



No=Yes or Yes=No?

Strategies in Responding to an Offer/Invitation Among Indonesians

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ABSTRACT

The present article discusses strategies in refusing/accepting an offer/invitation. It draws on two studies involving Indonesians within the physical settings of Australia and Indonesia. Whilst the subjects in the first study were 11 Indonesians consisting of three East Javanese, four West Javanese, an Acehnese, a Papuan, and two Makassarese, those in the second study were 19 East Javanese. The analysis shows that an Indonesian hearer (H) tends to delay a refusal or acceptance until the second, third, or another offer/invitation is made and when a refusal or acceptance is made, which denotes a 'face-threatening' act, an Indonesian H tends to use mitigating strategies. White lies, with the characteristic of indirectness, are the main strategy used by Indonesians in responding to an offer/invitation. Directions for future research conclude the article.

Keywords: Face, refusal/acceptance, offer/invitation, politeness, white lie

INTRODUCTION

Research into socio-cultural and pragmatic norms undergirding both oral and written communication abounds (Al-Adaileh, 2011; Aziz, 2000; Azza, 2011; Basthomi, 2008, 2010; Bataller, 2010; Brown, 2010; Geyer,

2010; Pinto, 2011; Syahri, 2007). Within the Indonesian context, studies in the realm of inter-language pragmatics have tended to be around the speech acts of request, complaint, compliment response and apology (Aziz, 2000; Azza, 2011; Pratiwi, 2008; Santi, 2010; Suryadi, 2007; Syahri, 2007) and the strategies for accepting/refusing an offer/invitation among Indonesians have received little attention. To address this issue, the present study seeks to analyse how

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Indonesians respond to an offer/invitation. Since this issue has to do with face (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Cheng, 2001; Geyer, 2010; Ji, 2000), the study connects to the notion of politeness (Kiesling & Johnson, 2010; Pfister, 2010) that is inextricable in daily communications.

In daily communications, or what Pfister (2010) refers to as rational conversations, people tend to avoid obvious face-threatening acts and instead manipulate both their verbal and non-verbal behaviour to avoid conflict (Aziz, 2000; Rohmah, 2006); speakers express respect for the person to whom they are talking and try to avoid offending them (Holmes, 1995), necessarily including that when they refuse/accept an offer/invitation. Refusing/accepting an offer/invitation potentially has a polite/impolite implication, for an offer/invitation has to do with face (Cheng, 2001; Ji, 2000).

Refusal, as one of the two responses to an offer/invitation, has received some attention from linguists and second-language researchers and practitioners (Deephungton, 1992; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; Hong, 2011; Lyuh, 1992). These researchers have conducted their studies in view of intercultural or cross-cultural communication. The criticality of refusal in intercultural communications lies in the potential negative transfer of the socio-cultural norms expressed by non-native speakers in the target language mediating the intercultural communications (Beebe *et al.*, 1990). The negative transfer of socio-cultural, particularly pragmatic, norms has been identified as a dominant factor

attributable to serious communication breakdowns (Aliakbari & Changizi, 2012; Riley, 1989; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Wannaruk, 2008). In this regard, it is worth noting that high proficiency in grammar is not necessarily comparable to sound knowledge of the socio-cultural norms embedded in the given language (Félix-Brasdefer, 2003). Among the cross-cultural studies on refusals (Deephungton, 1992; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; Hong, 2011; Lyuh, 1992), the common issue shared pertains to the differences in the degree of (in)directness, which, in turn, is perceived as (im)politeness.

As explained above, refusal/acceptance of an offer/invitation has to do with face, and thus politeness, which “refers to behaviour which actively expresses positive concern for others, as well as non-imposing distancing behaviour” (Holmes, 1995, p. 5). Holmes’ definition seems to echo Held’s (1992, p. 132) conception that “politeness can be defined and identified as an inventory of everyday modes of behaviour in avoiding or smoothing out conflict.” As an antecedent to Ji’s (2000) notion of face noted earlier, Brown and Levinson (1987) relate politeness to people’s face; politeness means preserving people’s face, which has two aspects: positive (self-image or personality and self-respect) and negative (claim to territories, freedom of action, freedom from imposition etc.).

