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INDIRECTNESS IN REQUEST REFUSALS: DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN AMERICANS AND JAPANESE

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EIKO YASUI

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INDIRECTNESS IN REQUEST REFUSALS: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
AMERICANS AND JAPANESE

By

Eiko Yasui

A THESIS

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Abstract

INDIRECTNESS IN REQUEST REFUSALS: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN

AMERICANS AND JAPANESE

By

Eiko Yasui

This study investigates the differences in verbal indirectness used in request refusals between Americans and Japanese. How the social status of the requester and the politeness level of the request affect people's indirectness in refusing requests are compared between the two cultures by eliciting the written data. The request responses in open-ended data are analyzed based on the classifications of refusals developed by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) and the refusal tactics of Bresnahan, Cai, and Rivers (1994). The analysis shows that the use of strategies and their frequencies are similar between Americans and Japanese, but the number of strategies and the degree of indirectness and face threat in responses differ. Americans are more likely to accept or move towards the cooperation of the other's request while Japanese tend to mitigate their refusals by using more strategies. This study suggests that the cultural preferences in direct and indirect communication styles do not always apply to the use of language in face-threatening situations. The indirectness in the use of language is not different between Americans and Japanese. The differences in indirectness in the request responses between the two cultures are in the clearness of the speaker's standpoints between the compliance and the refusal of the request.

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Introduction

Most people usually do not utter their intention directly in their everyday conversation (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Searle, 1975). In particular, when people need to say what is unfavorable for others, they tend to convey the meanings indirectly. The term *indirect speech acts* refers to the speech acts that convey more than one intended meaning of the speaker: direct literal meanings and indirect implicit meanings (Searle, 1975). When the utterance is made indirectly, the speaker's intended meaning is not expressed explicitly, and thus, its illocutionary force, the force of act that is achieved by the utterance, is weakened (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Clark, 1979; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Searle, 1975). Thus, since indirectness reduces the imposition of one's demands on the addressee (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987), people tend to express their intention indirectly when responding negatively to the other's remarks. Request refusal is a speech act which responds unfavorably to the other's desire. It may not only negatively affect the relationship between the requester and the requestee, but also cause a resentment of the requester. According to the perspective of Goffman's (1967) face notion, request refusal can threaten the requester's face in any cultural setting since it does not satisfy his or her demands. Thus, when refusing the other's requests, people often become very careful about avoiding damaging the requester's face value and use indirect expressions (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). However, though decreasing the other's face threat is the universal interest in people's communication (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987), how people refuse others' requests varies among cultures (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Bresnahan, Cai & Rivers, 1994; Kline & Floyd, 1990; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Shigeta, 1974; Ueda, 1974). Also, since the degree of preference and acceptance in using indirect communication styles differs between cultures (Hall, 1976; Holtgraves, 1997), how people refuse others' requests indirectly is different between cultures.

The purpose of this study is to examine the differences in the use of verbal indirectness in refusing requests between Americans and Japanese. How the differences

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in social value of each culture affect people's indirectness in their conversations will be examined for the refusals of important requests. Also, the study examines whether cultural or social factors determine the use of indirectness in a face threatening situation, such as request refusals.

Both requests and refusals are face-threatening acts that may conflict with each other since both impose the speaker's desire to the hearer and place restriction on how a recipient might respond (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). How one refuses a request can be affected by the degree of imposition of the request. When a request causes a large imposition to the addressee, the imposition of its refusal may be less than the request while when the imposition of a request is small, the imposition of its refusal may get larger than the request. Thus, how indirectly one refuses a request may be determined by the degree of imposition of the request.

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) suggest that indirectness is one of the politeness strategies that lessens the speaker's imposition on the addressee, and thus prevents the speaker from threatening the addressee's face. According to Leech (1983), indirectness gives options to the addressee by making the utterance more ambiguous. Since indirect expressions can be interpreted into multiple meanings, the meaning of the utterance depends on the addressee's interpretation, and moreover, the speaker can have the option to deny the unfavorable meanings for the addressee (Holtgraves, 1997).

Searle (1975) describes that indirect speech acts are the "cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another" (p. 60). *Illocutionary force* defines an act that the speaker intends to achieve by his or her utterance (Searle, 1969). When one utters a sentence, a certain illocutionary act is performed, that is, the utterance counts for some kind of act, which is determined by the illocutionary force of the utterance. For example, the utterance, "Can you pass me the salt?" has two speech acts since while its direct illocutionary force is a question, it can be also treated as an indirect request. According to Searle (1975), the "mutually shared background

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information" (p.61) between the speaker and the addressee enables them to convey more than one meaning or illocutionary force. He points out that the speaker's intended meaning is added in indirect speech acts. However, Holtgraves (1997) points out that the indirect meanings of indirect speech acts can be produced both by the speaker and the addressee, namely, depending on the addressee's interpretation, an indirect meaning which the speaker does not intend can be generated by the addressee.

Since refusing requests threatens both the requester's and the refuser's face (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987) and may ruin the relationship between the requester and the requestee, those who refuse may be motivated by the need to maintain both the requester's and their own face. This is an important expectation about the conduct of social interactions. Indirectness in speech is aimed at minimizing face threats of the addressee, and thus, is one of the negative politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). It also maintains the speaker's face, which may be damaged by his or her own utterance, noticing that he or she may potentially offend the addressee's face by the utterance (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Refusing a request using indirect expressions declines to comply with the request while avoiding directness (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). For example, consider the situation when you want to refuse the other's request to open the window. You may respond, "I don't want to" or "I don't think I can" and show unwillingness or inability to comply. Or, you can be more indirect; saying, "I am cold now." In Searle's (1969) categorization of speech acts, this statement is an assertion, but can also be a refusal of complying with the request as it is easy to imagine that opening the window would make you feel colder. In addition, if you respond, "Can I keep it closed?", your response includes three illocutionary forces; a question, a request and a refusal. In order to avoid a great imposition, people tend to refuse a request indirectly, but at the same time, the speaker takes the risk that the addressee will not interpret the utterance as a refusal.

A number of studies concerning the politeness usage of indirectness have focused on the use of indirect requests (Becker, Kimmel & Bevill, 1989; Clark, 1980; Clark & Schunk, 1980; Gibbs, 1981; Gibbs, 1986; Lwanga-Lumu, 1998; Rinnert & Kobayashi, 1999; Shapiro & Murphy, 1993). In addition, several researchers have studied the nature of request refusals, mainly aiming at identifying the refusal strategies in relation to the degree of face threats of refusals (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Bresnahan, Cai & Rivers, 1994; Kline & Floyd, 1990; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Nelson, Al Batal, & El Bakary, 2002; Shigeta, 1974; Ueda, 1974). However, the cultural difference in the use of indirectness in request refusals with the focus of what affects the degree of indirectness is not what so much attention has been paid to. The cross-cultural difference in the motivation of indirectness in refusing requests reflects varieties of social and cultural values of the speaker. Different from requesting, refusing is a response process, that is, the addressee of a request takes part as a refuser, the speaker. Thus, refusals take a more complicated process than do requests since they should be made in relation to the requests they are refusing; a request refusal may be affected by what is requested and how it is requested. Therefore, indirectness may have more varieties in refusal messages than in request ones.

The main focus of this study is on the aspect of indirectness in people's refusals. By using elicited written data, this study only deals with linguistic indirectness; non-verbal refusal markers, such as gestures, eye contact or face expression, or the tone of voice are not considered. First, the definition of the verbal indirectness and cross-cultural differences in indirectness speech are discussed. Secondly, the previous research on request refusals is presented, and based on these previous studies, research questions for this study are identified. Then, method and result are provided. Finally, this study ends with discussion and conclusion.

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Indirectness in Speech

Indirect Speech Acts

According to Searle (1975), indirect speech acts are those that have more than one illocutionary force. The performance of indirect speech acts concerns felicity conditions of directive illocutionary acts. For instance, indirect request is performed by questioning a preparatory condition which concerns the hearer's ability, such as, "Can I borrow your pen?", which has two illocutionary forces: a question and a request. By indirect speech acts, the speaker can communicate more than one meaning to the addressee based on the common background between them. Searle (1975) discusses that indirect speech acts have both the literal meaning and non-literal meaning, the latter of which is the primary illocution. Their literal meanings play important roles in achieving indirection in speech; indirect speech acts are uttered as if their literal meanings are the primary ones while "additional speaker meaning" (Searle, 1975, p. 70), the primary illocution, is added. Therefore, both the literal and non-literal illocutionary acts are performed by indirect speech acts.

Indirect illocutionary act is performed by asserting one's own desire (e.g. "I want to drink coffee"), belief or intent, or by asking about the other's psychological state (e.g. "Do you want to come to the party with us?") (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Gordon & Lakoff, 197; Searle, 1975). Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) describe that indirect speech acts "function as hedges on illocutionary force" (p. 139) since one can weaken the direct illocutionary force, and can give the addressee the option to deny. In addition, what is questioned or asserted is greatly related to politeness of the indirect speech acts (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987; Searle, 1975). Thus, only certain forms of indirectness can be polite, and indeed, there are some indirect speech acts that are impolite and rude.

Though Searle's (1975) notion of indirect speech acts is discussed only from the speaker's perspective, Clark (1979) discusses indirect speech acts from the addressee's perspective in addition to the speaker's. He points out that there is an expected response

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to each indirect speech act of the speaker. The speaker intends that the addressee understands both the literal direct meaning and the implied indirect meaning. The addressee deals with both of them and decides to respond to either both of them or only the indirect meaning. Clark (1979) points out that the addressee can not just deal with the direct meaning. Therefore, there is an adjacency pair between indirect speech acts and their responses, that is, both the speaker and the addressee intend to communicate indirect meanings by indirect speech acts.

Indirectness and Politeness

Indirectness has been well discussed in relation to politeness, and many studies examining the relationships between the two have been done (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Clark, 1979; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Searle, 1975). Searle (1975) discusses that the major motivation for people to speak indirectly is politeness; that is, in an indirect request, the speaker can give an option for the addressee to say "no" by asking instead of directly ordering. Requests or offerings, for examples, have their polite indirect idiomatic forms, which differ from one language to another. "Can you open the window?", an idiomatic form of an indirect request, is more polite than "open the window!" since the question form gives an option to the addressee to reply "no" to the request. In addition, the subjunctive forms, such as, *could you?* or *would you?*, are considered to be more polite than *can you?* or *will you?* since the speaker's demands are more indirectly expressed by the use of past tense (Searle, 1975).

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) argue for a strong relationship between indirectness and politeness. Based on Goffman's (1967) face notion, they develop their politeness theory, which indicates that people use politeness in order to minimize the face threat of face-threatening acts (FTAs) since people's mutual interest is to maintain their and others' face. The components of the two types of face are defined: positive face, one's desire of what he/she wants to be other's wants as well, and negative face, one's desire to do what they want without being impeded by others. When doing FTAs, there

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are two possible choices: do the act *on record*, that is, to make one's communicative intention clear, or do it *off record*, that is, to make one's intention ambiguous. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) identify two different types of politeness which people use when they do FTAs on record with redressive actions, which attempt to minimize or modify the face damage of the act: *positive politeness* and *negative politeness*. Positive politeness is, "redress directed to addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants should be thought of as desirable" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 106). Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model describe that positive politeness is the strategy to represent politeness by showing the speaker's familiarity to the addressee by using casual language. Therefore, the behavior to express warmth towards addressees by satisfying their needs or wants is a positive politeness strategy. On the other hand, the purpose of negative politeness is to satisfy the addressee's negative face; it is used to avoid impeding the addressee's freedom or desire. Since negative politeness focuses only on the maintenance of the addressee's want, keeping a certain distance from the addressee represents politeness. In short, negative politeness emphasizes the distance between the speaker and the addressee while positive politeness expresses an inclusion of the addressee into the same group.

Indirectness is, in Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) categorization, one of the strategies of negative politeness. It is pointed out that the indirectness that is often used when doing a certain FTA is a *conventionalized indirectness*, which is not off record any longer since the speaker's intention is clear and explicit. They describe indirect speech acts as "the most significant form of conventional indirectness" (p. 137). Searle (1975) also discusses that in order for the illocutionary force to be understood accurately, indirect speech acts should be idiomatic and conventional. In conventionally indirect speech, the speaker's intended meaning is clear to the hearer though it is expressed indirectly. Thus, by using conventionally indirect forms, one can achieve both being indirect and speaking on record. In addition, according to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), there is another

way for people to speak indirectly, that is, when their communicative acts are done off record. Off-record FTAs are done when one does not want to be responsible for their FTAs; the speakers give way the initiative of the speech act to the addressees and wait for their interpretation of it. In other words, the intention of the speaker is not explicit in the utterance; there are several possible interpretations, which the addressee has the option to decide from.

According to the politeness theory presented by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), the degree of politeness increases when the degree of indirectness gets higher. Therefore, in most cases, the most direct *bold on record* (speaking straightforwardly without any redress) is the least polite while a conventionally indirect speech act is more polite, and *off record*, which is even more indirect, has the largest degree of politeness. Similarly, Leech (1983) also claims that indirectness increases the degree of politeness. He describes that the use of higher degree of indirect illocutions shows an increase in the politeness level because indirect illocutions, "increase the degree of optionality", and because, "the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be" (Leech, 1983, p. 108).

However, in the case of requests, the relationship between indirectness and politeness seems to be more complicated. According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), indirect requests are more polite than direct ones, and of indirect requests, conventionally indirect requests, such as "can you ~?", "could you ~?" or "Do you mind ~?" forms, are more polite than non-conventionally indirect requests, such as requestive hints. Clark (1979) points out that the degree of imposition changes depending on what kind of conventionally indirect requests are used. The question form requests are considered to be more indirect, and thus more polite since question form gives the option of complying with or refusing the addressee while requesting by stating one's desire does not give options and does impose to the addressee. That is, the question form request, such as, "can you lend me some

money?" is more polite than stating the desire as a request, such as, "I want you to lend me some money".

Therefore, the relationship of indirectness to politeness is not necessarily simple. The politeness in indirectness depends on the performed illocutionary act and the implied intention, and not simply on the degree of indirectness (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Leech, 1983).

Cross-Cultural Difference in Indirectness

The past research investigates the differences in conversational indirectness between the two cross-cultural dimensions, collectivism and individualism (Bresnahan, Cai & Rivers, 1994; Holtgraves, 1997; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996). People in collectivist cultures are group-oriented and tend to have more concerns over other group members than do people in individualistic cultures, where each individual is valued over groups (Gudykunst, Yoon & Nishida, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 1988). Therefore, collectivism tends to avoid threatening others' face more, and hence, people in collectivist cultures are more likely to be indirect in order to reduce the imposition to the others than do those of individualistic cultures (Holtgraves, 1997; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Ting-Toomey, 1988). In addition, conversational indirectness is also investigated based on the similar cultural dimensions of high-context and low-context cultures presented by Hall (1976), which categorize cultures by whether the context plays an important role in communication. In high-context culture, the true meaning and intention of an utterance is implied in context of the conversation (Hall, 1976). Based on this distinction of high and low context culture, Holtgraves (1997) suggests that since people tend to look for indirect meanings in others' utterances and most of the meaning is often implicit in context in high context culture (Hall, 1976), people in high context culture use more indirect expressions than do people in low context culture. People in high context culture tend to use more hint-like messages, which include indirect meanings or implications whereas those in low context culture do not appreciate ambiguous utterances (Hall, 1976). Therefore, in general, the existing

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research presupposes that as in a collectivist and high context culture, Japanese tend to be more indirect in their speech than do Americans, whose culture is considered to be individualistic and low context.

