I)
	Dean	Administrative Staff		A dean has to refuse an invitation to officially open a bazaar extended by his/her administrative staff (situation J).
	Master	Building Construction Worker	SUGGESTION	A master has to refuse a suggestion for house renovation given by a building construction worker (situation O).
	Superior	Staff		A superior has to refuse a suggestion for intensively consuming red rice given by his/her staff (situation P).



Social-Status Relationship	Social Roles		Initiating Acts	Situations
	Addresser	Addressee		
ESS	Student	Roommate	OFFER	A student has to refuse an offer for using his/her roommate's motorbike (situation E).
	Student	Classmate		A student has to refuse an offer for a book from his/her classmate (situation F).
	Student	Friend	INVITATION	A student has to refuse an invitation to present a paper in a seminar given by his/her teammate (situation K).
	Student	Classmate		A student has to refuse an invitation to his/her classmate's <i>rujak</i> party (situation L).
	Student	Friend	SUGGESTION	A student has to refuse his/her friend's suggestion related with regular physical exercises (situation Q).
	Student	Classmate		A student has to refuse his/her friend's suggestion related to facebook account (situation R).

### C. Procedures of Data Collection

Prior to the data collection phase, the draft of the DCTs was validated by an expert of Indonesian. His comments and suggestions were taken into consideration in designing the final draft of the DCTs. To see the readability of the draft, the DCTs were further validated by piloting them with 10 students who did not participate in this study.

As the DCTs were all done, they were administered to the 161 students. In this phase, on the basis of the given situations, the participants were asked to verbally realize the act of refusal to offers, invitations, and suggestions given by persons having different social roles.

### D. Data Analysis

The participants' responses were analyzed in two steps. *First*, the responses were analyzed by adapting the methods applied by Blum-Kulka et al (1989) in Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). In this phase, the participants' answers were classified into head acts, hints, and modifications. Head acts are linguistic expressions which might independently realize the act of refusal. Hints are linguistic expressions which might be associated with the act of refusal. Utterances containing hints are generally multiply interpretable. In consequence, understanding the context is very important. Modification is linguistic expressions surrounding the head acts and hints which might function as mitigating devices by which the refusal can get less offensive. As such, by identifying the modification, the politeness strategies can be identified. In short, the first step of data analysis results in strategies in refusal realizations and politeness strategies to minimize the offense. *Second*, in the next step, the frequency of each refusal strategy and politeness strategies were counted in order to find out the differences due to social roles and social distance.

## IV. Findings

Accumulatively, the data analyzed in this study were 2898 corpus data. It was found that refusal strategies can be classified into two big clusters: direct and indirect strategies. Concerning politeness, this study suggests that the use of redressive expressions and the use wordy refusal were the strategies to lessen the offense.

### A. Indonesian Refusal Strategies in LHSS Relationship

In general, data analysis suggested that indirect strategies were favored by more participants than direct ones. It was found that out of 966 corpus data in LHSS relationship, 583 (60%) refusals were realized in indirect strategies, and the other 383 ones (40%) were performed by way of direct strategies. The detailed frequency and percentage of occurrence of each strategy across initiating acts are presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF OCCURRENCE OF REFUSAL STRATEGIES IN LHSS RELATIONSHIP

Social-Status Relationship	Social Roles		Initiating Acts	The Frequency and Percentage of Refusal Strategies		Sub Total
	Addresser	Addressee		Direct	Indirect	
LHSS	Employee	Employer	Offer	71 (46%)	90 (56%)	161
	Thesis Advisee	Thesis Adviser		79 (49%)	82 (51%)	161
	Administrative Staff	Superior	Invitation	79 (49%)	82 (51%)	161
	Lodger	House Mother		46 (29%)	115 (71%)	161
	Thesis Advisee	Thesis Adviser	Suggestion	42 (26%)	119 (74%)	161

	Student Taking community-service course	Village Leader		66 (41%)	95 (59%)	161
Total				383 (40%)	583 (60%)	966

### B. Indonesian Refusal Strategies in HLSS Relationship

In general, it can be stated that indirect strategies were favored by more participants in HLSS relationship, as well. Quantitative data showed that indirect strategies appeared 592 times or 61% of the total data, and the direct ones occurred in 374 data or 39% of the entire data. The frequency of occurrence and the percentage of each strategy across initiating acts in HLSS relationship are displayed in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF OCCURRENCE OF REFUSAL STRATEGIES IN HLSS RELATIONSHIP

Social-Status Relationship	Social Roles		Initiating Acts	The Frequency and Percentage of Refusal Strategies		Sub Total
	Addresser	Addressee		Direct	Indirect	
HLSS	Senior Member of an organization	Junior member of an organization	Offer	66 (41%)	95 (59%)	161
	Master	Housemaid		75 (46%)	86(54%)	161
	Thesis Adviser	Thesis Advisee	Invitation	40 (25%)	121 (75%)	161
	Dean	Administrative Staff		59 (36%)	102 (64%)	161
	Master	Construction labor	Suggestion	70 (43%)	91 (57%)	161
	Superior	Administrative Staff		64 (40%)	97 (60%)	161
	Total			374 (39%)	592 (61%)	966

### C. Indonesian Refusal Strategies in ESS Relationship

Likewise, people in ESS relationship preferred indirect strategies to direct ones. Quantitative data showed that out of 966 corpus data in ESS group, 506 refusals (52%) were realized by way of indirect strategies, while 460 refusals (48%) were performed in direct ways. The detailed number of occurrence of each strategy and its percentage across initiating acts is presented in Table 4.