Individual and social needs frequently lead to actions that may threaten the positive or negative face of other people; therefore, people employ strategies to minimise

the sense of the threats implicated by a certain action so as to maintain social relationships. In so doing, people often use instances of either positive or negative politeness strategies to minimise threats to positive or negative face (Al-Adaileh, 2011; Odlin, 1989). This categorical framework might suggest a generalisation about the differences in politeness scales. For example, Odlin (1989) says that English speakers are more likely to prefer negative politeness in their requests, which seems to be the opposite of German and Hebrew speakers, who are likely to employ positive request strategies more often.

There are some specific aspects to which we might pay attention in discussing politeness, particularly relating to cultural differences (Ji, 2000). English has several linguistic ways of conveying politeness; they range from lexical choice (slang, formal) and intonation to grammatical construction (Holmes, 1995). The use of *cuk* (dirty-swear word) to address people in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, might be desirable, for it suggests a jocular mockery or teasing that may function as a face-supportive act (Geyer, 2010; Haugh, 2010). However, the same word does not normally work in the same manner in other areas of East Java; different contexts may evoke different interpretations (Callahan, 2011; Rahayu, 2010). Another example is the use of *nDoro*, a Javanese royal term of address. One might use such a term to address a peer considered notoriously bossy. Therefore, the use of dirty words and slang might show inclusiveness or solidarity and

thus may be polite in a sense. Similarly, Aliakbari and Changizi (2012), reporting on their study on refusal among Persian and Kurdish speakers, reveal the use of swearing as a type of face work technique to soften the face threat which exists in the speech act of refusal. This affirms Holmes' (1995) observation that there is an infinite variety of manners of expressing linguistic politeness (Holmes, 1995).

All this suggests that politeness is central to communication consisting of utterances and actions. Politeness constitutes a purposeful, goal-orientated, and situation-bound selection of linguistic strategies (Held, 1992). In Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, verbal signals of politeness originate from acts affecting face. Therefore, they employ face-threatening acts (FTAs) to refer to utterances having illocutionary force that, in regard to social norms, must be appropriated to the situation.

Thus, what is central in the discussion of politeness is not whether certain words, phrases or expressions belong to a list of polite words or not, but rather the appropriation of the use of the available linguistic choices in accordance with the situation or context: exclusive/inclusive, distancing/embracing etc. (Blum-Kulka, 1992; Conlan, 1996; Pfister, 2010) for "face and facework are discursively constructed phenomena" (Geyer, 2010, p. 2120). Since face and facework, which are central to the conception of politeness, are discursive. As conventional properties are at play here. As conventions are inherent properties of cultural groups, the study of strategies

for the refusal/acceptance of an offer/invitation inevitably deals with particular cultural groups, as different cultural groups may have different conventions regarding facework and politeness (Cheng, 2001).

Despite the ubiquity of refusal/acceptance pertinent to an offer/invitation in daily conversations (Aziz, 2000; Deephuengton, 1992; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; Hong, 2011; Lyuh, 1992) and the fact that pragmatic studies on politeness abound (Al-Adaileh, 2011; Azza, 2011; Brown, 2010; Erfan, 2007; Geyer, 2010; Pinto, 2011; Syahri, 2007), the strategies for accepting/refusing an offer/invitation among Indonesians are under-researched. I am aware of Aziz's (2000) research on the issue of refusal and acceptance regarding a request/invitation; however, the study did not reveal much about the refusing/accepting strategies since it did not focus on this issue. In fact, the study did not attend to evolving turn-takings whereby the refusal or acceptance of a request or invitation can be fully assessed; the study, which employed discourse completion tests (DCTs), did not allow for multiple turn-taking.