However, some research provides the evidence that the collectivist/individualist stereotypes need to be modified for some speech behaviors (Bresnahan, Cai & Rivers, 1994). It is reported that Japanese communication style is not always indirect, and in some cases, Japanese can be more direct than Americans (Sugimoto, 1999). Sugimoto (1999) presents that Japanese become more direct and verbose than Americans when apologizing. Thus, in the study of cross-cultural comparison of communication styles, it may not be simply assumed that the distinctions between collectivist and individualist cultures, and between high-context and low-context cultures define the communication style of each culture. This study investigates whether this cultural stereotype in communication style is true to the case of request refusals by comparing Americans and Japanese responses to requests.

Request Refusals

Request Refusals

Refusing a request is a face-threatening act. By disagreeing with the requester's expectation, it threatens both the requester and refuser's face. Thus, in order to minimize the effect of the face threats, request refusals should be made in a way that decreases the imposition of the refusal; request refusal is a face threatening act, which at the same time, should be a face saving act, which keeps the other's face from being threatened. Kline and Floyd (1990) point out the three conflicting tasks of refusals: (1) defining the conditions that the refusing is understandable, legitimate and sincere, (2) indicating the rejection, and (3) transferring a requester into the one who is refused. Therefore, they describe request refusals as "behaviorally complex" (Kline & Floyd, 1990, p. 456). In conversation, there is a most preferred response to every speech act (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). The speaker

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utters a speech act intending to get the most expected response from the addressee. These *adjacency pairs* of speech and response, the most preferred pair of the utterance and the response, coordinate conversations (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Structurally, an acceptance is the most preferred response to a request, and they compose the adjacency pairs. A requester mostly expects the requestee to accept his or her request and does not prefer being rejected; refusal is not a preferred response of a request, and threatens the requester's face. Therefore, request refusals are often done in a way that minimizes the effect of mutual face threats of the requester and the refuser. Thus, when rejecting to comply with the requested task, one makes his or her refusal indirect in order to minimize the addressee's (requester's) face threat, which would be caused by the refusal.

There are also other ways than indirectness that can make the refusal less face-threatening. Clark and Schunk (1980) claim, in their *attentive theory*, "the more attentive B is to all aspects of A's request, within reason, the more polite B is" (p. 121). That is, though it is less polite if B does not comply with A's request, B can mitigate a negative effect of the refusal by adding apologies or explanations of the reason for the incompliance. Thus, apologies and explanations of reasons are also useful for decreasing the imposition of refusals.

Cross-Cultural Difference in Request Refusal Strategy

Bresnahan, Cai and Rivers (1994) study whether more participants in individualist cultures value clarity while more participants in collectivist cultures value harmony with others by examining the differences of refusal strategies between Americans and Chinese. They find that the typical characteristics of individualism and collectivism are not applicable to people's refusal behaviors. That is, there are no significant differences in the degree of concern for keeping harmony with others by reducing impositions and in the preferences of clarity in refusals between Americans and Chinese. Therefore, even though collectivism shows a greater degree of indirectness than individualism in many aspects, one can not simply assume that people in individualist cultures are less concerned

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about saving other's face, minimizing impositions to the others or hurting the other's feelings. Their study shows that indirectness is not always the characteristic of only collectivist cultures. As for the delicate issue that has the potential to ruin relationships with others, such as refusing requests, people in individualist cultures can be as indirect as people in collectivist cultures.

However, the ways of being indirect or mitigating the effect of face threat of refusals differ between cultures. Liao and Bresnahan (1996) examine cross-cultural differences in refusal strategies. Focusing on the relationship between cultural characteristics and people's communication styles, they show differences in the use of refusal strategies between Americans and Chinese. Their study indicates that Americans apply multiple strategies in refusal whereas Chinese use fewer tokens. In this respect, they propose the politeness theory of Asian culture, which indicates that "marginally touching the point" (Liao & Bresnahan, 1996, p. 734) is more polite when dealing with an awkward situation, such as refusing requests. Therefore, Chinese people use fewer strategies than do Americans and try to get out of an awkward situation sooner. They point out that this finding reflects the Asian nature of modesty. In addition, Liao and Bresnahan (1996) also identify the differences in preferences in refusal expressions between Americans and Chinese; Americans first mention the positive opinion, such as, "I'd love to..." and then express their refusals by explaining the reason or apologizing while Chinese, being afraid of being forced to comply, tend not to utter such positive expressions. Instead, they choose to apologize and explain the reason for refusal. As this study shows, there are differences in request refusals between cultures, particularly between Asian and Western cultures.

Ueda (1974) also indicates similar indirect refusal strategies for Japanese. She argues that in Japanese communication, it is always important to think about the other's feelings and try to avoid hurting them by being conversationally ambiguous. Therefore, compared to Americans, Japanese use more verbal indirectness in general. Ueda (1974)

shows that Japanese use ambiguous ways to express their negative intentions; using "soft expressions" (Ueda, 1974) to avoid embarrassing the requester, uttering vague "no" to convey the atmosphere that is completely dependent on the addressee, uttering "yes, but..." to show the unwillingness to accept the request, saying "yes" with the expectation that the addressee interprets it as "no", and so on. Her discussion emphasizes the Japanese preference of being ambiguous rather than expressing the explicit "no" since an explicit refusal causes a discomfort or awkwardness (Ueda, 1974). This Japanese tendency of implying their true intentions reflects the fact that Japanese is a high-context culture, where people often seek implications or indirect meanings in other's utterances. Thus, Japanese have stronger tendency in using "acceptance-like" messages, which externally seem to be the acceptance of requests, but actually imply refusals. Also, Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) analyze the differences in request refusals between Americans and Japanese and find that Japanese people's excuse for refusing a request is more ambiguous and unspecified than American's excuses (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). This indicates that Japanese refusal is more indirect than Americans' refusal in terms of specificity.

On the other hand, research shows that an important strategy for being indirect in request refusals in English is the use of modality (Turnbull & Saxton, 1997). Modality is the expression that includes modal verbs, such as *"can, could, may, might, must, ought to, will, would, shall and should"* (Turnbull & Saxton, 1997, p. 147). They also include the expressions, such as *be able to, be going to, probably, maybe, perhaps, necessarily, certainly, I think, I believe,* and *I'm sure*, since they indicate how the speakers judge what they say. They claim that by using modality, such as *can, should* or *have to*, the speaker can include their own perception about the mentioned event and avoid the directness. Their study shows the importance of the function of the use of modals of making refusals softer. Brown and Levinson (1978) also present the use of modality as a strategy of

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Therefore, previous research shows that Americans and Japanese indicate a difference in their use of indirectness and tactics to refuse requests. This study examines how indirect refusals differ between Americans and Japanese in relation to the following non-linguistic factors discussed in the next section.

Factors of Indirectness and Refusals

Degree of Imposition

Since the more the imposition to the addressee that an utterance has, the larger the effect of its FTA is, more face maintenances towards the addressee are required for the speaker when the imposition of his or her utterance gets larger (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Namely, the larger imposition of one's needs to the addressee leads to the larger threats of the addressee's face. According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), the higher degree of imposition needs the higher degree of indirectness to minimize the face threat caused by the imposition. Their model suggests that the larger the offense and face loss to the addressee, the more face maintenance is required by more remedy. Leech (1983) also points out that the greater imposition leads to the greater optionality, namely, indirectness. Since both requests and the refusals are FTAs, the degree of indirectness in request refusals is determined based on the degree of face threats and imposition caused by the requests (Bresnahan, Cai, & Rivers, 1994). The degree of imposition of a request can be defined by the degree of the requested task. A large and difficult request causes a greater imposition and a face threat to the requestee than a small and easy request. It is considered that the degree of imposition in requests has a significant effect on how they are refused; the refusal of a request with a large degree of imposition may be less indirect and less mitigated than the refusal of a request with only a small degree of imposition since it seems to be more reasonable to refuse a request with large imposition. That is, it is likely

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that as the size of a request gets larger, so too does the understandability and appropriateness of the refusal. Thus, the degree of indirectness in request refusals may not be considered without the degree of imposition in requests. Therefore, in this study, the degree of indirectness in refusals is considered in relation with the imposition level or the degree of face threats of requests.

Universal Dimensions: Social Distance and Social Power Distance

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) argue that social distance, the relative power of the speaker and the addressee, and the absolute ranking of impositions in the particular culture are the factors that influence the weight of FTAs in most cultures. Social distance refers to the closeness of relationship between the speaker and the addressee. They describe social distance as a symmetric relational dimension, which is assessed by interaction frequency and a degree of similarity. Power refers to one's social power defined by his or her social status. Power distance is an asymmetric dimension, which is based on an assessment of how much one can impose his/her own face on the other's face and how much he/she can control the other's actions. Finally, the cultural absolute ranking of impositions refers to a level of impositions of negative and positive face which can be affected by the cultural norm, value or setting. These rankings change depending on circumstances or personal characteristics even within a culture. It is pointed out that all these three factors are independent and relevant variables of determining the degree of face threats.

Other researchers present similar dimensions which influence the use of politeness as well. Leech (1983) presents the social distance model, as shown in Figure 1, is highly relevant to politeness (the vertical axis represents the degree of power or authority, and the horizontal axis represents social distance). Figure 1 indicates that the social power and social distance are independent factors. Holmes (1995) also points out the importance of the solidarity-social distance dimension and the power dimension in considering politeness.

High power
(superiors)

```
                    ┌─────────┐
                    │negative │
                    │politeness│
                    └─────────┘
Intimate                          Distant
(intimates)      Horizontal distance  (strangers)
┌─────────┐                       ┌─────────┐
│positive │                       │negative │
│politeness│                      │politeness│
└─────────┘                       └─────────┘
```

Vertical distance

Low power
(subordinates)
```
┌─────────┐
│positive │
│politeness│
└─────────┘
```
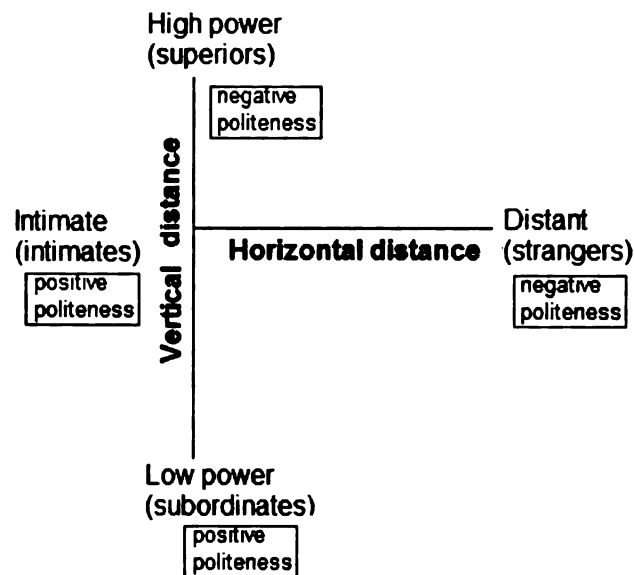
Figure 1. Leech's (1983) social distance model (Source: based on Leech, 1983)

Since politeness is highly related to the reduction of the degree of face threat, the

social distance and social power differences are considered to be the two most important

factors for determining the degree of face threats of imposition. Therefore, these two

dimensions are also related to the reduction of face threat in request refusals. In addition,

past research suggests that social power and social distance determine how people express

their refusals (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990, Bresnahan, Cai, & Rivers, 1994;

Liao & Bresnahan, 1996; Nelson, Al Batal, & El Bakary, 2002). For example, Bresnahan,

Cai and Rivers (1994) suggest that people's use of refusal strategies is affected by the

social distance between the speaker and the addressee, namely, whether their relationship

is in-group or out-group, their social power differences, and the level of imposition of the

request. More precisely, "role relationship, social obligation networks, face threats and

patterns of deference associated with status, age, power, etc, sex-role orientation and

expectations for behaviour associated with gender, strategies which are preferred and

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dispreferred for given contexts" (Bresnahan, Cai, & Rivers, 1994; p. 68, 69) are related to the use of refusal strategies.

Social Distance in the United States and Japan

Social distance between the speaker and the addressee influences the degree of impositions, namely, the weight of FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) describe that the weight of FTAs increases as the social distance between the speaker and the addressee increases. Thus, the higher degree of politeness is required when talking to those in distant relationship. That is, more indirectness is needed in order to remedy the effect of face threats when the social distance increases (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Generally, negative politeness is used more often toward the people from whom they think is appropriate to keep a certain distance, and positive politeness is used more often towards close friends (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Holmes, 1995, Kitao, 1989). In short, as social distance increases, the use of negative politeness becomes more frequent, and as social distance decreases and solidarity becomes higher, more positive politeness is used (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Holmes, 1995, Kitao, 1989). Therefore, more indirectness is likely to be used toward people who are in distant relationship.

However, some researchers find that people's reaction to social distance differs between cultures (Homes, 1990, 1995; Wolfson, 1988). According to Wolfson (1988), American people behave similarly to those in two extremes in social distance, that is, intimates and strangers since the interactants know where they stand in their relationships; they are either very close or very distant. In contrast, acquaintances and casual friends are more ambiguous in relationships, and it is difficult for the interactants to define their position in relationship with one another. American people tend to be more careful not to threaten the others' face in communication with close friends or complete strangers than with casual acquaintances or less-close friends (Holmes, 1995). Therefore, the use of

politeness, and thus, the use of indirectness is more important when speaking to intimates or complete strangers than when speaking to simple acquaintances in the U.S.

On the other hand, Japanese show a different attitude toward social distance. Their solidarity-social distance is defined by the sense of belonging. Akasu and Asao (1993) point out that this horizontal dimension has an important effect on Japanese people's speech acts as well. They mention that a sense of belonging or sameness is significantly related to the horizontal dimension, namely, solidarity-social distance. This sense of belonging is related to the ingroup and outgroup distinctions of Japanese. An ingroup notion includes the sense of exclusiveness both mentally and socially, and outgroup members are usually strangers with no common background. This ingroup-outgroup distinction is one of the factors that determines communicative behaviors of Japanese, and Japanese tend to use more negative politeness to emphasize the distance to those who are outgroup members (Akasu & Asao, 1993). Thus, indirectness in speech is more likely to appear in conversation between outgroup members in Japanese. Therefore, though the communication style toward strangers differs between Americans and Japanese, both Americans and Japanese show the same tendency of speech act in terms of social distance; people are considered to be less indirect to those who are close in relationships.