Table 4  
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF OCCURRENCE OF REFUSAL STRATEGIES IN ESS RELATIONSHIP

Social-Status Relationship	Social Roles		Initiating Acts	The Frequency and Percentage of Refusal Strategies		Sub Total
	Addresser	Addressee		Direct	Indirect	
Equal Social Status	Roommate	Roommate	Offer	77 (48%)	84 (52%)	161
	Classmate	Classmate		69 (43%)	92 (57%)	161
	Teammate	Teammate	Invitation	71 (44%)	90 (56%)	161
	Classmate	Classmate		48 (30%)	113 (70%)	161
	Friend	Friend	Suggestion	25 (15%)	136 (85%)	161
	Old Friend	Old Friend		79 (49%)	82 (51%)	161
	Total			369 (38%)	597 (62%)	966

The use of direct and indirect strategies in each group is presented in Figure 1.

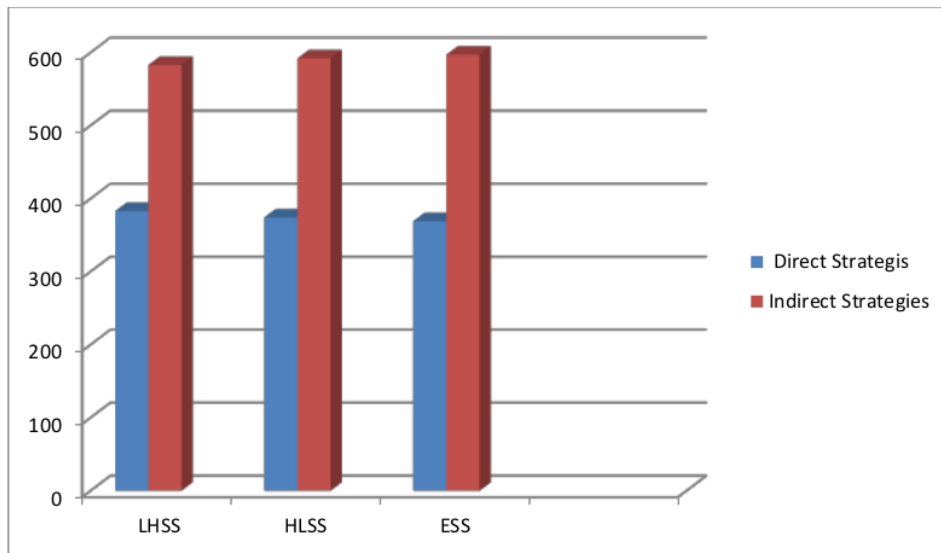


Figure 1. Graphic of the Use of Refusal Strategies in the Three Social-Status Relationships

As Figure 1 shows, across social-status relationships, indirect strategies were preferred by speakers from the three groups. In addition, speakers in ESS group used the most indirect strategies, while the ones in LHSS used the least indirect ways, and those in HLSS were in between in those groups. All in all, viewed from directness and indirectness, Indonesian refusals in three different social-status relationships are consistently patterned: indirect strategies are more dominant than direct ones. It means that hinting refusal is preferred to stating it explicitly.

#### D. Linguistic Realizations of Indonesian Direct Refusal

It was found that direct refusals in the three social-status relationships were linguistically realized in four ways. Table 5 that follows presents the summary of linguistic realizations in Indonesian direct refusals.

TABLE 5  
LINGUISTIC MARKERS AND LINGUISTIC REALIZATIONS OF DIRECT REFUSAL

Markers of Directness	Linguistic Realizations
Performative Verb	<i>Menolak</i> or 'refuse'
Expressions of inability	<i>Tidak/nggak/gak bisa</i> (cannot or may not)
Negating Expressions	<i>Tidak perlu</i> (do not need), <i>tidak setuju</i> (do not agree)
Particle 'no' directly	<i>Gak ah, enggak ah, jangan....</i> (NO.....)
Returning Expressions	<i>Untukmu saja</i> (this is for you)

First, the act of refusal was realized through a performative verb *menolak* or 'refuse'. A number of examples showed that social-status was not a determinant factor in choosing a strategy of refusing. Regardless of the social status of the addressee, some data prove that offers, invitations, suggestions were refused directly by means of a performative verb *menolak* or *refuse*. For example, declining an offer to an addressee of higher status, some participants used the performative verb *menolak*... as presented in Example (1).

Example (1)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Terima kasih Bapak/Ibu, tetapi saya harus menolak dikarenakan saya sudah punya</i>
2	<i>tempat/ rumah dekat dengan kantor sehingga nanti bisa datang lebih awal masuk kantor.</i>



3 (Situation A)  
 4 Thank you very much, Sir/Madam, **I have to refuse** it since I have had a house which is  
 5 near the office, so that I can get it earlier. (Situation A)

The refusal in Example (1) is realized through the expression *saya harus menolak* (line 1) or *I have to refuse* (line 4). The refusal in Example (1) was initiated with the act of thanking (*terima kasih*), and it was closed with an explanation/excuse.