As a response to this situation, the present study deals with a group of Indonesian speakers; it deals with language- and culture-specific empirics of the employment of the strategies among Indonesians in responding to an offer/invitation as constructed phenomena as noted by Geyer (2010) in the use of language for communication and as instances of the contents of the politeness maxim pointed out by Pfister (2010). Unlike Aziz's (2000)

study and its somewhat broad exploratory nature regarding Indonesian speech act realisations, the present study is focused on Indonesian strategies for refusing/accepting an offer/invitation, and, in light of the notion of face as a constructed phenomenon (Geyer, 2010). And in view of the need to remedy the methodological limitation in Aziz's (2000) research, the present study analyses naturally occurring data wherein strategies for refusing/accepting an offer/invitation are made manifest by multiple turn-taking.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is both part of and based on data involving two studies using Conversation Analysis focused on the adjacency pairs of giving offers/invitations and responding to the offers/invitations (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Wooffitt, 2005). The first study was carried out at a *musalla* (small mosque) of a university in Western Australia, whereas the second was at a faculty administration office in a university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. I acted as a participant-observer at both sites.

As regards the first site, following some preliminary observations, I decided that the subjects were 11 Indonesians who had the tendency to remain behind and become engaged in after-prayer conversations. These conversations were typically the longest conversational events of the subjects, averaging some 30 minutes each. The subjects were three East Javanese, four West Javanese, two Makassarese, an Acehnese, and a Papuan. These 11 subjects frequently

had the opportunity to talk in a group; sometimes they were distributed in two or three groups. In such cases I decided to engage myself in and record the group with the biggest number of subjects. It should be noted that the subjects shared relatively the same social power and social identity. All were students in the Australian context and are university faculty members in their home country, Indonesia.

As a participant-observer, I equipped myself with a tape recorder. The recorded data were then transcribed orthographically. Non-spoken data such as atmosphere, the mood of the conversations, and subjects' facial expressions and body movements were recorded in field notes. Memos were also written to make a summary of the data and to draw tentative conclusions of the patterns existing in the data. These tentative conclusions were used to focus the following observations in order to determine if there was any recurrence important to the fixation of the tentative conclusions. Subsequent to a month or so of preliminary observations, intensive observations and recordings were made in two weeks' time (five week days). The conversations mainly took place subsequent to two prayer times: noon and afternoon. This amounted to some 500 minutes (8.3 hours) of recordings. Out of these recordings, there were 13 linguistic events comprising pairs of offers/invitations and responses; these events constituted the focus of the analysis.

The situation at the second site was different in that of the 19 subjects I observed, only one was non-East Javanese. The main

locus of my observations at this site was the office space with tables around which many conversations were carried on by staff enjoying refreshments such as crackers, fruits and other edible items during a break. The focus of the conversations, which I observed from November 2012 to July 2013, was offers/invitations and their responses. The data on these mainly casual conversations were in both Javanese and Indonesian. My engagement in the conversations among the 19 participants took place only on weekdays. Equipped with a cell-phone and field notes to record linguistic events, I collected and orthographically transcribed 323 entries of short linguistic events of offers/invitations to partake of the refreshments, as well as their responses.

It should be noted that the transcription in both studies was made in the light and with some adjustment of Gail Jefferson's transcription system (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Wooffitt, 2005). Since the data are in some mixed codes of Indonesian and Javanese (*italicised*), the English translation is also provided in square brackets.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One interesting phenomenon in the conversations has to do with the strategies used by the speakers to cope with offers/invitations. Out of the 13 and 323 linguistic events comprising adjacency pairs of offers/invitations and responses in the first and second studies, respectively, indirect or indeterminate strategies in the responses were predominant. An Indonesian addressee, or hearer (H), tends to place the

interpretation of a response towards an offer/invitation, whether it means refusal or acceptance, on the part of the speaker (S). They tend to not express a clear acceptance or refusal right from the outset when first providing a response to an offer/invitation. Excerpt 1 epitomises this phenomenon (note in the excerpts that C refers to the speaker).