Social Power in the United States and Japan

Though similar tendencies in attitude toward social power can be seen between cultures (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Holmes, 1995), the degree of importance of the social power varies between cultures (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Kitao, 1989). Social power is defined as the ability to control and influence others' behavior. What constitutes the properties of social power, status, role, age, or sex, may vary from culture to culture or situation to situation even in one culture (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Holmes (1995) describes, "High power tends to attract deferential behaviour, including linguistic deference or negative politeness" (p. 17). The higher the speaker's social power over the addressee, the smaller the imposition of the speech to the addressee (Brown & Levinson,

1978, 1987). People tend to avoid offending those who have higher social power, such as a superior and express respect to them. Therefore, more negative politeness strategies are used toward superiors to emphasize the differences in power, which suggests people tend to be more indirect when speaking to those who have higher social power (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987).

In particular, Akasu and Asao (1993) consider social verticality as the most important factor for Japanese for determining speech acts. They describe Japanese as having a strong "top-down relation" (Akasu & Asao, 1993, p. 96) (*joge-kankei*), which refers to vertical relationships, namely, power differences. The importance of social power is so high in Japanese society that Japanese even consider the social power difference between brothers or sisters while Americans do not; age difference is also important for Japanese. Japanese language use is highly affected by the addressee's social power (Akasu & Asao, 1993). Since indirectness increases the degree of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987), Japanese people's use of indirectness is also greatly influenced by the social power differences between the speaker and the addressee. Moreover, because of the high importance of the social power in Japanese society, people tend to feel more difficulty in refusing or rejecting the request from individuals with higher status. Therefore, especially when refusing requests from those with higher status, it is likely for Japanese to be more indirect in order to soften the negative impact of the refusals. Rinnert and Kobayashi (1999) point out that when speaking to people with higher social status, Japanese prefer using more hints and make their intentions less explicit by making the interpretation of the utterance open to the addressee. Thus, more precisely, since Japanese have this inability of explicitly refusing especially those with higher social power, they are more likely to accept than refuse the request of a higher status individual even though they actually can not or do not want to comply with it. In such a case, Japanese use the ambiguous hinting expression which can be interpreted both as an acceptance and a refusal, and leave the

option to the hearer (Shigeta, 1974; Ueda, 1974). Japanese prefer relying on the addressee's interpretation rather than using direct explicit messages.

In contrast, Akasu and Asao (1993) note that Americans do not consider social vertical dimensions as important as Japanese do. Kitao (1989) also points out that Japanese society values social power relationships and status more than American society, and differences of social power are explicit in language by means of politeness in Japanese. In American culture, social power is defined by, and sometimes limited within people's social roles (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Leech, 1983). For example, a lecturer can say to a student "get the essay to me by next week", but cannot say, "make me a cup of coffee" since this case is out of his authority (Leech, 1983). Therefore, even the request made by those who have authority or power can cause a large face threat to his or her subordinate if he or she steps out of the range of the role or authority. This indicates that the assessment of the degree of social power is not absolute and is largely situation-dependent in American society; the social power of a professor over a student will be interpreted differently between a conference setting and a party, for example. Therefore, for Americans, the degree of face threatening effects of utterances could change depending on situations regardless of the social power differences. Americans are often expected to change their levels of speech behavior according to a situation and/or purpose. However, in contrast, in Japan, the significance of social power is so great that it is hardly affected by situations. In most cases, bosses are not expected to use polite forms or to be tactful to their subordinates. This is consistent with Kitao's (1989) point that Japanese apply the same politeness strategy unless the relationship between the speaker and the addressee changes, but Americans change their use of politeness strategy according to a situation. Also, for Americans, the use of expressions that reduce horizontal distance between the speakers and the hearer are more significant in conversation (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Kitao, 1989). Therefore, American people's speech acts depend more on situations and

differences in closeness in relationships while in Japan, social power differences dominates people's speech acts regardless of a situation.

The relative social power between the interactants has an effect on request refusals as well. According to Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990), in request refusals, the order and frequency of people's use of apology, expression of regret, such as "I'm sorry" or "I feel terrible...", and/or expression of empathy or positive opinion in their refusals of requests, such as "I wish I could...", are affected by the requester's social status. Also, they find that the requester's social status affects the frequencies of the use of apology or regret expression differently between Americans and Japanese. That is, for Japanese, the use of apology/regret in refusal is related to whether the requester's status is higher or lower than the speaker, but American people's use of apology/regret depends on whether the requester's status is equal to the speaker or not. For example, in refusing the other's requests, Japanese tend to apologize to those with higher social status while Americans apologize to those with equal status. Therefore, it is considered that the importance in social power in Japanese culture makes their language use distinct from Americans.

The fact that Japanese emphasize social power can be supported by Hofstede (1980). Hofstede (1980) examines the social power in work setting and defines it as, "a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between boss and subordinate as perceived by the less powerful of the two, subordinate" (p. 98). He computes the power distance by country based on the three question scores: (1) the percentage of how often employees are afraid to disagree with managers, (2) the percentage of employees who perceive their managers as autocratic or consultive, and (3) the percentage of how often consultive managers are preferred by employees (Hofstede, 1980). In his categorization, the United States is a low power distance country, which does not emphasize people's social power differences, whereas Japan is classified as a high power distance country, which values the social power difference among people.

Level of Importance of Requests

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) discuss that the ranking of imposition is affected not only by relational social power and closeness differences, but also by the situational variables. That is, how important a request is for the requester can also influence the degree of imposition of the refusal since important requests require more compliance than an unimportant trivial request. The importance of a request can be defined by how necessary and urgently the requested task should be accepted (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). According to Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model, urgency mitigates the imposition. For example, a request of a ride to a hospital by a very sick person does not cause a large imposition even though it is relatively a large request since the request is urgent and important and it is understandable for the requester to ask it.

In request refusals, the imposition of a refusal is also affected by the importance level of the request. Since a request which is important and urgent for the requester is often what he or she really needs to be accepted, declining it is like to lead to high imposition on the requester. It is discussed earlier that as the relative size of the request increases, the imposition of the request gets higher, and thus, the understandability and appropriateness of its refusal also increases. In the case of important and urgent request, though the size of the request gets larger, the degree of imposition does not increase since the urgency mitigates the imposition. Therefore, the imposition of the refusal of urgent and important request causes a large imposition and high face threats. In addition, the requestee feels higher obligation in complying with urgent and important requests than trivial requests. Thus, such refusals may be made indirectly in order to minimize the effect of face threats. When the requestee perceived that he or she is asked to do something important for the requester, he or she may be more indirect in order to reduce the imposition of the refusal. Thus, the importance level of a request is also considered to be an important predictor of people's use of indirectness in their refusals.

Level of Politeness in Requests

As discussed above, a remedy of the effect of the face threat by using politeness is required in doing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Thus, an appropriate level of politeness should be used in requests to minimize the effect of face threats of the requests (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). The appropriateness of the politeness of the requests is determined considering the relative social power and relative social distance between the requester and the requestee, and the degree of importance of the request. However, if the appropriate level of politeness is not used in the request, its imposition may be large and cause a large face threats to the requestee. In addition, the degree of politeness in a request may affect the degree of politeness in its refusal; the use of appropriate level of politeness in a request may elicit an appropriate level of politeness in its refusal as well since polite requests can reduce the degree of imposition of the request, and thus, the refuser may become more careful in not threatening both interactants' face in refusing it. On the other hand, if a request is not polite enough to reduce the degree of its imposition, its refusal may not have so much imposition to the requester since the requestee might have felt a larger face threat from the less polite request. One may be able to refuse the less polite request more directly than the request with higher degrees of politeness. Therefore, the politeness level of requests may have an effect on the indirectness used in their refusals.

As discussed earlier, in most cases, indirectness leads to a higher degree of politeness since it reduces the imposition of the speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Leech, 1983). According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), in the case of requests, the conventional indirect requests, such as *can you, could you, I want you to* and so on (Searle, 1975), are more polite than non-conventional indirect requests, such as hints, in which the speaker's intention is hard to detect. However, directness is not always associated with impoliteness. They also point out that the social power mitigates the imposition of requests (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Holtgraves (1986) finds that the imposition of requests is mitigated if the requester's social power is higher than the requestee's. Thus,

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the higher social power individuals can be more direct in requesting to those with lower social power without imposing too much to them. In addition, if the social distance between the speaker and the addressee is close, as a positive politeness strategy, the speaker can show the closeness or familiarity to the addressee as a politeness by being less indirect (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). Thus, it is important to note that directness does not always lead to impoliteness; the social distance or social power difference between the speaker and the hearer determines the relationship between the degree of politeness and the degree of indirectness.

<div align="center">Hierarchy of request response strategy</div>

Figure 2. Classification of Refusals (Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz, 1990)

1. Direct

   A. Performative ("I refuse~.")

   B. Nonperformative statement ("no.", "I can't.")

2. Indirect

   C. Statement of regret ("I'm sorry.")

   D. Wish ("I wish I could.")

   E. Excuse, reason, explanation ("I have a headache.")

   F. Statement of alternative ("Why don't you ask someone else?")

   G. Set condition for future or past acceptance ("If you had asked me earlier, I would have~.")

   H. Promise of future acceptance ("I'll do it next time.")

   I. Statement of principle ("I never do business with friends.")

   J. Statement of philosophy ("One can't be too careful.")

   K. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor ("Who do you think you are?")

   L. Acceptance that functions as a refusal (unspecific reply, lack of enthusiasm)

M. Avoidance (silence, topic switch, silence, "I'll think about it.")

Figure 3. Adjuncts to refusals (Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz, 1990)

1. Statement of positive opinion ("I'd love to...")

2. Statement of empathy ("I realize you are in a difficult situation.")

3. Pause fillers ("uhh", "well", "oh")

4. Graditude/appreciation

Figure 4. Refusal tactics (Bresnahan, Cai & Rivers, 1994)

Direct, least face-sensitive tactic

1. Reprimand

2. Direct refusal: overt denial of the request

3. Polite refusal: either a mitigated refusal or an apology

4. Justification: defensive explanation

5. Excuse: neutral explanation about inability to comply

6. Deceptive excuse: a lie

7. Expression of willingness

8. Expression of thanks

9. Postponement: avoidance, defer answering

10. Suggest an alternative

11. Agree to request with conditions

12. Agree

Indirect, face-sensitive tactic

Previous studies present the hierarchy of request refusal strategies based on the degree of face threats (Figure 2, 3 and 4) (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Bresnahan, Cai, & Rivers, 1994). They suggest that the most direct refusals are "no" and "I refuse~" followed by the expression of negative ability or willingness, such as "I can't", "I won't" or

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"I don't think so" (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Bresnahan, Cai, & Rivers, 1994). The present study examines the indirectness used as a mediator of the effect of face threats. However, not all the indirect expressions in refusals increase the degree of politeness and decrease the degree of face threatening. Some indirect refusals include high face threatening expressions or impolite remarks, which are just as face-threatening as or even more so than the direct bold refusals however indirect they may be. In such high face-threatening indirect refusals, indirectness does not function as a mediator of the effect of face threats, but rather, even increases it. For example, criticizing the requester in refusing his or her request, such as, "you shouldn't ask for borrowing money to the others so often", has a potential of causing a high face threat to the requester (Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz, 1990). Insults/attacks, such as "who do you think you are?", is also highly face-threatening though they can indirectly refuse the requests (Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz, 1990). In addition, the use of modality affects the degree of face threats in request refusals. Ifert and Roloff's (1994) study identifies the requester's anticipation of the obstacle that prevents the requester from complying with the request. They find that a requester wants the obstacles to be the requestee's inability to do the task rather than his or her unwillingness to do it. That is, the requestee's lack of skills or resources to comply with the request is the most preferred obstacle to comply in refusals. Therefore, in request refusals, the expressions of unwillingness, such as "I don't want to" or "I won't" are not preferred and more face-threatening than the expressions of inability, such as "I can't" though both are structurally equally indirect. Moreover, "I don't want to" and "I won't" are even more face-threatening than the direct bold refusal "no". This indicates that indirectness and politeness do not always correspond to each other, and that the expressions of negative unwillingness are not likely to appear in request refusals. These indirect refusals, which do not have politeness aspects, are considered as high face-threatening indirect refusals in this study.

Secondly, one can hint his or her intention to refuse a request by providing excuses, justifications, suggestions of alternative solutions, promises for future acceptance, conditions for future or past acceptance, or statements of principle though the intention of refusal is not expressed directly in these strategies (see figure 2 and 4) (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Bresnahan, Cai, & Rivers, 1994). Suggestion of alternative solutions can be a little less face threatening than excuse since it is more towards being cooperative to the requester, and similarly, since promise of future acceptance is even more cooperative to the requester, it can be ranked as less face threatening than suggestion of alternative solution.

In addition, according to Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz's (1990) *classification of refusals* (figure 2) and *hierarchical list of refusal tactics* (figure 4) in Bresnahan, Cai and Rivers (1994), apology, such as "I'm sorry" or "sorry" (apology) often appears in request refusals. That is, the requesters usually understand that their requests are refused when they are responded to with such expressions. Also, such responses make the refusals polite by reducing the degree of face threats of both the speaker and the hearer. Thus, "I'm sorry" can, when used as a response to requests, be considered as the conventionalized form of mitigated refusals. Therefore, in terms of explicitness of the speaker's refusal intention, apology can be more direct than other hint refusals, which the speaker's refusal intention is less clear. Statement of wish or willingness for compliance of requests also has certain forms, such as "I wish I could" or "I would like to". However, statement of wish or willingness is not used by itself as a refusal and usually followed by explanations or justifications for the refusals while apology itself can be a refusal without being followed by any explanations or justifications. Thus, apology is considered to be a little more direct than the hint refusals, such as excuse, suggestion of alternative solutions, and promise of future acceptance, whereas statement of wish/willingness can be ranked as more indirect than these hint refusals.

Also, as Ueda (1974) discusses, Japanese often use very ambiguous expressions, which the speaker's intention is hard to detect from, such as uttering "yes" with the intention of "no" or adding excuses for their inability of compliance after saying "yes, but...". In using such expressions, the speaker depends on the addressee's interpretation since the speaker's intention is not explicitly expressed (Ueda, 1974). The speaker's actual intention of refusing is so implicit that it can not be detected unless the addressee senses it from other information that is given by the speaker. This acceptance-like response, which functions as a refusal, is used due to the tendency of the Japanese people not to say "no" (Ueda, 1974). This type of response is categorized as unwilling acceptance response in this study.

Therefore, as a result, the request refusal responses can be ranked by the degree of face threats as in table 1 and 2. This ranking and categorization of refusal responses includes 12 different categories of request refusals, ordering from the most face threatening refusal to the least face threatening tactic, and two types of adjuncts to refusals (Table 1 and 2). This ranking and categorization is used in the analysis of this study.