Second, it was found that direct refusal was realized through the expression of inability *tidak bisa* and its variants such as *tidak dapat...*, *kurang bisa...*, *belum bisa...*, *gak/nggak bisa...* which is equivalent to 'cannot' or 'may not'. Example (2) is the one presenting an inability to decline an invitation to an addressee of a higher status.

Example (2)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Maaf, Pak. Tapi hari Sabtu jam 7 malam nanti saya ada acara keluarga yang</i>
2	<i>mendesak sehingga <b>tidak bisa hadir di acara makan malam di rumah Bapak. Mungkin</b></i>
3	<i>bisa lain waktu</i> (Situation G).
4	I am sorry, Sir. I have another agenda with my family on Saturday at seven, so that I
5	<b>cannot come</b> to the dinner at your home. On another occasion I will come. (Situation G)

In Example (2), the refusal to the invitation is made up of an apology (*maaf*) and an excuse or explanation, followed by the expression of inability *tidak bisa hadir* (line 2) or **cannot come** (line 5), and closed with a promise.

Besides, it was found that the act of refusal across social-status relationships was realized by means of negating expressions, of which the following are the most-frequently occurring ones: *saya tidak membutuhkannya* (I do not need it), *saya tidak berminat...* (I am not interested in...) and *saya tidak sependapat dengan Ibu/Bapak* (I do not agree with you).

Example (3) presents a disagreement used to directly reject a suggestion to an addressee of a higher status.

Example (3)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Maaf sebelumnya Pak, karena ketiadaan personel yang bisa menanganinya, jadi <b>saya</b></i>
2	<i><b>tidak sependapat dengan saran Bapak</b> untuk membentuk English Speaking Club di</i>
3	<i>desa ini, Pak.</i> (Situation N)
4	I am sorry sir, due to the limited personnel, <b>I disagree with your suggestion</b> concerning
5	the English Speaking Club in this village (Situation N).

Example (3) is the response of a situation in which a student taking a community service course in a village has to refuse a suggestion given by the leader of the village. The direct refusal in Example (3) is recognizable from the statement *saya tidak sependapat dengan saran Bapak* (I do not agree with you, Sir). Disagreement in Example (3) suggests that the speaker refuses the suggestion.

In addition to those three ways, it was found that directness in the act of refusal in equal-social-status relationship can be realized by means of the particle *no* or *tidak* and its variants such as *gak...*, *enggak ah, ....*, *enggak dech, ....* *jangan ah, ....* as seen in Example 4. Example 4 is the response of a situation in which a student has to refuse an offer of borrowing a motorbike. The refusal is realized in a very direct way, i.e. by way of saying *enggak dech, ....* or *no uhm....*.

Example (4)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Terima kasih sebelumnya ya, <b>tapi enggak dech....</b> Tanggung jawabnya itu lho, besar</i>
2	<i>banget. Lain kali saja kalau aku sudah benar-benar butuh. OK.</i> (situation E)
3	Thank you, but... <b>no uhm....</b> I am worried that I can't take the responsibility for watching it.
4	I will use it in case I am really in need. OK. (Situation E)

Besides, it was found that direct refusal to offer is realized by returning the offered thing. *Untukmu saja* and its variants are the expressions commonly used by participants to refuse an offer. This study proved that such an expression was frequently used to refuse an offer in HLSS and ESS relationships. Example (5) is an example of a refusal addressed to a housemaid by a master.

#### Example (5)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Aduh Mbak<sup>1</sup>, enak sekali kelihatannya, tapi buat mbak saja. Aku Lagi diet.</i> (Situation D)
2	Uhm,.. <i>Mbak</i> , it looks good, but it is for you, I am on diet. (situation D)

#### E. Linguistic Realizations of Indonesian Indirect Refusals

This study proved that **criticizing, presenting other priority or agenda, showing a preference, and stating self-limitation** were the semantic formulas which were frequently used by participants to make indirect refusals. **Criticizing** was frequently used to refuse an offer. This is the strategy by which a refuser negatively commenting on the offered thing. A number of data showed that being offered to stay in a house free of charge, the refusers frequently refused the offer by saying...*rumah tersebut terlalu jauh* (...the house is too far away...). Negatively commenting on the distance of the house, the refusers hint that they would not like to stay in the house. An original response to an offer and its English version is presented in Example (6).

#### Example (6)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Terima kasih atas penawarannya. Sebelumnya, saya mohon maaf, bukan berarti saya men-</i>
2	<i>olak penawaran yang Bapak berikan, akan tetapi, jarak antara rumah dengan kantor</i>
3	<i>terlalu jauh<sup>29</sup> sehingga saya memerlukan banyak waktu dan materi untuk pulang pergi</i>
4	<i>ke kantor. Sekali lagi mohon<sup>10</sup> maaf dan terima kasih banyak.</i> (Situation A)
5	(Thank you for the offer. I am sorry, I would not like to refuse your offer, but the
6	distance between the house and the office is too far away, so that I need much
7	time and energy to travel from home to work. Again, I am sorry and thank you).
8	(Situation A)

The hint of refusal in Example (6) is recognizable from the utterance saying ...*akan tetapi, jarak antara rumah dengan kantor terlalu jauh*... (lines 2 and 3). It signals that the offered party is not interested in the offered house. As such, the utterance is the hint of a refusal.