Excerpt 1

- C1 *Gimana Mas Bas Mas Sab Baik-baik saja Kuliah lancar ka::n?*
[Is everything all right? Courses are running well, aren't they?]
- C2 *Alhamdulillah::h.=*
[Praise is to God.]
- C3 = *Alhamdulillah::h.*
[Praise is to God.]
- C2 *Hanya kecutnya:: saya sudah kehabisan bekal rokok kretek Indo*
[But, unfortunately, I've run out of Indonesian cigarettes.]
- C1 *Obatnya ini lo:: ha::ini aku ada permenmonggo::monggo::ha::mon ggo::*
[You needn't worry. Here are some sweets to substitute.]
- C2 *Trimakasih Pa:ksudah saya*
[Thank you, I've got mine.]
- C1 *Suda::h nggak usah sungkansungka::n kita kan sama sama perantaua:n kita pakek cara Australi sajala:h kalau iya: iya betu:l kalau ngga:k nggak betu:l jadi: ambil sajalah ayo::*
[Come on...just feel free...we're all foreigners here...let's just use

the Australian way. If you accept, just say yes, if you refuse, just say no...so just take it.]

- C2 *Ya ya Pak terima kasi::h (.) wa::h kalau ini sih memang bisa jadi gantinya rokok sementara (.) ya nggak Sab*
[Yes, yes, thank you...wow...this is a real substitute, isn't it?]

In Excerpt 1, C1 offers some sweets to C2 and C3. This invites C2's response of "*Trimakasih Pa:k sudah saya*" [Thank you. I've got mine]. In this case, it is not clear whether C2 accepts or refuses the offer. This response could be called *pemanis bibir* (similar to paying lip service). In this instance, C1 concludes directly that it is only *pemanis bibir* and proceeds to say "*Suda::h nggak usah sungkan sungka::n kita kan sama sama perantaua:n kita pakek cara Australi sajala:h kalau iya: iya betu:l kalau ngga:k nggak betu:l jadi: ambil sajalah ayo::*" [Come on...just feel free...we're all foreigners here...let's just use the Australian way. If you accept, just say yes, if you refuse, just say no...so just take it]. In the above example, it is after the second offer that the S really knows the meaning of the response; H actually accepts the offer. It is actually doubtful whether C2 really has had some sweets, as reflected in "*Trimakasih Pa:k sudah saya*" [Thank you. I've got mine]. In a sense, it seems that Indonesians tend to cover up the real meaning of a response to a first offer/invitation. A similar situation is reflected in Excerpt 2, which, in fact, involved me (C2).

Excerpt 2

- C1 *Mas pistachiosnya*
[Bro, would you like the pistachios?]
- C2 *Iya mBak*
[Yes, Sis.]
- C3 *Ayo Mas=*
[Come on, Bro.]
- C2 *=Iya Ma::s=*
[Yes, Bro.]
- C4 *=Ini Mas tak ambilka::n*
[Here you go, Bro.]

In Excerpt 2, C2 was offered pistachios, which were already arranged on a table. I would note that, despite my “*Iya mBak*” [Yes, Sis.] and “*Iya Ma::s*” [Yes, Bro.] to both the first and second offers made by C1 and C3, respectively, both of my verbal assents were not congruent with my action, for I did not take the pistachios until the third offer was made, which, in fact, was not made verbally; the third offer was made by C4 by directly placing a small saucer of pistachios on the table right in front of me. I would add here that I happened not to take the pistachios subsequent to the first and second offers simply because I did not want to explicitly show that I wanted the pistachios even though I really wanted to take them. I took them after the third offer was made. A similar situation is also made manifest in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3

- C1 *Eh Dik (.) ngomong ngomo:ng kok laper to aku maem yo:: dompetku lagi rodok kandel ko:k*

[By the way, I am feeling hungry. Why don't we have lunch? It's on me.]