Table 1. Ranking and categories of request refusals

	Category	Example
Most direct, highest face-threatening refusal response	(1) high face-threatening refusal statement (insult/accusation/attack)	"I won't." "You shouldn't ask that to me."
	(2) direct refusal	"no.", "I refuse..."
	(3) negative ability	"I can't.", "I don't think I can.", "I'm not sure I can."
	(4) apology	"I'm sorry."
	(5) excuse/justification	"I'm busy now."
	(6) suggestion or offer of alternative solutions	"Ask someone else." "How about asking...?"
	(7) statement of future acceptance	"I can help you later.", "Could you wait for a moment?"
	(8) wish/willingness	"I wish I could."
	(9) unwilling acceptance remark	"yes, but...", "ok, but..."
Most indirect, least face-threatening refusal	(10) avoidance/postponement	"What shall we do?", "I don't

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response		know...", "Could you ask me later?"
Acceptance	(11) partial acceptance/acceptance with conditions	"I can try a little."
	(12) complete acceptance	"sure", "yes"

Table 2. Adjuncts to Refusals

Category	Example
(1) statement of empathy	"I suppose you really need a help"
	"It must be very inconvenient for you"
(2) pause fillers	"oh", "well"

Research Questions

Given the discussions above, there are several possible factors that determine people's use of verbal indirectness; specifically, these are social power importance, relationship closeness, request politeness and request importance, which determine the degree of impositions in request refusals. The degree of imposition of requests may affect the indirectness in refusals. The relative social power of the requester, the social distance between the requester and the requestee, the politeness level of the request, and/or the importance level of the request determine the degree of imposition of the request (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Holmes, 1995; Leech, 1983). However, according to the previous analysis, there doesn't seem to be a significant difference in the effect of social distance on speech behaviors between Americans and Japanese, and though they react differently to complete strangers, both Americans and Japanese become more indirect toward those who are not close in relationships than those who are intimate (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Brown &

Levinson, 1978, 1987; Holmes, 1995). In addition, the difference in the effect of the social power between Americans and Japanese is more distinct and important than the difference in the effect of social distance between the two cultures. Thus, social distance is not considered as a variable, and it is made constant in this study. In addition, the importance level of the request is also made constant in this study since it is unlikely that people refuse unimportant trivial requests, such as "can you open the window?" in any culture (Bresnahan, Cai & Rivers, 1994). Therefore, in this study, only the case of the refusal of important requests is examined. Accordingly, the independent variables used in this study are: social power (high/equal), politeness level in request (more polite/less polite) and nationality (American/Japanese).

It is considered that people are more indirect in refusing a request if the requester's social power is higher than them, and if the request is made with an appropriate level of politeness. In addition, previous studies show the cross-cultural differences in indirectness, that is, Americans tend to be less indirect than Japanese (Holtgraves, 1997; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996). Since Japanese culture emphasizes social power differences more than do Americans (Akasu & Asao, 1994; Kitao, 1989), when speaking to higher social power individuals, Japanese use more indirectness than do Americans (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Shigeta, 1974; Ueda, 1974). In addition, considering that Japanese is a high context culture (Hall, 1976), Japanese indirectness is likely to have more varieties. In Japanese culture, people tend to expect others to look for more than the explicit meanings in their utterances, and to depend on the others' interpretations (Shigeta, 1974; Ueda, 1974). Ueda (1974) points out that Japanese sometimes use a very ambiguous refusal, which implicitly means "no", but explicitly indicates an acceptance. People use indirectness in many different intentions; to be polite (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987), to avoid hurting the others when mentioning something unfavorable (Ueda, 1974), and/or to avoid negative approvals by the others by unfavorable remarks. As a high context culture (Hall, 1976), Japanese use ambiguous expressions with the

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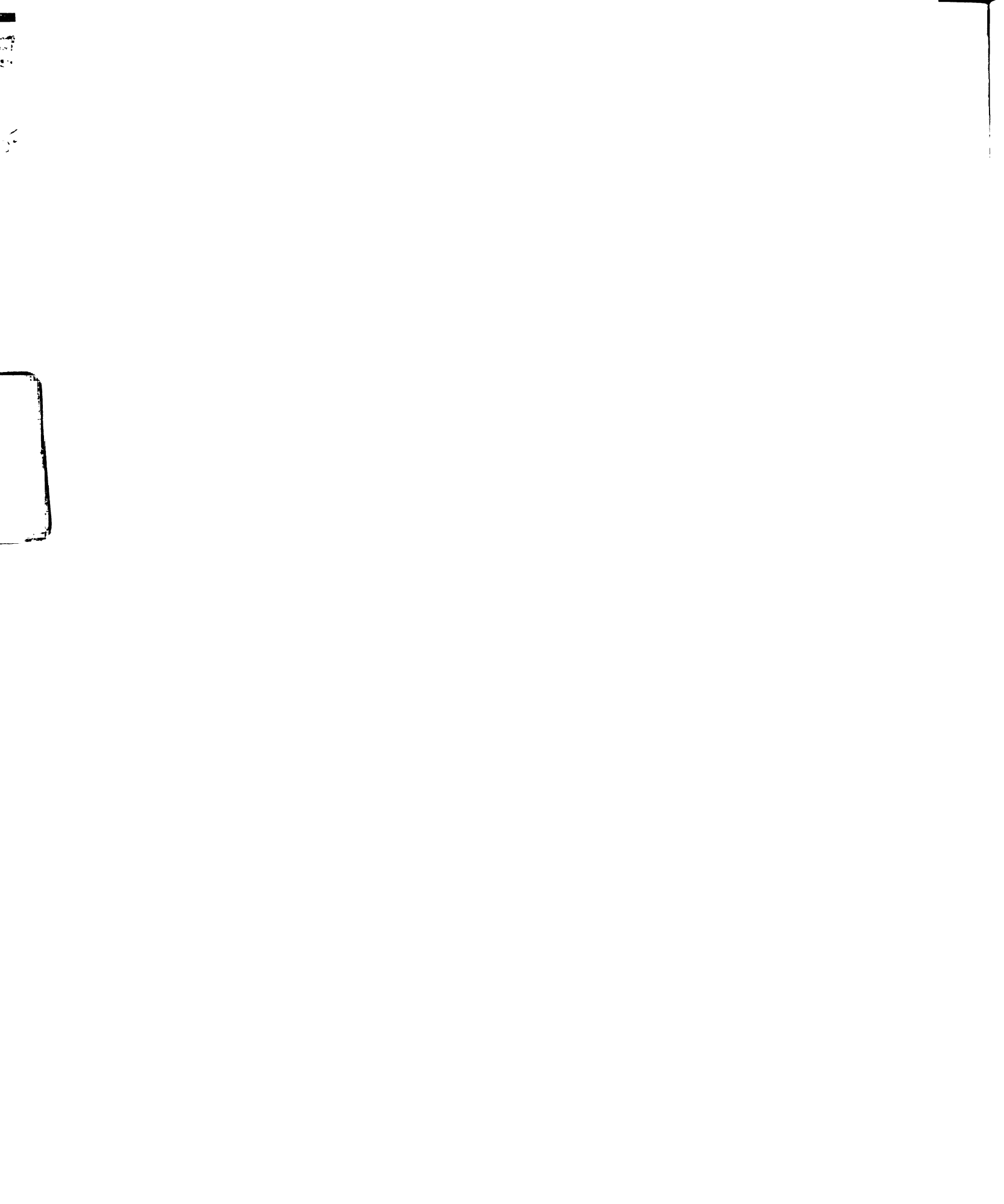
expectation of their actual implicit intentions being sensed by the addressee without uttering them directly. Thus, Japanese are sometimes likely to utter the expressions of granting when they actually want to refuse. On the other hand, since the United States is considered to be a low context culture (Hall, 1976), where people usually do not seek for implied meanings in the others' utterances, it is very unlikely that Americans use the ambiguous refusals. Therefore, Japanese are likely to use more opaque refusals than do Americans (Ueda, 1974). Although it is studied that social power and politeness of request affect people's use of indirectness in request refusals, how the effect of social power and politeness request on indirectness in request refusal differs between Americans and Japanese is unknown. In this study, the intercultural difference in how people become indirect in refusing a request between the U.S. and Japan is examined in relation to the requester's social power and the politeness of requests.

Therefore, the research questions for this study are developed as follows:

RQ1: Does nationality have any effects on the indirectness in people's request refusals?

RQ2: Does social power of the requester have any effects on the indirectness in people's request refusals?

RQ3: Does the politeness level of requests have any effects on the indirectness in people's request refusals?

Method

Sample

Participants of this study were composed of 125 Americans (37 male and 88 female) with age ranged from 19 to 46 ($M = 21.62$, $SD = 2.69$), and 94 Japanese (34 male and 60 female) age ranging from 19 to 60 ($M = 23.85$, $SD = 6.06$). The American participants were randomly recruited from two undergraduate communication classes at a university in the Midwest and the Japanese sample were undergraduate and graduate students in a major national Japanese university. For American subjects, 95.2% (119) were Communication

majors, 3.2% (4) were Education majors, 0.8% (1) was an English major and 0.8% (1) was a Child Developing major while for Japanese subjects, 57.4 % (54) majored in English Literature, 17.0% (16) in English Linguistics, 9.6 % (9) in French Literature, 6.4% (6) in Japanese Literature, 4.3% (4) in Japanese Linguistics, and 1.1% (1) majored in Japanese Study, Music Study, Western Literature, Cultural Study, and Comparative Literature.

Procedure

The data was collected using a questionnaire, which include a set of scenarios. Both the American and Japanese data were collected in classrooms during class, and American participants received extra credit for the class for participating in the study. Participants were randomly completed only one of four versions of the questionnaire.

Questionnaire

Each set of questionnaires included a scenario with an open-ended question and several scaled items (see Appendix A and B). The open-ended item required the subjects to read the scenario of a request refusal situation, and asked them to write down the exact utterance they would make in the situation. Each questionnaire included one of four types of scenario of the following situations: (1) the situation of a polite request from the individual with higher social power than the subjects, (2) the situation of a less polite request from the individual with higher social power than the subjects, (3) the situation of a polite request from the person whose social power is the same as the subjects, and (4) the situation of a less polite request from the person whose social power is the same as the subjects. (1) and (2) examined how the subjects responded to the request made by the person who had a higher social status than them, and how differently they reacted to the different levels of politeness whereas (3) and (4) were used to see how the subjects responded to the request made by a person with equal social status, and if they reacted differently when the politeness level of the request differed. The gender of the requester was not specified in the scenario. All the scenarios had both English and Japanese versions for each nationality, and the translation was carefully done to make the contents of

both versions exactly the same. In Japanese version, the use of honorific forms in requests was made consistent through all scenarios in order to avoid the differences in perceived politeness levels caused by a different use of honorifics. In the scenarios, a boss at work was used as the high social power requester while a co-worker was a requester with an equal social power. The two levels of politeness (polite and less polite request) in the scenarios were determined based on the conventionality of requests and indirectness. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) discuss that conventionally indirect requests are more polite than non-conventionally indirect requests, namely hints. Also, the question form requests are more polite than the neutral forms, and hedging, that is, apologizing before requesting, makes the request more polite (Clark, 1979; Lakoff, 1975). Thus, in the scenarios used in this study, the polite request forms included the expression, "I'm sorry, but do you think you could help ~?" while "I really need you to help me ~" was used as the less polite request form.

An approximately equal number of subjects were assigned to each of four conditions for both American and Japanese subjects (Table 3). All the participants were first instructed to read the scenario (Appendix A) which they were randomly assigned to and provide a response to the request in the scenario. They were also asked to answer the 7-point manipulation check items for the requester's social power, request politeness and request imposition in the scenario (Appendix B). The manipulation of *social power* of the requester in the scenario (Cronbach's α = .94) was measured using four items, which assess how important the participants considered the requester's social power in responding to his or her request. The manipulation of *Request politeness* in the scenario (Cronbach's α = .90) was measured through four items, which examine how polite or appropriate they felt the request in the scenario was. The four-item scale for the manipulation of *request imposition* in the scenario, which measured how great they felt to be imposed by the request, was eliminated because of its low reliability (Cronbach's α = .45). The questionnaire also included the 7-points Likert scale items (Appendix B) that examined the

subjects' preferences in direct communication and indirect communication, which were chosen based on Holtgraves's (1997) conversational indirectness scale (direct communication scale: Cronbach's α = .74, indirect communication scale: Cronbach's α = .76). Differences of mean scores in these scales were compared between the two nationalities.

Table 3. Numbers of subjects assigned to each situation by nationality

	boss/ polite	boss/ less polite	co-worker/ polite	co-worker/ less polite	Total
Americans	32 (25.6%)	30 (24.0%)	32 (25.6%)	31 (24.8%)	124
Japanese	22 (23.4%)	23 (24.5%)	25 (26.6%)	24 (25.5%)	94
Total	54	53	57	55	219

Data Analysis

As discussed above, based on Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz's (1990) *classification of refusals* (Figure 2) and *hierarchical list of refusal tactics* (Figure 4) presented by Bresnahan, Cai and Rivers (1994), the 14-category coding scheme was developed for the analysis of the open-ended request refusal responses (Table 1 and 2). Each unit of request response was categorized into one of the following response strategy types developed for the study, ordering from most direct, highest face-threatening response to most indirect, least face-threatening response: (1) high face-threatening refusal statement (insult/accusation/attack), (2) direct refusal statement, (3) statement of negative ability, (4) apology, (5) excuse/justification, (6) suggestion or offer of alternative solutions, (7) statement of future acceptance, (8) wish/willingness, (9) unwilling acceptance, (10) avoidance/postponement, (11) partial acceptance/acceptance with conditions, and (12)

complete acceptance (Table 1). In addition, two adjuncts to refusal categories were created: (1) statement of empathy and (2) pause fillers (Table 2).

In the analysis, the number of response strategies included in each response was counted for each subject. If the same strategy type appeared more than once, they are all counted as different strategies. Also, the ways each strategy was expressed were coded; since *mitigation* (*hedges* in Lakoff's (1975) term) and *reinforcement* are the devices that concern other's face and have strong connections with the degrees of imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Lakoff, 1975; Sbisà, 2001), it was noted if either mitigation or reinforcement were used in the responses. The use of mitigations, such as the modal predicates of "I think", "may", or "might", emphasis on inner state, tag questions, question forms, or euphemisms, mediates the imposition, and thus more polite than reinforcements, such as the modals like "must", "have to", and "ought to" or imperative forms, which increase the imposition of an utterance (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Lakoff, 1975; Sbisà, 2001). Thus, mitigation can increase the degree of politeness while reinforcement approaches to impoliteness. Also, whether the response was clearly expressed or hinted was noted; hints, which the speaker's intention is implicit, are more indirect than conventional forms, which the speaker's intention is clear, and can be used as even a higher degree of mitigation (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). In addition, as for Japanese data, the use of honorifics was noted since honorific is one of the most important devices for Japanese politeness.

Finally, the degree of indirectness of excuse was also ranked by whether it is specified and whether the refusals include the direct request topic. Ueda (1974) points out that Japanese prefer avoiding specific reasons or private reasons for their refusals, and tend to use general, official reasons. Similarly, Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz (1990) find that Japanese excuses are less specific and lacking in detailed information while Americans provide more specific information, such as their personal plans with the indication of the time or place. The excuses with specific personal plans or situations, such as "I have a

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doctor's appointment at three tomorrow", or "I only have five bucks now and need them to buy lunch later", indicate the speaker's intention clearer and more directly than the ones without concreteness, such as "I'm busy tomorrow", "I have a prior commitment", or "I don't have money now". In addition, mentioning the direct content of requests in the refusal excuses can affect the degree of indirectness of the refusals as well. That is, the excuses directly pointing out the main request topic can be more direct and specified than the ones without the markers which represent the direct topic. Thus, in the request refusal used in this study, "I am not good at computer" is a little more direct than "I don't have time now" since the former uses the word "computer", which directly relates the topic of the request. Thus, in order to further assess the indirectness degree of each response in terms of content specificity, the content of excuses in each response were examined and categorized into groups (Table 4).