**Presenting other priority agenda** is another semantic formula commonly occurred in refusal in LHSS relationship. This is an indirect refusal strategy in which a refuser mentions a more urgent agenda other than the offered thing. This study showed that such a semantic formula is frequently used to indirectly refuse offers<sup>28</sup> invitations. ...*saya sudah ada janji dengan...* or 'I have made an appointment with....', ...*saya ada acara yang tidak bisa ditinggal di*... or 'I have another agenda in...' are a few examples of expressions commonly used to refuse offers or invitations. Consider the Example (7).

#### Example (7)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Terimakasih Bu/Pak atas undangannya tempo hari. Tetapi jadwalnya benturan dengan</i>
2	<i>kegiatan saya yang lain, jadi maaf sebelumnya ya. Pak/Bu, lain kali saya boleh diundang</i>
3	<i>lagi (Situation G)</i>
4	(Thank you for the invitation you extended a couple days ago, Sir/Madam. <b>The schedule,</b>
5	<b>however, clashes with my other agenda.</b> I am sorry for
6	this. You can invite me on another occasion, Sir/Madam (Situation G)

Example (7) is the response of an invitation to have dinner (situation G). The hint of the refusal is recognizable in the utterances in bold (lines 2-3 and 4-5). Stating that the given

<sup>1</sup> Mbak is

schedule clashes with other agenda, the speaker would like to show that she/he refuses the invitation.

Another semantic formula frequently occurred in the data is *showing a preference*, by which a refuser refuses an offered object by saying that he/she prefers another object or activity to the offered one. The expressions commonly suggesting a preference are *saya lebih suka* (I prefer), *saya merasa nyaman jika.....* (I feel convenient if...), and *lebih baik saya akan...* (that would be better if I...). This study suggests that such a strategy is commonly used to indirectly refuse suggestions. Example (8) is one case in point.

Example (8)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	Terima kasih atas saran Bapak, <b>tetapi lebih baik jika saya coba dulu di pertambangan</b>
2	karena saya dari dulu ingin bekerja di sana, tetapi ide Anda bagus Pak. Mungkin bisa saya
3	coba nanti. (Situation M)
4	(Thank you for your suggestion sir, <b>but that would be better if I try to apply for a job in a</b>
5	<b>mining company</b> since I have been dreaming of working in a mining company for
6	years, but your idea is good Sir. Let me try later). (Situation M)

Example (8) is a student's utterances in response to his/her thesis adviser's suggestion for applying a job in a bank. Being uninterested in banking, the student showed his/her preference: working in a mining company (line 1 or lines 4 & 5).

*Stating self-limitation* is another semantic formula frequently opted by the participants to refuse offers or suggestions. Using this strategy, a refuser hints his/her refusal by stating his/her limitation because of which she/he cannot accept the offer or accomplish the suggestion. Example (9) is the response of a suggestion of running an English speaking club made by a village leader (situation N). The hint of the refusal is recognizable from the speaker's admission of the limited number of people who can run the English speaking club (line 1 or 3). Stating the limitation, the speaker signals that she/he cannot accomplish the suggestion.

Example (9)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	Saya rasa itu ide bagus pak, <b>namun jujur saja sumber daya (SDM) di sini kurang.</b> Saya
2	Yakin peminatnya cukup banyak. Itu yang membuat saya ragu (Situation N).
3	(It sounds great, Sir, <b>but we have limited human resource.</b> I am sure that many people are
4	Interested in the program. It makes me doubt). (Situation N)

#### F. Politeness Strategies in Indonesian Refusal

This study revealed that there were two main strategies to lessen the offense, i.e. the use of redressive expressions and the use of verbose refusal.

##### F.1 The Use of Redressive Expressions

The most-frequently occurring redressive expressions were *apology, thanks, compliments,* and *deferential expressions*, each of which is elaborated in the following subheadings.

Apology is a redressive expression in which a speaker says that he/she is sorry for refusing something. Using this strategy, an addresser would like to show that she/he does not intend to hurt his/her addressee's feeling. The expressions frequently used by the participants in this study are *mohon maaf, maaf, minta maaf,* and *sorry*. This study suggests that apology was the most-frequently-used-redressive expression across the social-status relationships, despite the difference in intensity in each group. Quantitative data showed that apology was used 649 times (67%) in LHSS relationship, 478 times (49.48%) in HLSS relationship, and 468 times (48.44%) in ESS relationship. Example (10) is an example of refusal to an invitation of a higher-social-status person (situation H). It is a refusal made by a lodger who refuses an

invitation given by his/her house mother. The refusal is explicitly stated in the utterance saying ...*saya tidak bisa ikut...*(line 1), and the direct refusal is initiated with an apology at the beginning of it saying **Maaf**....(line 1). Apologizing, the speaker would like to minimize the discomfort on the part of the addresser and the disappointment on the part of the addressee.