- C2 *Aku wis mari maem iku Pak yo opo*
[I have had a meal. What do you think?]
- C1 *Ha la::h wi::s ta:::*
[Come on...]
- C2 *Te:men lo Pak*
[I mean it.]
- C1 *Hala::h ra usah sungkansungka::n*
[Just feel free, come on.]
- C2 *Te::men temen kok Pak*
[I mean it, really.]
- C1 *Kalau gitu:: (.) sampeyan mimik saja wis*
[Then, just have a drink.]
- C2 *Aku selak arep presentasi iku Pak yok opo*
[I'm going to make a presentation, what do you think?]
- C1 *Iyo ta: (.) yo:: (.) ojo nek ngono (.) yo wis kapan kapan wae nek ngono yo wis sampeyan siapsiap*
[Are you? You cannot go, then. So, make your preparation, then.]
- C2 *Sori Pak yo suwu::n lo Pak yok o:po iki*
[I'm sorry. What do you think? What a shame.]
- C1 *Yo ra popo: wo:ng sampeyan pancen penting kok (.) arep yok opo maneh (.) yo wis nek*

*ngono aku tak maem dewe
assala: :mualaikum*

[It's all right. It is just because you really have an important thing to do. All right then, I'll have lunch alone. God bless you. See you.]

Excerpt 3 clearly demonstrates that C2 has something important to do i.e. giving a presentation. However, instead of telling the truth immediately after the offer/invitation is made, he uses "*Aku wis mari maem iku Pak yo opo*" [I have had a meal. What do you think?]. At this juncture, it is not clear yet whether C2 really has had his lunch. He just mentions *maem* (a meal), which does not necessarily denote *maem awan* [lunch] as intended by C1 (based on the context). Again, it is the same as that in Excerpt 1 in which H does not immediately show refusal or acceptance after the first offer/invitation is made. The real refusal or acceptance is made obvious after C1 probes further and learns the underlying reason why C2 refuses the offer/invitation.

Reminiscent of the issue above, let me refer to my anecdotal observations as an Indonesian myself. As I was invited to dinner by an Australian friend in the first month of my one-year stay in his country, I was confronted with the inevitability of responding to an offer to take items from the dinner table. My first response to the offer, suggesting the meaning of "no," did me no good. My expectation that the Australian fellow would make another offer simply led me to frustration and resulted in his asking if Indonesians typically eat as little for dinner

as I did. The question made me aware that he did not realise that I was expecting him to make more than a single offer so as to make me feel justified in taking and eating what I wanted from the dinner table. This situation suggests that what I did was transferring my Indonesian pragmatic norms to English (Basthomi, 2004, 2008, 2010; Bataller, 2010; Koike & Palmiere, 2011; Pratiwi, 2008; Syahri, 2007).

It may be construed that Indonesians tend to consider a refusal as a positive face-threatening act towards S and an acceptance of a positive face-threatening act to H. Therefore, at this point, they decide to delay their real refusal/acceptance and hand over the responsibility for making a decision to S, as the party held responsible for initiating the face-threatening situation. Here we may safely say that Indonesians tend to try to avoid making face-threatening acts, preferring instead, harmony (Rohmah, 2006). In this case, then, it is S's responsibility to probe further, if they intend for the conversation to proceed, so that H can no longer resist; H has to choose either kind of face-threatening act. As the face-threatening acts can no longer be avoided, Indonesians try to find other strategies to save face. In Excerpt 3, we note that the refusal is softened by means of saying something equal to *sorry*, a kind of excuse (Aziz, 2000; Lyuh, 1992), thanking S (acknowledging that the offer/invitation is worthwhile) and eliciting comments from S by means of a question, "*Yok o:po iki*" (What do you think?) in which H expects S to show his understanding. This question also means granting S the authority to make a decision,

which serves as compensation for S's loss of face due to H's refusal, thus achieving harmony (Rohmah, 2006).

However, there is also the possibility that Indonesians use a direct refusal or acceptance. The strategies accompanying this are interesting. Excerpt 4 provides an epitome of these strategies.

Excerpt 4

C2 *Nanti tak susu::l gimana Dik sampeyan nggak butuh ngopi fail fail ke CD ta:h (.) ke kantor saya saja*

[I'll come....Don't you think you need to copy some files? Just come to my office and do the copying in there.]

C4 *Wa::h kebetulan ni::h tapi rasanya: saya berhutang ba::nyak sama njenengan (.) gimana ya*

[Wow...it's great, but I think I owe you quite a lot. How is it, what do you think?]