Table 4. Types of excuse and their degree of specificity

Category	Example	Level of Specificity
Unavailability	I'm busy.	1 (general)
	I don't have time.	1
	I don't want to cause any other problems.	1
	I have lots of work to do.	2 (less specified)
Inability	It takes time to fix this problem.	2
	This problem is hard to fix.	2
	I'm not good at computer stuff.	3 (specified)
	I've had the same problem and couldn't fix it.	3
Superiority of others	..... knows better about fixing computers.	3

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Results

Manipulation Check

First of all, to check if the two levels of social power of the requester (boss/coworker) were successfully manipulated in the scenario, a manipulation check was conducted using a 4-item social power scale (Cronbach's α = .94). An independent-sample t-test showed a significant difference between the two different level of social power of the requester, boss and coworker, t (216) = - 11.84, $p < .001$. Subjects assigned to the boss scenario ($M =$ 2.87, $SD = 1.17$) perceive social power with the requester to be less balanced, equal, symmetrical and even than those assigned to the coworker scenario ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.49$). Thus, the manipulation of the two levels of the requester's social power in the scenarios was successful.

Also, a 4-item request politeness scale (Cronbach's α = .90) was used to examine whether the two levels of politeness of the request in each scenario (polite request/less polite request) was successfully manipulated. An independent sample t-test was used to compare the mean between the more polite request scenario and the less polite request. Results showed a significant difference in the politeness level of the request, t (217) = 4.08, $p < .001$. Subjects in the more polite request situation ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.20$) perceived the request more polite, appropriate, respectful and civilized than those assigned to the less polite request situation ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.49$). Therefore, the two different levels of politeness in the requests of the scenarios were set appropriately.

Preference in Direct/Indirect Communication

Based on the scaled measure of direct/indirect communication preference, the level of preference for communicating in a direct way and an indirect way was compared between Americans and Japanese respondents using an independent-sample t-test. The results showed that there was a significant difference in the preference for direct communication between Americans and Japanese, t (217) = 3.88, $p < .001$. Direct communication is more preferred by Americans ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.01$) than by Japanese ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.08$).

Also, there was a significant difference in the preference for indirect communication between Americans and Japanese, t (217) = -4.96, p < .001. Indirect communication was more preferred by Japanese (M = 3.88, SD = 1.02) than by Americans (M = 3.19, SD = 1.00). More American respondents tended to use more direct and explicit communication styles while more Japanese respondents preferred communicating indirectly.

Intention of Refusal

A single Likert-item measured the participant's perception of what his/her response meant where a score of 1 indicated a refusal of the request while a score of 7 indicated a compliance with the request. An independent t-test showed a significant difference in the degree of refusal intention with the response between Americans and Japanese, t (216) = 6.20, p < .001. Americans (M = 4.07, SD = 1.55) exhibited less refusal intention than did Japanese (M = 2.77, SD = 1.53). However, neither requester's social power, t (216) = -.61, p = .545, nor politeness level of the request, t (216) = -.29, p = .776, showed a significance difference. Thus, the degree of refusal intention did not differ between refusing the boss's request (M = 3.44, SD = 1.65) and the coworker's request (M = 3.58, SD = 1.69). Also, respondents in both countries did not show a difference in refusal intention of the request between the more polite request (M = 3.48, SD = 1.70) and less polite request (M = 3.54, SD = 1.64). This result indicated that American respondents tended to comply more with the request than Japanese respondents.

Use of Honorifics

The use of honorifics in the open-ended response was noted for Japanese respondents since honorifics play an important role in expressing politeness in Japanese. Overall 51 (54.3%) out of 94 Japanese respondents used honorifics in their responses to the requests. Between the different requesters, all the responses to the boss's request (45 respondents (88.2%) out of 45) used honorifics to the boss while six respondents (11.8%) out of 49, whose situation were in the coworker's request, used them to the coworker. In addition, the use of honorifics in the responses to the more polite request (26, 51.0%) and the less

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polite request (25, 49%) did not show a difference. Therefore, the use of honorifics in Japanese indicated the importance of social power in choosing the forms of language in Japanese.

Frequency of Strategy

Based upon the open-ended questionnaire, the frequency of each response strategy used was counted (Table 5 and 6). A total of 323 strategies were used by American respondents, whereas there were 305 strategies used among Japanese respondents. Of all the response types, overall, excuse (216) was used most frequently while the high face threatening refusal (insult/attack), which appeared only once among Americans, was the least frequently used strategy. The U.S. data showed that excuse (114) was the most frequently used strategy followed by suggestion or offer of alternative solutions (69). Japanese respondents also used excuse the most frequent (102) followed by apology (70) and suggestion or offer of alternative solutions (61). Japanese (76.1%) used apology substantially more than Americans (23.9%). Their use of apology showed a different pattern from that of American respondents, that is, 11 respondents apologized twice, in the beginning of the response and in the end as follows, while only one American respondent used apology twice in the response. For example:

(1) moshiwake nai kedo (apology)

     ("I am sorry, but")

     hontoni tasukete agetai kedomo (wish)

     ("I wish I could help you, but")

     ima isogashi node (excuse)

     ("since I'm busy now.")

     dekinai desu (negative ability)

     ("I can't.")

     sumimasen (apology)

     ("I'm sorry.")

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In addition, Americans (81.4%) tended to partially comply with a request significantly more than Japanese (18.6%), and Americans (69.2%) expressed willingness or wish to comply more frequently than Japanese (30.8%).

In contrast, comparing the frequency of used strategy between the two different levels of the social power of requesters revealed that all participants apologized significantly more often when refusing the coworker's request (total = 56, 60.9%) than refusing boss (total = 36, 39.1%), and more future acceptance was used to refuse coworker (total = 38, 62.3%) than to refuse the boss's request (total = 23, 37.7%). In addition, it was found that participants in both countries completely accepted boss's request (total = 10, 90.9%) more often than coworker's request (total = 1, 9.1%). Table 6 shows that complete acceptance appeared more often in the responses to polite request (72.7%) than in the ones to less polite request (27.3%). This indicates that both Americans and Japanese are more likely to completely accept the request from the higher social status than the equal status's request, and the more polite request than the less polite request. Table 5 and 6 show the summary of the frequency of each strategy by nationality and the requester's social power, and by nationality and the politeness level of request.

Table 5. The frequency of each strategy by nationality and requester's social power

Nationality	Strategy	Boss Total (%)	Coworker Total (%)	Table total (%)
Americans	High face-threatening refusal	0 (0%)	1 (100.0%)	1 (100%)
	Negative ability	8 (27.6%)	6 (20.7%)	14 (48.3%)
	Apology	7 (7.6%)	15 (16.3%)	22 (23.9%)
	Excuse	51 (23.7%)	62 (28.8%)	113 (52.6%)
	Alternative solutions	30 (23.1%)	39 (30.0%)	69 (53.1%)
	Future acceptance	13 (21.3%)	23 (37.7%)	36 (59.0%)
	wish	12 (46.2%)	6 (23.1%)	18 (69.2%)
	Unwilling acceptance	2 (22.2%)	4 (44.4%)	6 (66.7%)
	Avoidance	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Partial acceptance	19 (44.2%)	16 (37.2%)	35 (81.4%)
	Complete acceptance	7 (63.6%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (63.6%)
	Statement of empathy	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	2 (22.2%)
	Pause fillers	7 (38.9%)	1 (5.6%)	8 (44.4%)
Japanese	High face-threatening refusal	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Negative ability	6 (20.7%)	9 (31.0%)	15 (51.7%)
	Apology	29 (31.5%)	41 (44.6%)	70 (76.1%)
	Excuse	50 (23.3%)	52 (24.2%)	102 (47.4%)
	Alternative solutions	33 (25.4%)	28 (21.5%)	61 (46.9%)
	Future acceptance	10 (16.4%)	15 (24.6%)	25 (41.0%)
	Wish	1 (3.8%)	7 (26.9%)	8 (30.8%)
	Unwilling acceptance	1 (11.1%)	2 (22.2%)	3 (33.3%)
	Avoidance	2 (28.6%)	5 (71.4%)	7 (100.0%)
	Partial acceptance	3 (7.0%)	5 (11.6%)	8 (18.6%)

Complete acceptance	3 (27.3%)	1 (9.1%)	4 (36.4%)
Statement of empathy	2 (22.2%)	5 (55.6%)	7 (77.8%)
Pause fillers	2 (11.1%)	8 (44.4%)	10 (55.6%)

Table 6. The frequency of each strategy by nationality and politeness level of request

Nationality	Strategy	More polite Total (%)	Less polite Total (%)	Table total (%)
Americans	High face-threatening refusal	1 (100.0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100.0%)
	Negative ability	5 (17.2%)	9 (31.0%)	14 (48.3%)
	Apology	10 (10.9%)	12 (13.0%)	22 (23.9%)
	Excuse	57 (26.5%)	56 (26.0%)	113 (52.6%)
	Alternative solutions	32 (24.6%)	37 (28.5%)	69 (53.1%)
	Future acceptance	19 (31.1%)	17 (27.9%)	36 (59.0%)
	Wish	8 (30.8%)	10 (38.5%)	18 (69.2%)
	Unwilling acceptance	2 (22.2%)	4 (44.4%)	6 (66.7%)
	Avoidance	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0.0%)
	Partial acceptance	22 (51.2%)	13 (30.2%)	35 (81.4%)
	Complete acceptance	4 (36.4%)	3 (27.3%)	7 (63.6%)
	Statement of empathy	2 (22.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (22.2%)
	Pause fillers	4 (22.2%)	4 (22.2%)	8 (44.4%)
Japanese	High face-threatening refusal	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0.0%)
	Negative ability	7 (24.1%)	8 (27.6%)	15 (51.7%)
	Apology	33 (35.9%)	37 (40.2%)	70 (76.1%)
	Excuse	54 (25.1%)	48 (22.3%)	102 (47.4%)
	Alternative solutions	30 (23.1%)	31 (23.8%)	61 (46.9%)

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Future acceptance	10 (16.4%)	15 (24.6%)	25 (41.0%)
Wish	7 (26.9%)	1 (3.8%)	8 (30.8%)
Unwilling acceptance	3 (33.3%)	0 (0%)	3 (33.3%)
Avoidance	2 (28.6%)	5 (71.4%)	7 (100.0%)
Partial acceptance	3 (7.0%)	5 (11.6%)	8 (18.6%)
Complete acceptance	4 (36.4%)	0 (0%)	4 (36.4%)
Statement of empathy	4 (44.4%)	3 (33.3%)	7 (77.8%)
Pause fillers	6 (33.3%)	4 (22.2%)	10 (55.6%)

Order of Strategy

In American data, most respondents used excuse (51) in the beginning of the response while suggestion of alternative solutions (43) was used the most as the final strategy. Among Japanese respondents, most of the responses began with apology (51), and ended with suggestion of alternative solutions (41). The kinds of strategy used in the beginning and the end of the responses by requester's social power and by politeness level of request are presented in table 7, 8, 9 and 10.

Table 7. The frequency of first strategy by nationality and requester's social power

Nationality	Strategy	Requester		Total
		Boss	Coworker	
American	High face-threatening refusal	0	1	1
	Negative ability	3	2	5
	Apology	4	11	15
	Excuse	21	30	51
	Suggestion of alternative solutions	5	2	7
	Statement of future acceptance	2	4	6
	Wish/willingness	8	4	12
	Unwilling acceptance	2	3	5
	Partial acceptance	10	6	16
	Complete acceptance	7	0	7
	Total	62	63	125
Japanese	Negative ability	0	1	1
	Apology	27	24	51
	Excuse	12	15	27
	Suggestion of alternative solutions	1	0	1
	Wish/willingness	0	4	4
	Unwilling acceptance	0	2	2
	Avoidance	0	1	1
	Partial acceptance	2	1	3
	Complete acceptance	3	1	4
	Total	45	49	94

Table 8. The frequency of first strategy by nationality and politeness level of the request

Nationality	Strategy	Politeness level of request		Total
		More polite	Less polite	
American	High face-threatening refusal	1	0	1
	Negative ability	2	3	5
	Apology	6	9	15
	Excuse	30	21	51
	Suggestion of alternative solutions	1	6	7
	Statement of future acceptance	5	1	6
	Wish/willingness	6	6	12
	Unwilling acceptance	1	4	5
	Partial acceptance	8	8	16
	Complete acceptance	4	3	7
	Total	64	61	125
Japanese	Negative ability	0	1	1
	Apology	20	31	51
	Excuse	16	11	27
	Suggestion of alternative solutions	0	1	1
	Wish/willingness	4	0	4
	Unwilling acceptance	2	0	2
	Avoidance	0	1	1
	Partial acceptance	1	2	3
	Complete acceptance	4	0	4
	Total	47	47	94

Table 9. The frequency of the last strategy by nationality and requester's social power

Nationality	Strategy	Requester		Total
		Boss	Coworker	
American	High face-threatening refusal	8	3	11
	Negative ability	4	1	5
	Apology	1	2	3
	Excuse	13	11	24
	Suggestion of alternative solutions	20	23	43
	Statement of future acceptance	10	13	23
	Wish/willingness	1	2	3
	Unwilling acceptance	0	1	1
	Partial acceptance	5	7	12
	Total	62	63	125
Japanese	High face-threatening refusal	1	3	4
	Negative ability	0	1	1
	Direct refusal	3	1	4
	Apology	1	8	9
	Excuse	3	4	7
	Suggestion of alternative solutions	25	16	41
	Statement of future acceptance	9	9	18
	Unwilling acceptance	1	0	1
	Avoidance	2	3	5
	Partial acceptance	0	4	4
	Total	45	49	94

Table 10. The frequency of the last strategy by nationality and politeness level of request

Nationality	Strategy	Politeness level of request		Total
		More polite	Less polite	
American	High face-threatening refusal	9	2	11
	Negative ability	2	3	5
	Apology	2	1	3
	Excuse	10	14	24
	Suggestion of alternative solutions	20	23	43
	Statement of future acceptance	10	13	23
	Wish/willingness	1	2	3
	Unwilling acceptance	1	0	1
	Partial acceptance	9	3	12
	Total	64	61	125
Japanese	High face-threatening refusal	3	1	4
	Direct refusal	1	0	1
	Negative ability	1	3	4
	Apology	7	2	9
	Excuse	4	3	7
	Suggestion of alternative solutions	19	22	41
	Statement of future acceptance	9	9	18
	Unwilling acceptance	1	0	1
	Avoidance	1	4	5
	Partial acceptance	1	3	4
	Total	47	47	94

Number of Strategy

The research question asked if American and Japanese people's use of indirectness in request refusals is different by the social power of the requester and the politeness level of the request. First, a 2 (nationality) × 2 (requester's social power) × 2 (politeness level of request) Analysis of Variance was used to examine the difference in the number of strategies used in refusal responses in each scenario between the two nationalities. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for nationality, $F(1, 211) = 24.03, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$, indicating that Japanese respondents ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.12$) used more refusal strategies than did Americans ($M = 2.58, SD = .85$) (Table 8). The analysis also showed a significant main effect for the social power of the requester, $F(1, 211) = 6.27, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Participants in both countries used more strategies when refusing the coworker's request ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.07$) than when refusing the request of a boss ($M = 2.69, SD = .96$) (Table 11). However, the main effect for the politeness level of a request was not significant, $F(1, 211) = .01, p = .92$. How many strategies people use in request refusals did not differ between the more polite requests ($M = 2.86, SD = 1.12$) and the less polite requests ($M = 2.87, SD = .94$) (Table 11). The interaction effect for nationality and requester's social power was not significant, $F(1, 211) = .002, p = .962$, that is, both Americans (coworker: $M = 2.75, SD = .82$, boss: $M = 2.42, SD = .86$) and Japanese (coworker: $M = 3.41, SD = 1.24$, boss: $M = 3.07, SD = .96$) used more strategies in their response to the coworker's request than to the boss's request. There was no significant interaction effect for nationality and politeness level of request either, $F(1, 211) = .69, p = .407$. For Americans, the number of strategies used in the more polite request ($M = 2.53, SD = .89$) and the less polite request ($M = 2.64, SD = .82$) did not differ from each other. Similarly, for Japanese, the number of strategies used to respond to the more polite request ($M = 3.32, SD = 1.24$) did not differ from the number of strategies used in responses to the less polite request ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.01$). Also, the interaction effect for politeness level and requester's social power did not show a significant difference, $F(1, 211) = .87, p = .35$.