Example (10)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<b>Maaf</b> , <i>Bu saya tidak bisa ikut ke acara Ibu, karena besok saya harus pulang dan saya sudah beli tiketnya Bu. Kalau saya tunda kepulangan saya, saya takut orang tua saya</i>
2	<i>nanti kecewa karena saya (Situation H).</i>
3	I am sorry for not coming to your invitation, Mam, because I have to go home town
4	tomorrow, and I have bought a ticket, Mam. If I postpone the going home, my parents will
5	be very disappointed (Situation H).
6	

Thanks or *terima kasih* intensively occurred in this study. Viewed from the intensity in using the expression of thank, people in LHSS were ranked number one, and the ones in HLSS were number two, while those in ESS were number three. It was found that 491 data (50.82%) in LHSS, 368 refusals (38%) in HLSS, and 272 refusals (28%) in ESS were softened by way of using the expression of thank. See Example (11).

Example (11)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Sebelumnya terima kasih Pak, saya senang Anda mengundang saya, tetapi sebelumnya saya sudah ada janji dengan keluarga saya untuk ke luar kota karena anak paman saya</i>
2	<i>menikah. Sekali lagi, terima kasih dan saya minta maaf. (Situation G)</i>
3	(thank you Sir. I am glad that you invite me, but I have made an appointment with my
4	family for going out of town; my uncle's son is married. Again, thank you and I am
5	sorry for this). (Situation G)
6	

Example (10) is an indirect refusal to an invitation of a higher-social-status person. The indirectness is seen from the statement saying that the speaker has made an appointment with his/her family: '*...saya sudah ada janji dengan...*' (line 2). The indirect refusal is initiated and closed with the expression of thank *terima kasih* (lines 1 and 3).

Compliment was another redressive expression massively used in the three social-status relationships. This is a strategy to minimize the threat by highlighting the addressee's self-worth. Data in this study revealed that compliment was used to initiate or close a refusal. Quantitative data suggest that compliment was used more frequently in HLSS than in other social-status relationships. In HLSS, compliment was used 160 times, and it appeared 123 times in LHSS, while in ESS it occurred 93 times. Example (12) is the one presenting a compliment used as a mitigating device.

Example (12)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Sebenarnya bagus sekali idemu terkait dengan FB, tapi takutnya kalau punya FB nanti</i>
2	<i>masalah pribadiku akan dipantau oleh orang lain (Situation R).</i>
3	Your idea concerning FB is very good, but I am worried that my personal problems will
4	be monitored by others if I have an FB account (Situation R).

In Example (12), a speaker refuses a suggestion for having an FB account (situation R). The indirect refusal is recognizable from his/her worry about the bad impact of the FB saying *...tapi takutnya kalau punya FB nanti...* (lines 1-2). The refusal was initiated with a compliment saying *sebenarnya bagus sekali idemu...* or *your idea concerning FB is very good...*(lines 1 & 3). Complimenting the idea, the speaker would like to lessen the offense due to the refusal.

Deferential expression is the one functioning to humble the addresser and enhance the addressee's self-worth. Such an expression frequently occurred in this study, in particular among the students in LHSS relationship. The expressions frequently used were *dengan segala hormat* and *tanpa mengurangi rasa hormat* which are equivalent with 'with all respect'. Example (11) presents a direct refusal to an offer of a higher social-status person (situation B) mitigated with a deferential expression. The directness of it is recognizable from the expression of inability ...*saya tidak dapat menerima...* (lines 1-2). The very direct refusal is softened with the expression *dengan segala hormat* (line 1).

Example (13)

Line	Original Utterances and their English Version
1	<i>Saya sangat berterima kasih dengan tawaran Ibu. Akan tetapi, <b>dengan segala hormat</b>, saya</i>
2	<i>tidak dapat menerima tawaran Ibu dikarenakan saya masih mahasiswa semester awal,</i>
3	<i>saya ingin mendapatkan nilai yang bagus dan oleh sebab itu saya ingin konsentrasi untuk</i>
4	<i>belajar (situation B)</i>
5	Thank you for your offer, Mam. With all respect, I cannot accept it since I am a freshman,
6	I would like to have good grades, that is why I would like to focus on my study (Situation B)

The summary of the use of redressive expressions is represented in Figure 2.