C2 *Jangan disau::r biar jadi amal saya saja biar nggak kelong pahalane yo ra*

[You needn't reimburse me. Let it be my good deed deserving a reward later, on the day of judgement, will you?]

Unlike those in the previous excerpts, in this excerpt, C4 immediately accepts the offer/ invitation. However, the direct acceptance is mitigated by the use of expressions acknowledging that he owes C2 something and eliciting C2's question

"*gimana ya*" [what do you think?]. However, unlike that in Excerpts 1 and 3, *gimana ya* does not mean that C4 is granting C2 with any authority; rather, it means that it is C2 whom C4 considers to possess the authority of understanding that C4 needs to compensate for loss of face due to the direct acceptance.

Based on these illustrations, we may conclude that Indonesians tend to provide a response which seems to decline an offer/invitation right after the first offer/ invitation is made and reveal their refusal/ acceptance after the second or further offers/invitations are made. In this regard, Indonesians' way of responding to an offer/ invitation can be construed to be indirect (Kiesling & Johnson, 2010) and similar to that of Koreans (Lyuh, 1992). When a refusal is eventually revealed, Indonesians tend to mitigate the refusal by means of expressions that carry the meaning of remorse, gratitude and eliciting comments from the speaker using a question equal to "What do you think?" These strategies are also employed when they make a direct acceptance. This suggests that a refusal is equal to an acceptance of an offer/invitation. Both constitute FTAs, the former on the part of S, the latter on the part of H; therefore, mitigating strategies are needed. These empirics lend support to Cheng's (2001) proposal for the conception of self-face and, thus, self-politeness vis-à-vis the well-developed conception of politeness based on other's face. In other words, facework in the communicative event of giving an offer/ invitation and refusing/accepting it among

Indonesians requires negotiations regarding the potential loss of H (self) and S's (other) face, providing a face-saving strategy for both H and S (Aziz, 2000).

Indonesian responses to an offer/invitation as presented above seem to suit well to Held's (1992) perspectives of politeness comprising four categories: 1) politeness seen from a causal-deterministic viewpoint, 2) politeness seen from an indirectness approach, 3) politeness seen as a relationship support, and 4) politeness seen as pre-patterned speech. The first perspective bears the idea that a linguistic system is bound by social norms, and that the traces of social influences are present in its lexicon and grammar. The transfer of the Indonesian norms into conversation using English as the communicative medium affirms this issue.

The second perspective sees indirectness in Indonesian verbal behaviour of accepting/refusing an offer/invitation as ideal. It ensures the mutual protection of face, harmonious communication and conflict-free exchanges. Indirectness as a politeness strategy works under the assumption of commonly shared unspoken language, contextual binding and an increased dependence on the partner's cooperation. Indirectness means that the speaker gains the freedom to proceed further with conversational turns and that the hearer is free to decide, to make counter moves and to continue the conversation in accordance with their preferences. Indirectness encourages the hearer to willingly accept and generate conflict-free agreement. Indirectness also enables both

the speaker and the hearer to gradually adjust their communication development (Kiesling & Johnson, 2010; Morgan, 2010).

The third point seems to be an extension of the second one in that indirectness is not (does not necessarily emerge as) the only answer to the conflict potential of communication. Other forms of behaviour, probing for clarity and/or clarification, justification etc. are believed to have the answering potential to tackle the conflict potential of communication. In this sense, politeness is not limited to the sentence unit. Rather, it embraces the complex action or sequence of actions. Also included under this point is politeness as an affective realisation, which is generated consciously and employed strategically.

The fourth perspective refers to the language-specific forms and formulae related to politeness. It deals with idiomatic aspects related to the close tie between politeness and linguistic 'routinisation' and 'automatisation' such as the use of a question similar to *What do you think?* epitomised above, which seems to be typical among Indonesians.