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When responding to the request from a boss, the number of strategies people use did not differ between the more polite request ($M = 2.63$, $SD = .96$) and the less polite request ($M = 2.75$, $SD = .96$). In responding to the coworker's request, the number of strategies used to the more polite request ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.21$) and the less polite request ($M = 2.98$, $SD = .91$) did not differ from each other.

Therefore, in responding to the request, Japanese used more strategies than Americans. In addition, both Americans and Japanese used more numbers of strategies to respond to coworker's request than to boss's request. The data showed no significant effect based upon the politeness of the requests.

Table 11. Mean and standard deviation of the number of strategies used in request responses

Variables		Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	American	2.58	.85
	Japanese	3.24	1.12
Requester's social power	Boss	2.69	.96
	Coworker	3.04	1.07
Politeness level	Polite	2.86	1.12
	Less polite	2.87	.94

Degree of Imposition

The hierarchy ranking of response strategies based on the degree of face threats (Table 1) was used in order to assess the overall degree of face threat in each open-ended request response. The ranking of response strategies includes *high face-threatening refusal* (insult/attack) as the highest face-threatening strategy, which scored one, and *complete acceptance* as the lowest face-threatening strategy, scored 12, and a higher

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number of hierarchy score indicated a lesser degree of face threats (Table 1). Initially, a sum of the hierarchy scores of each strategy's degree of face threat was divided by the number of strategies used in each response to obtain the mean of the degree of face-threat in each response. The obtained score for each response was considered as the overall degree of face threat of the response. ANOVA was used to compare the degree of face threat of responses, showing Americans' responses were less in imposition than the ones used by Japanese. Thus, Americans tended to decrease the imposition more than Japanese when responding to other's requests.

However, this result appeared to be counterintuitive considering all the claims made in the literature comparing Japanese and American communication. Averaging scores for use of strategies does not fully capture the impact of the use of multiple strategies as an indirect mitigated means of expressing inability to help other people. Thus, the analysis was repeated based on an index of scores created by simply summering up all the ranking of all strategies used. Hence, if someone responded using a strategy ranked 2 (direct refusal), 5 (excuse), and 6 (suggestion of alternative solutions), this response was assigned a score of 13. The obtained scores were treated as the degrees of face-threats of the response; the higher the number, the lesser the face-threats of the response were. Then, again, a 2 (nationality) × 2 (requester's social power) × 2 (politeness level of request) ANOVA was used to compare the degree of face threat of responses. The results showed that a main effect for nationality was not significance, $F(1, 211) = 3.15, p = .077$. However, the closer examination of mean scores indicated that Japanese respondents ($M = 17.76, SD = 5.63$) used a lower degree of face-threatening responses than did American respondents ($M = 16.31, SD = 5.92$) (Table 12). Japanese responses were less in imposition than the ones used by Americans, that is, Japanese tended to decrease the imposition more than Americans when responding to other's requests. According to the analysis, the main effect for requester's social power was not significant, $F(1, 211) = 2.26, p = .134$. However, a closer examination in mean scores showed that participants in both

countries reacted differently in responding to the request from their boss ($M = 16.34$, $SD = 5.42$) and in responding to their coworker's request ($M = 17.50$, $SD = 6.16$) (Table 12). American responses to the boss ($M = 15.97$, $SD = 5.36$) included higher imposition than to the coworker ($M = 16.65$, $SD = 6.45$). Similarly, in Japan, the responses to the boss ($M = 16.84$, $SD = 5.52$) were significantly more face-threatening than the ones to the coworker ($M = 18.59$, $SD = 5.66$) (Table 12). That is, a higher degree of face-threatening strategies, which has a larger imposition, was used in responding to those with higher social power than in responding to those whose status were equal. The main effect for politeness level of the request was not significant, $F(1, 211) = .45$, $p = .503$. Participants' use of response strategies did not differ between the more polite request ($M = 17.16$, $SD = 6.54$) and the less polite request ($M = 16.69$, $SD = 5.01$) (Table 12), indicating that the degree of politeness of requests did not affect the imposition of their refusals. In addition, none of the interaction effects were significant, nationality and social power, $F(1, 211) = .44$, $p = .507$, nationality and politeness level, $F(1, 211) = .26$, $p = .612$, and social power and politeness level, $F(1, 211) = .02$, $p = .895$. Also, Japanese respondents used substantially lesser face-threats to the more polite request ($M = 16.23$, $SD = 6.20$) than to the less polite request ($M = 17.28$, $SD = 6.01$) (Table 12).

Table 12. Mean and standard deviation of the degree of face-threat in request refusals

Variables		Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	American	16.31	5.92
	Japanese	17.76	5.63
Requester's social power	Boss	16.34	5.42
	Coworker	17.50	6.16
Politeness level	Polite	17.16	6.54
	Less polite	16.69	5.01

Use of Politeness Marker

The use of politeness markers (e.g. "please") in the open-ended response was examined. Six Americans (4.8%) and 24 Japanese (25.5%) used politeness markers in their responses. In addition, four Americans (3.2%) and 22 Japanese (23.4%) used politeness markers with their boss while two Americans (1.6%) and two Japanese (2.1%) used them with their coworker. That is, significantly more politeness markers were used with those of higher social power for Japanese. Also, politeness markers were used by five Americans (4.0%) and 13 Japanese (13.8%) in the response to the more polite request while one American (.8%) and 11 Japanese (11.7%) used them in responding to the less polite request. Thus, the level of politeness of request did not affect the use of politeness markers.

Use of Mitigation/Reinforcement/Hint

If each strategy was expressed with mitigation (imposition-decreasing device; e.g. the use of modality, "may", "would" etc.), reinforcement (imposition-increasing device; the use of modality, "must", "should" etc.) or hint was examined in order to assess the degree of imposition of the responses. The following scores were entered into a 2 (nationality) × 2 (requester's social power) × 2 (politeness level of request) ANOVA to examine how imposing each response strategy was: 0 = the strategy is not used, 1 = the strategy is expressed with reinforcement, 2 = the strategy does not include either mitigation or reinforcement, 3 = the strategy is expressed with mitigation, and 4 = the strategy was expressed with hint. Thus, the score indicated that the higher, the more indirect and less face-threatening the strategy was expressed. The mean scores and standard deviation of the scores of mitigation and reinforcement for each strategy are presented in the tables (Table 13 – 20).

Table 13. Mean and standard deviation of the degree of mitigation of negative ability (0 = not used, 1 = expressed with reinforcement, 2 = no mitigation or reinforcement, 3 = expressed with mitigation, and 4 = expressed with hint)

Variables		N of people	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	Americans	14	2.71	.47
	Japanese	15	2.73	.46
Requester's social power	Boss	14	2.79	.43
	Coworker	15	2.67	.49
Politeness level	More polite	12	2.75	.45
	Less polite	17	2.71	.47

Table 14. Mean and standard deviation of the degree of mitigation in excuse

Variables		N of people	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	Americans	107	2.28	.47
	Japanese	83	2.16	.37
Requester's social power	Boss	91	2.33	.50
	Coworker	99	2.13	.34
Politeness level	More polite	98	2.27	.44
	Less polite	92	2.18	.42

Table 15. Mean and standard deviation of the degree of mitigation in suggestion of alternative solutions

Variables		N of people	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	Americans	66	2.64	.76
	Japanese	56	2.61	.68
Requester's social power	Boss	58	2.69	.71
	Coworker	64	2.56	.73
Politeness level	More polite	56	2.64	.67
	Less polite	66	2.61	.76

Table 16. Mean and standard deviation of the degree of mitigation in promise of future acceptance

Variables		N of people	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	Americans	34	2.35	.485
	Japanese	24	2.50	.590
Requester's social power	Boss	22	2.59	.503
	Coworker	36	2.31	.525
Politeness level	More polite	28	2.36	.559
	Less polite	30	2.47	.507

Table 17. Mean and standard deviation of the degree of mitigation in unwilling acceptance

Variables		N of people	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	Americans	6	2.17	.41
	Japanese	3	2.33	1.53
Requester's social power	Boss	3	2.67	1.16
	Coworker	6	2.00	.63
Politeness level	More polite	5	2.40	1.14
	Less polite	4	2.00	.00

Table 18. Mean and standard deviation of the degree of mitigation in avoidance

Variables		N of people	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	Americans	0		
	Japanese	7	2.29	.95
Requester's social power	Boss	2	3.00	.00
	Coworker	5	2.00	1.00
Politeness level	More polite	2	3.00	.00
	Less polite	5	2.00	1.00

Table 19. Mean and standard deviation of the degree of mitigation in partial acceptance

Variables		N of people	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	Americans	33	2.21	.42
	Japanese	8	2.25	.46
Requester's social power	Boss	22	2.14	.35
	Coworker	19	2.32	.48
Politeness level	More polite	23	2.13	.34
	Less polite	18	2.33	.49

Table 20. Mean and standard deviation of the degree of mitigation in complete acceptance

Variables		N of people	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nationality	Americans	7	2.00	.00
	Japanese	4	2.25	.50
Requester's social power	Boss	10	2.10	.32
	Coworker	1	2.00	
Politeness level	More polite	8	2.13	.35
	Less polite	3	2.00	.00

First, no significant result was detected in *high face threatening* and *direct refusal* strategies since only one subject used the high face-threatening refusal while no response included the direct refusal strategy. In addition, apology and statement of wish/willingness in request refusals have the illocutionary force of mitigation themselves. Also, statement of wish or willingness, which is usually expressed as "I wish I *could*" or "I *would* like to", can not be expressed without using the linguistic means of mitigation.

Thus, the use of linguistic mitigation in apology and statement of wish/willingness was not examined.

When stating *negative ability* to comply with the request, respondents used modal verbs to mitigate the effects of their refusal responses, such as, "I *don't think* I can". There was no significant main effect for either nationality, $F(1, 21) = 1.28$, $p = .27$, requester's social power, $F(1, 21) = 0.11$, $p = .75$, or politeness level of request, $F(1, 21) = .02$, $p = .91$. The use of mitigation in negative ability did not differ between Americans ($M = 2.71$, $SD = .47$) and Japanese ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .46$), between the boss's request ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .43$) and the coworker's request ($M = 2.67$, $SD = .49$), and between the more polite request ($M = 2.75$, $SD = .45$) and less polite request ($M = 2.71$, $SD = .47$). However, there was a significant interaction effect for requester's social power and politeness level of request, $F(1, 21) = 5.31$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$. In responding to their boss's request, respondents in both countries used more mitigation to less polite request ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .33$) than more polite request ($M = 2.60$, $SD = .55$) while in responding to their coworker's request, they used more mitigation to more polite request ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .38$) than less polite request ($M = 2.50$, $SD = .54$). No significant interaction effect was found either for nationality and requester's social power, $F(1, 21) = .01$, $p = .94$, or nationality and politeness level of request, $F(1, 21) = 1.19$, $p = .29$.

In *excuse*, mitigation was expressed by downgrading the degree of strength of expressed reasons, for instance:

(2) I'm not *really* a computer whiz. (excuse)

I'll see if I can help, (partial acceptance)

but if I can't, I'll try and recruit someone else to help instead. (suggestion of alternative solutions)

By saying "I'm not *really* a computer whiz" instead of "I'm not a computer whiz", the speaker can soften the degree of assertiveness of his or her excuse, and thus, can decrease the degree of imposition. There was a significant main effect for nationality, $F(1, 182) =$

5.22, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = 03$, and requester's social power, $F(1, 182) = 10.10$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. Americans ($M = 2.28$, $SD = .47$) use more mitigation in their excuses than did Japanese ($M = 2.16$, $SD = .37$) as well as more mitigation is used to an excuse to the boss ($M = 2.33$, $SD = .50$) than to the coworker ($M = 2.13$, $SD = .34$). The result did not show a significant main effect for politeness level in request, $F(1, 182) = 1.31$, $p = .26$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$. The level of mitigation in excuses did not differ between the response to the more polite request ($M = 2.27$, $SD = .44$) and to the less polite request ($M = 2.18$, $SD = .42$). There was no significant interaction effect found in the use of mitigation in excuses either for nationality and requester's social power, $F(1, 182) = 1.80$, $p = 1.82$, nationality and politeness level, $F(1, 182) = 2.39$, $p = 1.24$, or requester's social power and politeness level of the request, $F(1, 182) = .16$, $p = .690$. However, the closer examination of the mean indicated that Americans mitigated their excuse significantly more to their boss ($M = 2.44$, $SD = .54$) than to their coworker ($M = 2.15$, $SD = .36$) as well as more to the more polite request ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .49$) than to the less polite request ($M = 2.19$, $SD = .45$). Japanese respondents' use of mitigation in their excuses did not differ between their boss and their coworker, and between the more polite request and the less polite request.

Most of the mitigation in *suggestion of alternative solutions* in English was done with the use of modals and the expression of intention, such as, "I think" or "I believe", or a question form, such as:

(3) *I think* you *would* be better off using another computer.

(4) How about if you use my computer to send your e-mail while I fix your computer?

Whereas in Japanese, it was mostly expressed in a question form:

(5) yoroshi kereba motto pasokon ni kuwashii kata ni tanonde itadake naide shouka?

("Could you ask someone else who is more familiar with computers if it's ok for you?)

(6) dareka wakari souna hito o yonde kima shouka?

("Shall I bring someone who might be familiar with this?")

There was no significant effect found either for nationality, F (1, 114) = .21, p = .65, requester's social power, F (1, 114) = 1.21, p = .27, or politeness level of the request, F (1, 114) = .35, p =.56. There was no difference in people's use of mitigation and reinforcement between Americans (M = 2.64, SD = .76) and Japanese (M = 2.61, SD = .68), between the boss (M = 2.69, SD = .71) and the coworker (M = 2.56, SD = .73), and between the more polite request (M = 2.64, SD = .67) and the less polite request (M = 2.61, SD = .76). Also, no interaction effect showed significance, nationality and requester's social power, F (1, 114) = .35, p = .553, nationality and politeness level of the request, F (1, 114) = .10, p = .753, and requester's social power and politeness level of the request, F (1, 114) = .42, p = .518.