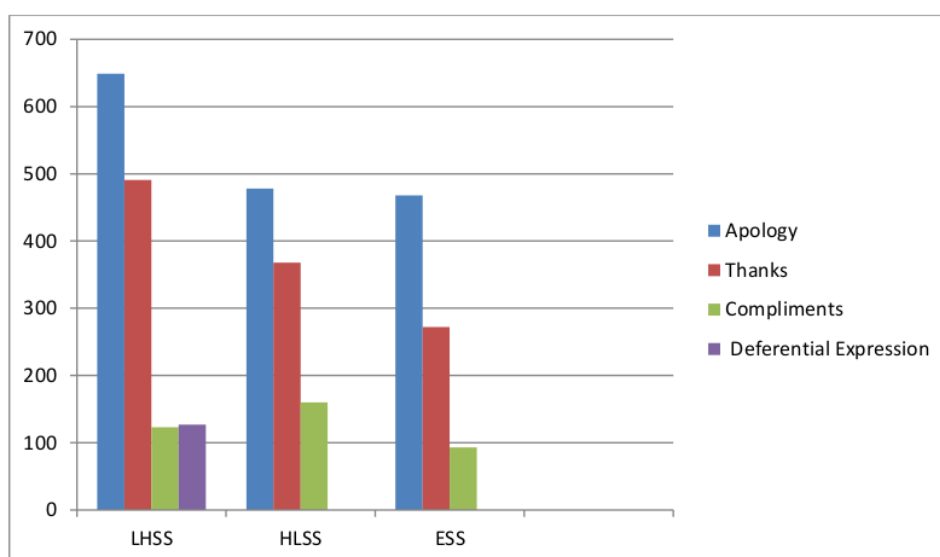


Figure 2: Graphic of the Use of Redressive Expressions in the Three Social-Status Relationships

This study suggested using wordy/verbose refusal <sup>24</sup>the other strategy that commonly used by research participants to minimize the offense. It was found that across initiating acts and social-status relationships, refusal is rarely realized in a single act, but in a series of ones. A great number of data showed that the Head act and the hint of refusal are accompanied with another acts functioning to minimize the offense. It was found that refusal in the three social-status relationships was made up of the combination of one up to seven acts, and the three-act combination was the one which is most frequently used. The frequency of the act combination in each social-status relationship is displayed in Table 6, and the proportion of it is presented in Fig. 3.



TABLE 6

FREQUENCY OF ACT COMBINATION IN THE THREE SOCIAL-STATUS RELATIONSHIPS

ACT COMBINATION	The Frequency and Percentage of Act Combination		
	LHSS	HLSS	ESS
One-act Combination	0	63 (6.5%)	90 (0.93%)
Two-act Combination	73 (0.7%)	266 (27.53%)	281 (29.08%)
Three-act Combination	407 (42%)	361 (37.37%)	373 (38.61%)
Four-act Combination	345 (35.71%)	217 (22.46%)	182 (18.84%)
Five-act Combination	115 (11.90%)	50 (0.51%)	36 (0.37%)
Six-act Combination	26 (0.26%)	8 (0.08%)	3 (0.03%)
Seven-act Combination	0	1 (0.01%)	1 (0.01%)
Total	966 (100%)	966 (100%)	966 (100%)

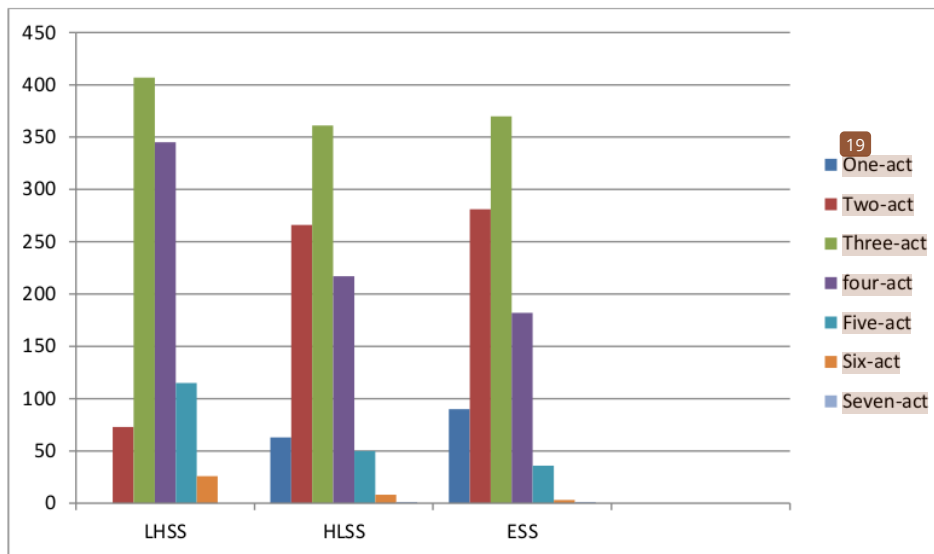


Figure 3. Graphic Representation of Proportion of the Act Combination in the Three Social-Status Relationships

As Table 4 and Fig. 3 show, three-act combination was preferred by speakers in the three groups. This quantitative finding confirmed the previous study conducted by Nadar et al (2005) reporting that the combination of three speech acts was the politeness strategy mostly used to lessen the threat in refusal.

Example (13) is a refusal to an invitation (situation L) containing a combination of four acts.

Example (13)

Line 8 Original Utterances and their English Version  
 1 *Sepertinya acaranya seru. Tapi masalahnya aku ada kegiatan lain yang tidak bisa*



- 2           8   patalkan. Jadi maaf ya, aku tidak bisa ikut (Situation L)  
 3           It sounds great. But the problem is that I have another agenda which cannot be cancelled.  
 4           I am sorry, I cannot join (Situation L).

