

Refusal Speech Acts in French Learners of Mandarin Chinese

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Abstract : This study investigated various models of refusal speech acts among three target groups: French learners of Mandarin Chinese (FM), Taiwanese native Mandarin speakers (TM), and native French speakers (NF). The refusal responses were analyzed in terms of their options, frequencies, and sequences and the contents of their semantic formulas. This study also examined differences in refusal strategies, as determined by social status and social distance, among the three groups. The difficulties of refusal speech acts encountered by FM were then generalized. The results indicated that Mandarin instructors of NF should focus on the different reasons for the pragmatic failure of French learners and should assist these learners in mastering refusal speech acts that rely on abundant cultural information. In this study, refusal policies were mainly classified according to the research of Beebe et al. (1990). Discourse completion questionnaires were collected from TM, FM, and NF, and their responses were compared to determine how refusal policies differed among the groups. This study not only emphasized the dissimilarities of refusal strategies between native Mandarin speakers and second-language Mandarin learners but also used NF as a control group. The results of this study demonstrated that regarding overall strategies, FM were biased toward NF in terms of strategy choice, order, and content, resulting in pragmatic transfer under the influence of social factors such as 'social status' and 'social distance,' strategy choices of FM were still closer to those of NF, and the phenomenon of pragmatic transfer of FM was revealed. Regarding the refusal difficulties among the three groups, the F-test in the analysis of variance revealed statistical significance was achieved for Role Playing Items 13 and 14 ($P < 0.05$). A difference was observed in the average number of refusal difficulties between the participants. However, after multiple comparisons, it was found that item 13 (unrecognized heterosexual junior colleague requesting contacts) was significantly more difficult for NF than for TM and FM; item 14 (contacts requested by an unrecognized classmate of the opposite sex) was significantly more difficult to refuse for NF than for TM. This study summarized the pragmatic language errors that most FM often perform, including the misuse or absence of modal words, hedging expressions, and empty words at the end of sentences, as the reasons for pragmatic failures. The common social pragmatic failures of FM include inaccurately applying the level of directness and formality.

Keywords : French Mandarin, interlanguage refusal, pragmatic transfer, speech acts

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