Statement of future acceptance was mitigated by the use of question forms in English, as in the following examples:

(7)   Would it be ok if I come back to fix it another time?

(8)   Can this wait until later today?

(7) and (8) looked like questions, but are actually requests and offers of future acceptance, which made the utterance have three different illocutionary acts: a question, request, and offer.   By including more than one illocutionary forces, the utterance increased its degree of politeness and decreased its degree of impositions.   Also, a condition was added to mitigate the offer or promise of future acceptance in English, for example:

(9)   *If you want to,* my internet is working, so you can save your file to a disk and send it
       quickly on my computer *if you like.*

Sugimoto (1999) finds that more Americans are tend to use the conditional offer than Japanese.   She points out that by providing the condition with "if you want to" or "if you like", the speaker expresses his or her hesitation of being obligated to remedy the face-threats of his or her refusals since Americans tend to be less willing to commit themselves to remedy.   On the other hand, Japanese used question forms or modals to mitigate the offer of the future acceptance, such as:

(10) mou sukoshi matte morae masen ka?

("Could you wait for a little?")

(11) ato de otetsudai shitai to omoimasu.

("I would like to help you later.")

There was a significant main effect for requester's social power in the use of mitigation, F (1, 50) = 4.92, $p < .05$, partial η^2 = .09. When promising or offering for future acceptance in response to a request, the response to the boss (M = 2.59, SD = .50) was more mitigated than the one to the coworker (M = 2.31, SD = .53). The result showed that, in expressing their future compliance with a request, both American and Japanese respondents are more likely to decrease the imposition of their utterance in responding to those with higher social status than to those who have equal social status regardless of the level of politeness of the request. No significant effect was found for nationality, F (1, 50) = .18, p = .68, and politeness level of request, F (1, 50) = .18, p = .68. Americans (M = 2.35, SD = .49) and Japanese (M = 2.50, SD = .59) did not differ in the use of mitigation in the statement of future acceptance, and politeness level in a request did not affect the level of mitigation in its response (polite request: M = 2.36, SD = .56, less polite request: M = 2.47, SD = .51). However, the result showed a significant interaction effect for requester's social power and politeness level of request, F (1, 50) = 6.04, $p < .05$, partial η^2 = .004. When responding to the more polite request, mitigation was used more often to the boss (M = 2.73, SD = .47) than to the coworker (M = 2.12, SD = .49) while for the response to the less polite request, the use of mitigation did not differ between responding to the boss (M = 2.45, SD = .52) and to the coworker (M = 2.47, SD = .51).

Unwilling acceptance can be a very indirect refusal as it indicates the acceptance of a request as well as one's unwillingness to comply with it. In most cases, one's inability to comply with the request was indicated with his or her acceptance of the request in both countries, for example:

(12) betsuni kamahen kedo (unwilling acceptance)

("I don't mind helping, but")

naosuno ni chito jikan kakaru kara na (excuse)

("It takes time to fix it")

ore mo sena akan koto yosan aru shi… (excuse)

("I have so much stuff to do, so…")

ima sugu ya nai to akan ka?

("Does it have to be fixed immediately?")

mou sukoshi ato nara tetsudau koto dekiru kedo… (future acceptance)

("I can help you with it a little later though…")

None of the Japanese respondents used an expression that unwillingly accepted a request in responding to any of the requests with less politeness. Though a response of unwilling acceptance was used only by nine respondents, the result showed a significant main effect for requester's social power, F (1, 4) = 10.00, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .71$. Mitigation was used more often with their boss ($M = 2.67$, $SD = .1.16$) than with their coworker ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .63$). There was no significant main effect for either nationality, F (1, 4) = 4.00, $p = .116$, or politeness level of request, F (1, 4) = 1.00, $p = .374$. American respondents ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .41$) did not differ from Japanese respondents ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.53$) in the use of mitigation in expressing unwilling acceptance. Also, the use of mitigation in stating unwilling acceptance did not differ between refusing the more polite request ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.14$) and refusing the less polite request ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .00$). This analysis did not yield a significant interaction effect between nationality, requester's social power and politeness level of the request due to lack of enough respondents using this strategy.

Avoidance was used only among seven Japanese participants as a refusal strategy. Most of them expressed the avoidance of immediate response to the request, for example:

(13) tada itsu owaru yara…

("But, I just don't know when I can finish with it (= work)…")

(14) dou shima sho?

("What shall I do?")

(15) ima katadzuke naito ikenai koto ga aru kara (excuse)

("I have stuff to get done with now, so")

madzu sore o yarasete okure. (avoidance)

("Let me do it first.")

(13) and (14) were mitigated since (13) expressed one's hesitation for strong assertion and (14) took a question form to leave options to the addressee while (15) was reinforced by the use of an imperative form. No significant main effect was found either for requester's social power, $F(1, 7) = .52$, $p = .521$, or politeness level of the request, $F(1, 7) = .52$, $p = .521$. Thus, the use of mitigation in the strategy of avoidance in Japan was not affected either by the requester's social power nor the degree of politeness of requests. However, the examination of the mean showed that people used more mitigation in the response with their boss's request ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .00$) than with their coworker's request ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.00$), and more in the response to the more polite request ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .00$) than the less polite request ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.00$). Since no American respondents used avoidance in their responses, the analysis did not show a significant main effect for nationality.

In the strategy of *partial acceptance*, mitigation was expressed with an imperative form in English though the imperative form usually yields a reinforcement and imposition, such as:

(16) *Let me* take a quick look.

Since this is an offering of help and an acceptance of the request, it does not cause a face-threat. In addition, mitigation was also expressed in a question form in Japanese or with a use of modality both in English and Japanese as in the following examples:

(17) Chotto mise-te morae-ru?

("*could you* let me take a quick look?")

(18) I *think* I have a few moments to help you

(19) sukoshi misase-te itadaki-masu

("I *would like to* take a quick look")

The analysis did not show any significant effects either for nationality, requester's social power, or politeness level of the request in the use of mitigation in expression partial acceptance. Neither between Americans ($M = 2.21$, $SD = .42$) and Japanese ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .46$), the response with their boss ($M = 2.14$, $SD = .35$) and with their coworker ($M = 2.32$, $SD = .48$), nor the response to the more polite request ($M = 2.13$, $SD = .34$) and to the less polite request ($M = 2.33$, $SD = .49$) differs in the use of mitigation.

The strategy of *complete acceptance* appeared only in eleven responses among the whole data. Mostly, it was expressed with "sure", which indicated higher willingness of compliance than "yes". There was no significant main effect either for nationality, requester's social power, nor politeness level of request. American ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .00$) and Japanese respondents ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .50$) did not differ in their use of mitigation when completely accepting a request. Also, the use of mitigation in complete acceptance did not differ between the responses with their boss ($M = 2.10$, $SD = .32$) and with their coworker ($M = 2.00$, $SD = $ n/a). There was no difference between the response to the more polite request ($M = 2.13$, $SD = .35$) and the less polite request ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .00$) either.

Overall, the frequency of the use of mitigation did not differ between Americans and Japanese respondents. However, there was a difference in the form of mitigations. Japanese respondents used more question forms to mitigate their response, providing options to the addressee, such as a request "dare ka hoka no hito ni kiite morae masen ka? (Could you ask someone else?)" or a offer "dare ka hoka no hito ni kiite mima shou ka? (shall I ask someone else?)". On the other hand, Americans mitigated their response using more modality, such as "you *might* have more success asking someone else".

Adjuncts to Refusal

The adjuncts to refusal responses, *statement of empathy* and *pause filler*, function as mitigation of impositions since they express hesitation and soften the effect of refusals. Six Japanese (75.0%) and two Americans (25.0%) included the expression of their

empathy about the requester's trouble in their responses (e.g. "I'm really sorry you are having trouble", "I suppose you really need my help"). Also, pause fillers express the speaker's hesitation, and thus, decrease the degree of the imposition of the response. English pause fillers, such as "oh", "ah", "umm" or "well", were used in eight responses (47.1%) while Japanese pause fillers, such as "ahh", "etto" or "uhhnn", were used by nine participants (52.9%).

Specificity of Excuse

In order to further assess the degree of indirectness in request responses in the open-ended data, the degree of indirectness of excuses in terms of their specificity was compared between the U.S. and Japan. Each type of excuse was ranked by the scores from 1 to 3 with 1 being the most general excuse to 3 being the most specified excuse (Table 4). As for the responses including more than one excuse, the mean of all the excuse scores was used. An independent-sample t-test was used to compare the mean of the two nationalities. The result did not yield a significant difference between the U.S. and Japan, t (190) = -1.12, p = .266. The degree of specificity of excuses which Americans used (M = 2.05, SD = .77) did not differ from that of Japanese (M = 2.17, SD = .73). In addition, the frequency of each excuse type showed that the three most frequently used excuse types were the same between Americans and Japanese responses: (1) statement of inability to fix the problem ("I'm not good at fixing computers"), (2) statement of one's unavailability related to obligations ("I have lots to do now"), and (3) statement of busyness ("I'm busy now") (Table 21). Therefore, the specificity of excuses used in the request refusals was not different between Americans and Japanese.

Table 21. Frequency of excuse types for American and Japanese refusals

Excuse types (degree of specificity)	American (N = 109)	Japanese (N = 83)
Busyness: "I'm busy." (1 = not specified/general)	19 (8.7%)	15 (6.8%)
One's lack of time: "I don't have time now." (1)	15 (6.8%)	9 (4.1%)
Hint of one's inability: "I don't want to cause any other problems." (1)	2 (0.9%)	2 (0.9%)
One's unavailability related to obligations: "I have lots of work to do." (2 = less specified)	31 (14.2%)	31 (14.2%)
The problem is time-consuming: "It takes time to fix this problem." (2)	12 (5.5%)	8 (3.7%)
Difficulty of the problem: "This problem is hard to fix." (2)	4 (1.8%)	5 (2.3%)
One's inability to fix the problem: "I'm not good at computer stuff." (3 = most specified)	32 (14.6%)	32 (14.6%)
One's inability based on past experience: "I've had the same problem and couldn't fix it." (3)	12 (5.5%)	3 (1.4%)
Superiority of others: "..... knows better about fixing computers." (3)	2 (0.9%)	9 (4.1%)

Summary of Findings

In sum, the present study provided the following findings (bolded are unexpected findings):

- More Americans lean toward communicating their intentions directly, and more Japanese indicate the use of indirect communication.

- It is unlikely that both Americans and Japanese refuse a request by insulting or attacking the requester, or by directly saying "no".

- The use of language and choice of linguistic forms are sensitive to the addressee's social power in Japan.

- The three most frequently used request response strategies in the U.S. are: (1) excuses, (2) suggestion or offer of alternative solutions, and (3) future acceptance.

- The three most frequently used request response strategies in Japan are: (1) excuse, (2) apology, and (3) suggestion or offer of alternative solutions.

- Most American respondents use excuse in the beginning of their responses and suggestion of alternative solutions in the end.

- Most Japanese respondents begin their responses with apology and end them with suggestion of alternative solutions.

- Japanese tend to repeat apology in their refusals.

- **Japanese use more strategies in responding to requests than do Americans.**

- **Both in the U.S. and Japan, more strategies are used to respond to the status equals than to those with higher social power.**

- **More Americans tend to comply with other's requests than do Japanese.**

- Japanese responses to requests indicate lesser degrees of face-threats than American ones.

- More mitigation is used in response strategies in responding to a higher social status individual than in responding to the status equals both in the U.S. and Japan.

- The politeness level of the request does not affect the use of mitigation in response strategies.

- Japanese use more question forms while Americans use more modal verbs to mitigate their responses.

- **The types and the degree of specificity of excuses used in request refusals do not differ between Americans and Japanese. However, Americans use more mitigation in their excuses than Japanese.**

Discussion

This study investigated whether American and Japanese use of indirectness in request refusals is affected by the requester's social power or the politeness degree of the request. The study showed that respondents avoided refusing the other's requests by directly saying "no". Most of them used multiple strategies to refuse the request while some complied. Consistent with previous research (Holtgraves, 1997; Liao & Bresnahan, 1996), the present study found that Americans preferred communicating directly and frankly while Japanese preferred indirect communication, implying their true intentions without explicitly expressing them. However, the response to requests did not necessarily reflect this preference in communication styles in the U.S. and Japan.

The analysis revealed that more Americans tended to comply with the request than did Japanese. This was an unexpected result since Japanese, as members of a collectivist culture, should be more likely to value the empathy and cooperation with the in-group members more than Americans (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Gudykunst, Yoon & Nishida, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 1988). It was predicted that more Japanese would comply with the other's requests compared to Americans. However, the results showed that Japanese used more strategies in request responses than did Americans, indicating that Japanese tend to mitigate the imposition of their refusals by using multiple strategies. This result shows that Japanese use more strategies to decrease the imposition of their refusals, whereas Americans prefer to comply with the other's request rather than refusing it and mitigating their refusals.

Also, it was rather unexpected that more strategies were used in the response to the coworker than in the response to the boss for both Americans and Japanese considering

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that the use of multiple strategies decreases the imposition of the response, and higher mitigation is more likely to be used to the higher social status individuals. However, this may be attributed to the result that more respondents tended to accept, both partially and completely, their boss's requests than those of their coworker's. Since a response of acceptance does not require the mitigation by using multiple strategies, the responses to the boss might have been shorter. Also, Liao & Bresnahan (1996) find that in Asian culture, people want to finish an awkward, face-threatening interaction as soon as possible. Since Japanese did not comply with the other's request as often as Americans, the shorter response to a higher social status individual in Japan may have been resulted from people trying to get away with a face-threatening situation as soon as possible. Since social power is an important factor that determines Japanese people's language use (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Kitao, 1989), refusing a higher social status individual can be a very high face-threatening situation for Japanese, which they want to avoid. These two explanations for the difference in number of strategies used in the responses to the higher social status and to the status equals imply that a simpler and quicker response is preferred when responding to the higher social power individuals both in the U.S. and Japan.

The most frequently used strategies in request responses were similar across nationalities and scenarios. The frequently used strategies were: excuse, suggestion of alternative solutions, promise of future acceptance, and apology both in the U.S. and Japan. This seemed to be contrary to the results that Americans preferred direct communication while Japanese preferred indirect communication style over direct communication. Because of this difference in the preference in communication styles, the choices of strategies could have differed between the two cultures. That is, Americans could have chosen more direct strategies while Japanese could have used more indirect ones. It might have been due to the limited response situation of the scenarios in this study that the choices of response strategies between Americans and Japanese respondents were similar.

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A closer examination of the number of frequencies of each strategy revealed some characteristics in the use of strategies in each country. First, although the frequently used response strategies were similar, the order of the strategies used differed between Americans and Japanese. In American responses, excuse appeared in the beginning of the response and suggestion of alternative solutions was most frequently used as a final strategy. On the other hand, Japanese used apology in the beginning of their responses and suggestion of alternative solutions in the end. Inconsistent with Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz's (1990) finding that Japanese start with apology only when the requester's social power is higher, however, in the present study, the use of apology as a first strategy did not differ regardless of the requester's social power.