Example (13) is a direct refusal made up of the combination of four acts. The directness is recognizable from the last utterance saying *aku tidak bisa ikut* or 'I cannot join.' The head act is initiated by three other acts: showing interest '*sepertinya acaranya seru*' in line 1, excusing or explaining '*tapi masalahnya aku ada...*' (lines 1-2), and followed by apologizing '*jadi maaf ya..*' in line 2. Initiating the Head act with the other ones, the speaker would like to mitigate the threat due to the refusal.

## DISCUSSION

### A. Indirectness in Indonesian Refusals

As discussed earlier, across social-status relationships and initiating acts, direct strategies were more dominant than the indirect ones. It was evidently proved that people of lower status tended to use indirect strategies in refusing offers, invitation, and suggestions of higher status, and vice versa. Likewise, indirect strategies in refusing were preferred by people having equal status relationship. It could not be proved that directness tends to rise with an increase of familiarity and closeness. Offers, invitations, and suggestions made by friends, teammates, and classmates were mostly indirectly refused by the research participants. These findings confirmed the previous studies conducted by Amarien (1997), Kartomiharjo (1990), and Aziz (2000) reporting that indirect manner in refusing is preferred by most Indonesians.

Why is indirectness dominantly present across social-status relationships? One possible explanation is related with the characteristic of Indonesian culture. As widely believed, Indonesian culture is collectivistic (Kadarisman, 2009, Barnes, 2006), in which prominence is given to social harmony. In such a culture, social harmony has greater value than individual rights and independence. Respecting others is foregrounded, and living together in harmonious atmosphere is a collective responsibility. Besides, the Principle of Mutual Consideration (PMC) suggests that both the addresser and the addressee care for each other's feeling. Uttering utterances which potentially strike others should be maximally avoided. One of the strategies commonly used to avoid social disharmony is the use of hints. Hinting, particularly in refusal, according to Kartomiharjo (1990) is considered to be more polite than refusing by using 'no' or '*tidak*'.

Refusing is an act which can strike both the addresser and the addressee. The realization of this act might result in discomfort on the part of the addresser and the disappointment on the part of the addressee, both of which might cause social disharmony. Relying on the characteristic of the Indonesian culture, the values pertaining in the PMC, and the risk that might probably occur due to the refusal, it is plausible that most Indonesian people tend to maximally avoid the act of refusal. In case, they have to refuse, they will realize it as politely as possible. Using indirect strategies is relevant in this case. To put shortly, the desire to observe each other's face and to avoid social disharmony is the internal factor motivating Indonesians to use indirect strategies in refusal. According to Aziz (2000), indirectness is best regarded as the hearer's wisdom (p. 302).

### B. Directness in Indonesian Refusals

Another matter worth discussing is direct strategies. If indirect strategies or hinting is considered a polite manner, are direct strategies less polite? This study suggests that direct strategies in refusal whose main characteristic is the use of negating particle 'no' are by no means less polite. How can it be? Data of this study show that the act of refusing is rarely

realized in a single act, but rather it is along with other acts. As presented in Table 3 and Fig. 4, most Indonesian refusals are realized in the combination of three acts. It means that the Head act is accompanied with two other acts such as thanking, apologizing, and complimenting, all of which can soften the threat due to the refusal. Thus, direct refusal in Indonesian, can also be polite.

Thanking, as presented in Fig. 2, was very extensively used in <sup>18</sup>is study across the three social-status relationships. This finding is in line with the one by Amarien (1997) reporting that thanking was preferred by Indonesian speakers speaking English in their refusals to offers. Thanking itself is the act of telling others that we are grateful for what they have done. Thanking for the offers, invitations, and suggestion given by others, a speaker would like to signal that she/he is in their debt. According to Leech (1983), it is the act functioning to maintain balance and harmony (p.125). Through this act, the discomfort<sup>5</sup> and disappointment due to refusal can be minimized since the act of thanking can show the feeling of respect and interpersonal closeness between interactants. Thus, despite the directness pertaining in the refusal, the refusal remains polite due to the presence of the expression of thanks.

Apologizing is another act extensively occurred in the data. Across the three social-status relationships, the act of apologizing occurred in more than 50% of the data. This finding confirms the finding by Wijayanto (2013) reporting that Javanese commonly initiates refusals with an apology (p. 40). In addition, Gintings (2014) reports that direct and indirect refusals among people in Medan, North Sumatra are initiated with an apology, but some others are not. Nadar et al (2005) confirm that apologizing is an act which is extensively used by Indonesians (p. 177).

Apologizing can be understood as the act of telling others that we are at fault. To Brown and Levinson (1987), apologizing is an act which threatens an addresser's positive face (p. 68). Admitting that we are at fault is in some extent self-humiliation, and that is why apologizing is psychologically difficult, particularly if it deals with bad deeds which seriously harm the addressee.

Refusing to offers, invitations, and suggestion cannot be categorized as a bad deed seriously harming the addressee. Offers, invitations, and suggestions in this study are for the benefit of given parties (the research participants), and hence refusing them do not seriously harm the addressee. In consequence, apologizing for refusal is not as psychologically difficult as described earlier. It can explain why apologizing is extensively used in this study. Due to the presence<sup>12</sup> of the act of apologizing, direct refusals get more polite. Thus, apologizing can restore the equilibrium between<sup>12</sup> a speaker and hearer (Leech, 1983, p. 125). To Olshtain (1987), apologizing can give support for the Hearer who was actually or potentially affected by a violation X (p. 156).