By way of recapitulating, this study has demonstrated that an indirect refusal/acceptance of an offer/invitation tends to be preferred by Indonesians. A first 'no' as a response to an offer/invitation does not necessarily mean a real 'no' or refusal; it may suggest a delayed 'yes' or acceptance of the realisation that unfolds in the evolving conversations as an S probes further by repeating the offer/invitation. Similarly, a direct 'yes' ((i)ya (Indonesian), *nggih*

(Javanese)) is not necessarily congruent with the observable physical action of, for instance, taking the item offered. A white lie (Pfister, 2010, p. 1280) seems to be the main strategy used by Indonesians to give a response to the first offer/invitation. The white lie is used to stave off FTAs; it is the gate before which a speaker must decide whether he will proceed or not. Getting through means putting one person, either the speaker or the hearer, at risk of losing face. As conversations are inevitable in daily communications and FTAs are indispensable in conversations, the potential danger of losing face, within the communicative act of giving a response to an offer/invitation, either on the part of the S (other) or the H (self) (Cheng, 2001), is seen by Indonesians to require rehabilitation, which takes the form of mitigating strategies. The mitigating strategies in responding to an offer/invitation include H's saying, either separately or in combination, *sorry* (making an excuse), acknowledging the value of the offer/invitation and directing to the S a question equal to *What do you think?*

From a cross-cultural comparative point of view, this indirectness may potentially be "misinterpreted as a sign of insincerity or hypocrisy by speakers from cultures that favour directness" (Pinto, 2011, p. 216). It is also possible that such indirectness is construed as burdensome by members of other linguistic communities, such as Israelis. Blum-Kulka (1992) has claimed that Israelis are sensitive to indirectness in that they tend to be baffled by such an indirect strategy.

However, from an Indonesian hearer's point of view, indirectness can be construed as care towards both self-face and other-face (Aziz, 2000; Cheng, 2001). Since this cultural property may be carried over or transferred by Indonesians into another language, such as English, this may pose problems in cross-cultural communications, especially when the time for conversation does not allow for evolving turns by which the real-delayed acceptance or refusal is made (cf. Aziz, 2000).

This study was limited in terms of the number of subjects and the length of the observations; hence, more extensive observations and a greater number of subjects, as well as more varied settings, need to be carried out for a fuller explication of the issue. Cross-cultural comparative studies on appropriate/polite refusal/acceptance strategies of an offer/invitation also need to be conducted, including those in second-language and foreign-language enterprises. Referring to, for example, English-language teaching classes, which take place all over the world (Brown, 2010; Hashimoto & Kudo, 2010; Seargeant, 2012), this specific point of acceptance or refusal of an offer or invitation needs special attention, in terms of whether the issue leads to linguistic and cultural transfers, particularly in the learners' English conversations. If an unintended transfer takes place, comparative discussion of such a point potentially sensitises the students of the very point and, in turn, their cross-cultural understanding can potentially be better established.

This study has presented Indonesians' strategies for responding to an offer/invitation, which may be transferred to a foreign language, such as English. This has not touched on the possibility of transferring the ensuing Indonesian way of making potentially repetitive offers/invitations to, for instance, an English speaker. As such, this area is open to future research investigations aiming to determine how such a possible repetitive offer/invitation is perceived by the speakers of the target language.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study has shown instances that give rise to the merits of Cheng's (2001) proposal that the concept of face and ensuing politeness should be theorised, not only on the basis of other-face, but also self-face. Similarly, through this study, I have demonstrated some instances of the contents of the politeness maxim within the inevitability of politeness in communications as suggested by Pfister (2010), the contents being discursively constructed (Geyer, 2010). The instances derived from the cultural norms of the particular speech community of Indonesians have been placed against the backdrop of two countries in which English functions as the main medium of communication. Out of this configuration, a pertinent practical issue of transfer that is likely to abound in the area of cross-cultural communications has been touched on. Discussion of the issue has also indicated potential areas for future research that need conducting in view of a

fuller understanding of the main and related issues raised in this study.

In short, this study contributes to helping to raise awareness of language as a means of communication. It has provided some empirics of the theorisation of the politeness maxim as proposed by Pfister (2010), specifically that dealing with indirectness (Kiesling & Johnson, 2010).

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