Secondly, the use of apology appeared to be more important for Japanese than Americans; Japanese used apology significantly more frequently, especially to those with higher social status, and significantly more Japanese responses started with apology. This is consistent with the past research pointing out that Japanese apologize more often than do Americans in the situations where face-threats occur, especially to those with higher social power (Kitao, 1989; Kotani, 1999; Sugimoto, 1999). The tendency that Japanese repeat apologies, mostly in the beginning and in the end of their responses, also represents the importance of the use of apology in Japan. Apology is a relatively direct refusal since the speaker's intention to refuse is clear when it is used in request responses. However, as it is a mitigation device, which prevents the potential face-threats (Holmes, 1990), Japanese tend to apologize to handle the face-threatening situation. On the other hand, Americans were more likely to move towards fulfilling the requester's needs by suggesting alternative solutions, promising future acceptance, accepting the request partially, or completely accepting them, rather than expressing their feelings (i.e. apology, statement of willingness/wish, or statement of empathy). Thus, in terms of the clearness of the speaker's intention, Americans are more direct in request responses than Japanese; Americans show their intention more clearly. While Japanese tend to either not refuse

requests directly or comply with them and are more concerned about mitigating their refusals, Americans indicate their intention to be cooperative to the requester more clearly.

The use of mitigation in each response strategy did not significantly differ between Americans and Japanese. The degree of politeness of the request did not significantly affect the respondents' use of mitigations while the requester's social power had some effects on their use of mitigations. However, although the similar degrees of mitigation were included in the response to the request between Americans and Japanese, the means of mitigation indicated a different tendency between the two cultures. Mitigation of responses used in the U.S. was mostly expressed by the use of modal verbs, such as "I *could* ask someone else if you want", whereas Japanese used more question forms to mitigate their responses, that is, they requested back or gave an offer more often, such as, "could you wait for a while?", "do you mind asking someone else?" or "shall I ask someone else?". The question form requests or offers for alternative solutions used in request refusals give options to the addressee and can be less imposing than the responses mitigated by modality, such as "*maybe* someone else *could* help you". Therefore, Japanese tend to use more indirect and less face-threatening than do Americans. Thus, considering that the frequently used strategies did not differ between Americans and Japanese, the difference in indirectness of refusals between the two cultures may be found in the ways to mitigate, and not in the use of strategy itself.

Two different approaches were taken to examine the degree of face threats and indirectness in each response to the request. The hierarchy scores of response strategies, which ranked the strategies from the most face-threatening and the most direct strategies to the least face-threatening and the least direct strategies, were used for the analysis. First, the average face threats scores of strategies for each response were used to compare the overall degree of face threats of responses of Americans and Japanese. The result indicated that the response of Americans was less face-threatening than that of Japanese. However, this result appeared to simply reflect the tendency that more Americans

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complied with the requests than did Japanese as partial and complete acceptance of the request were ranked as less face-threatening strategies. Moreover, taking the average of the scores of strategies used in each response did not reflect the effect of the use of multiple strategies. Then, as a solution, instead of taking the average scores, face threats hierarchy scores of each strategy used in each response were simply summed up by responses and used as a score of overall degree of face threats for the response. This approach revealed the opposite result; Japanese people's response was less face-threatening than American ones. One might question the use of sum of the face-threat scores of each strategy in the latter analysis since if the response with higher degree of face threats is used multiple times in one response, the face-threat score of the response gets higher, which indicates the higher degree of mitigation in the response though the response actually is highly face-threatening. However, it can be justified since the high face-threatening refusal appeared only once in the data, and no one repeated it in the response. Therefore, these two different approaches showed the different tendencies of request responses between Americans and Japanese. Americans do not use as many strategies as do Japanese and tend to use less-face threatening and less direct refusals or comply with the request. On the other hand, Japanese tend to use more direct and face-threatening refusals while employing larger numbers of strategies to mitigate their refusals. This reflects the fact that Japanese used more apologies while Americans used more strategies which aim at fulfilling the requester's needs since apology was ranked as more direct refusals than the practical strategies, such as suggestion of alternative solutions or statement of future acceptance. In addition, the latter approach using the sum of scores showed that a lesser degree of high-threatening response was used to the status equals than the higher social status. However, this reflected the use of larger number of strategies to status equals than those with higher social power. Indeed, the former analysis using the average of scores indicated the use of the response with the lesser degree of face-threats to the higher social power than the status equals. Thus, simpler and shorter responses with strategies of lower

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degrees of face-threats and directness are used in the response to those whose social power is higher, whereas responses to the status equals contain multiple strategies, but the degree of face-threats and directness in each strategy are higher.

Although, for Japanese, the social power is an important social factor and people determine their language choices and politeness use by their interactants' social power (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Kitao, 1989), the strategies they used for request responses do not change by the requester's social status; Japanese used similar strategies both to the higher social power and the status equals, just adding more politeness and honorifics in responses to those with higher social status. This indicates that the importance of social power does affect the use of honorifics and politeness, but not the use of response strategies. Japanese social systems require people to change their language use properly by who they communicate with (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Kitao, 1989), but saving the face of the status equals is also important for Japanese as well as avoiding the face-loss of those with higher social status as they are in-group members. As a result, Japanese employed a similar degree of face-threats and indirectness for their request refusals in responding to both the higher social power individuals and equal social power individuals.

In addition, the degree of directness/indirectness of contents of excuses was also examined. Inconsistent with the finding of Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) that Japanese use less specific excuses than do Americans, in the present study, the types and the specificity of excuse used in request refusals was not different between the participants from the two cultures. It was possible that the scenarios limited the variety of the kinds of excuses, and thus, the types of the excuses used in the U.S. and Japan did not differ. However, Americans used more mitigation in excuses by downgrading the strength of the assertion of their excuses. The reason for this appeared that Japanese mitigate their responses using apology before uttering excuses.

Conclusion

Request refusals are cognitively demanding speech acts since the refuser is required to save the requester's face not to ruin the personal relationship with him or her while rejecting the compliance with the asked request. Request refusals have to be chosen in relation to the request to be refused; the degree of face-threats, which the refuser may cause, depends on the degree of face-threats of the request. Thus, request refusals, which require high communication competence, reflect multiple social aspects and cultural values in their language use.

This study compared the differences in indirectness used in request refusals between Americans and Japanese, and investigated whether the requester's social power and the degree of politeness of the request affect the indirectness of the request response by eliciting the written request response messages. However, some people complied with the request in the scenarios, and it was unlikely that people say directly "no" in responding to requests. It was also noticeable that people used multiple refusal strategies to minimize the negative effect of their refusals. The findings suggest the preferences and tendencies of indirect or direct communication in a culture do not necessarily represent all the speech acts of the culture. In face sensitive situations, where people have to manage both the speaker's and the hearer's face threats, the preferences in communication styles can not be always applied. In fact, though Americans prefer direct communication styles while Japanese tend to communicate indirectly, the strategies used for request responses do not differ between Americans and Japanese. In addition, though Japanese, as a collectivist culture, value group harmony, they tend to refuse other's requests more often than do Americans, whose culture is individualistic. The study shows that Americans are more likely to try to fulfill the requester's needs in some way when they can not fully comply with the request rather than expressing their inner-states. On the other hand, Japanese try to mitigate their refusals more by apologizing and employing multiple strategies.

The effect of the social power of the requester is similar between Americans and Japanese in request responses. The response to the request from those with higher social power includes lesser degree of face-threats than the one from equal status individuals. Also, both Americans and Japanese prefer simpler and shorter responses to the request from those whose social power is higher. The study reveals that the value of the social power in Japanese society is reflected in the use of honorifics or politeness, and not in the use of strategies they use in particular communicative situations. Also, this study attempts to introduce the politeness level of the request as a factor to affect the response to consider. However, though the results showed some effects, they are not significant enough to indicate that the politeness in requests change people's reactions to the requests.

The methodology and analysis of this study has some limitations to consider. First, the use of elicited written message rather than the naturally occurring data for examining language use and speech behavior may be problematic. Responses which participants provided were projected responses, which they think they would say, and not what they actually utter in the actual situation. Therefore, participants could have been braver to refuse the request in the scenario than in the real life situation. Secondly, the written data left out face expressions or tone of voice, which may significantly affect the degree of indirectness and face-threats of the response. However, Japanese rely significantly on non-verbal aspects of communication (Ueda, 1974), and thus, the variety of indirectness would have been expressed in face expressions, tones of voice, or gestures. Thirdly, the request situation used for this study could have refined the variety of refusals. Since the situation of the scenario included the urgent request, which required the compliance right away, more participants might have tended to comply with it or provided more specified responses. If the request had been the one without urgency and required the compliance in far future, more unspecified responses would have obtained. Also, concerning the analysis, in the present study, each unit in response data was categorized into response strategy types, and the analysis was done comparing the use of strategies. Therefore, the

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contents or detailed words choices used in each strategy in each response was not examined, and thus, the differences in indirectness or directness caused by the differences in expressions or word choices were not reflected in the analysis of the present study. In addition, the rank order of the response strategy used for the analysis (Table 1) may be controversial.

There is also a limitation concerning generalizability. Participants of this study consist of only a small number of college undergraduate and graduate students, which do not represent the whole population of each culture. In addition, as the scenario was set in the workplace situation, the results may not be generalized to other speech situations. Also, the situation of workplace in the scenario was not what students were involved in in their actual lives. However, since college students represent homogeneous characteristics across cultures, students are often chosen as subjects in the cross-cultural research, where communicative behaviors are compared between different cultures. The workplace situation can also be rationalized since the social power relationship between the boss and the subordinate are clearer and more consistent than the power relationship between the professor and the student across cultures.

Despite these limitations, however, this study indicates enough evidence of cross-cultural differences in communication styles in request refusals between Americans and Japanese. In face-threatening situations, Americans can be as indirect as Japanese in the use of strategies and mitigations. It is unlikely for people in both cultures to refuse other's requests directly or blatantly. The cultural difference of indirectness in request refusals provided by the present study is that Americans' request responses are more direct than Japanese ones in that they more clearly indicates their standpoints; Americans move towards the compliance of the other's requests. Japanese can be considered to be more indirect since their standpoints between refusal and compliance is ambiguous; Japanese are more interested in softening the effect of face-threats of their refusals when they are not able to comply with the requests.

This study suggests the direction for the importance of noticing that the cultural preference in direct or indirect communication styles is not universal. Assuming that the U.S. is a direct communication culture causes a danger of misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. It is also important to notice that Japanese indirectness does not come from their unclearness of intention or indecisiveness; it is their way of mitigation. Since request refusals are cognitively demanding communicative acts, their indirectness is highly complicated. In future research, it is important to investigate the ways indirectness is expressed in request refusals considering additional aspects in communication, tone of voice, facial expressions or gaps, in sequential conversational exchanges.

Appendix A: Four different Scenario types

Scenario 1 (Requester: higher social power, Request: higher degree of politeness)

Suppose your boss at your work is having trouble with the Internet on his computer. One day, when you walk by at your boss's desk, he asks you to help him fix his Internet since he really needs to send an important e-mail. However, your own experience with the Internet has shown you that these problems are often difficult to resolve and take a lot of time. You really don't want to help him since you have so much work to do and are very busy.

(a) How would you respond to the following request in this situation? Write the exact

   words that you would say in response to this request.

   Boss: I'm having trouble with the Internet now, but I need to send an important e-mail.

   I'm sorry, but do you think you could help me fix the problem now?

   You would say:

┌───┐
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
│   │
└───┘

Scenario 2 (Requester: higher social power, Request: lower degree of politeness)

Suppose your boss at your work is having trouble with the Internet on his computer. One day, when you walk by at your boss's desk, he asks you to help him fix his Internet since he really needs to send an important e-mail. However, your own experience with the Internet has shown you that these problems are often difficult to resolve and take a lot of time. You really don't want to help him since you have so much work to do and are very busy.

(a) How would you respond to the following request in this situation? Write the exact

   words that you would say in response to this request.

You would say:

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Scenario 4 (Requester: equal social power, Request: lower degree of politeness)

Suppose your co-worker at your work is having trouble with the Internet on his computer.

One day, when you walk by at your co-worker's desk, he asks you to help him fix his

Internet since he really needs to send an important e-mail. However, your own experience

with the Internet has shown you that these problems are often difficult to resolve and take a

lot of time. You really don't want to help him since you have so much work to do and are

very busy.

(a) How would you respond to the following request in this situation? Write the exact

words that you would say in response to this request.

Co-worker: I'm having trouble with the Internet now, but I need to send an important

e-mail. I really need you to help me with this now, could you?

You would say:

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Appendix B: The questionnaires followed each scenario

1. Item to measure the intention of refusal

Your intention with the message you just wrote is (circle the number):

Rejection 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Acceptance

2. Four items for manipulation check of the social power balance

Think about the social power balance in your relationship with this requester. Using the scales below, rate the balance of social power in your relationship with the requester.

The relationship of the social status between this requester and me is (circle the number for each items):

1. Imbalanced 1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Balanced
2. Unequal   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Equal
3. Asymmetrical 1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Symmetrical
4. Uneven   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Even

3. Four items for manipulation check of the politeness degree of the request

Now, think about the nature of the request itself. Using the scales below, describe how polite you think this request was.

This request is (circle the number for each items):

1. Impolite   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Polite
2. Inappropriate 1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Appropriate
3. Disrespectful 1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Respectful
4. Rude   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 Civilized

4. Four items for manipulation check of the level of imposition of the request

How would you rate the following statement (circle the number)?

1. To conduct the task requested by this request is:

   very difficult   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   very easy

2. The size of this request is:

   very big   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   very small

3. Refusing this request in this situation is:

   very easy   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   very difficult

4. Refusing this request in this situation is:

   very uncomfortable   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   very comfortable

5. 7-point Likert scale items to measure the preference in communication style

There are two types of messages that people use to communicate their intentions: direct and indirect messages. In direct messages, the speaker's intention is clearly indicated in their literal meaning. On the other hand, the speaker's intention is not literally expressed in indirect messages. The addressee has to detect the speaker's true intention implied in the message. Now, given these definitions of these two types of communication styles, please rate how much you agree/disagree with the following statement (circle the number).

1. It is important to say exactly what I mean in most situations.

   strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

2. In most situations, I prefer saying directly what I mean.

   strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

3. I prefer only to hint at what I need or want in most cases.

   strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

4. It is generally better to let the other person figure out what I mean.

   strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

5. What I say often have more than one meaning.

   strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

6. Often there is no need to look for a deeper meaning in my remarks.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

7. It is generally better to communicate indirectly.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

8. I usually prefer to express my opinions frankly.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

9. What I mean with a remark is usually fairly obvious.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

10. Often there is more to what I say than what appears on the surface.

strongly disagree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7 strongly agree

6. Demographic questions

1. What is your gender? (Please circle one.)   Male   Female

2. What is your age? _____

3. What year are you in? (Please circle one.)   Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior

4. What is your major? _____

5. What is your nationality? _____

6. What is your first language? _____

7. What is your ethnicity? (Please circle one.)

Caucasian   Asian/Pacific Islander   African American   Native American

Hispanic

Bi-racial or Multi-racial   Others (please specify)_____

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