Another linguistic marker indicating politeness in direct refusals is the use of compliment and deferential expressions. Compliment is an act attributing credits to someone or something. As such, it can please the addressee. This study shows that complimenting is one of the preferred strategies to mitigate a refusal across social-status relationships. This finding is different from the one by Soenarso (cited in Ernawati, 2004) reporting that compliments among Indonesians are not as frequently heard as among Australians. In other words, his finding confirmed that compliments are not frequently performed by Indonesians.

Deferential expression is a very specific <sup>16</sup>ategy for downgrading the refusal. It appeared only in LHSS relationship. The expression, *tanpa mengurangi rasa hormat, dengan segala hormat, segala kerendahan hati*, all of which are equal 'with all respect' represents cultural behavior.

The presence of direct refusal along with mitigating devices discussed earlier suggests that direct refusals among Indonesians are not prohibited. They are quite likely to directly refuse offers, invitations, and suggestions by saying *tidak* or 'no', even to higher-social-status

persons. However, the direct refusals, particularly the ones addressed to higher-status persons need to be downgraded by some mitigating devices since Indonesians, like other people from any other nationality, are constrained by a general guideline in communicating with others, i.e. polite. Being polite is represented in caring for each other's feeling (Aziz, 2000), minimizing face threatening acts which might bring about face loss (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and minimizing cost but maximizing benefit to others and maximizing cost but minimizing benefit to self (Leech, 1983). Thus, relying on the findings, directness in the Indonesian context does not necessarily suggest misbehavior or deliberate attempt to harm others. Rather, directness can be regarded as an attempt to balance between the desire to care for other's feeling and the need to have message clarity.

### C. Politeness and Social Status in Indonesian Refusals

This study suggests that social status influences much the deliverance of politeness. Quantitative data show that despite the fact that indirectness is dominant across social-status relationships, refusals in LHSS contained more redressive expressions than the ones in other groups. Fig. 2 shows that LHSS is the group using the highest number of redressives expressions, followed by HLSS and ESS groups. It indicates that achieved statuses such as position is one of determinant factors contributing to the politeness realization. The higher the position of the addressee, the more polite the expressions addressed to him/her are.

In addition to the quantitative data, this study revealed another evidence indicating that social status contributes much to the choice of politeness strategies. The expression of respect saying *dengan segala hormat*, *tanpa mengurangi rasa hormat*, and *dengan segala kerendahan hati* are only found in LHSS. Using such deferential expressions, an addresser would like to humble him/herself and enhance other's self-worth. Given that such expressions were frequently stated by people in LHSS group, it can be underlined that the social status of the addressee might be the motive behind the deliverance of them. In other words, such expressions can be used as a means to disambiguate the role of Power (P), Distance (D), and Rank of imposition (R). The use of those expressions suggests that the addressee's power as represented in his/her social status influences the choice of the strategies. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), taking deference to the humbling of the self and 'raising' of the other signals the value of P factor (p. 82-83).

## CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The aim of this study is to investigate whether different social-status relationships may manifest different refusal behavior. This study revealed that despite the different social-status relationships and initiating acts, Indonesian refusal is consistently patterned, i.e. they are mostly realized in indirect ways. In addition to indirect refusals, considerable number of refusals in this study is direct ones. They are, however, not realized in blatant ways. Rather, they are mitigated with a number of redressive expressions because of which the directness gets much more polite. Turning to the politeness strategies, this study showed that LHSS group used more redressive expressions than other groups.

Relying on the consistent strategies of refusal found in this study, there are two conclusions that can be drawn. *First*, Indonesian young generation, in realizing the act of refusal is constrained by a general constraint in communication, i.e. polite. Politeness, among Indonesian university students is not merely their tacit pragmatic knowledge, but it is the norm that they have to constantly hold. *Second*, social status is a social variable contributing a lot to the politeness behavior. This study suggests that the higher social status of the addressee, the more politeness the expressions addressed to him/her is.

There are some limitations to this study. To name a few, the data of this study were not naturally-occurring data since they were collected through Discourse Completion Test (DCT).

Data taken from such an instrument are not as natural as the ones taken by observing natural dialogues since there are many aspects of communication are missing, such as facial expressions and intonation. Due to some obstacles, DCT was the instrument used to collect data in this study. In order to get more authentic and natural data, it is suggested that future researchers conduct studies on Indonesian refusals by using observation as the method of data collection.

The way of determining participants is another limitation of this study. Students participating in this study were restricted to those studying in colleges in which I am teaching. As such, the results of this study cannot be used for making a generalization for all Indonesian students. In order to have a more reliable portray how Indonesian university students realize the act refusal, future studies should have a bigger population with more representative samples.

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# REFUSAL AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN RELATION TO SOCIAL STATUS: A CASE OF A FACE-THREATENING ACT AMONG INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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