Arab World English Journal
INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327
مجلة اللغة الانكليزية في العالم العربي

Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume 10. Number 2. June 2019 Pp. 165-180
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no2.14

Speech Act of Refusal on the Phone

Imed Samaali
Department of English, College of Education Azulfi,
Majmaah University, Al-Majmaah, Saudi Arabia

Tahar Bayouli
Department of English, College of Education Azulfi,
Majmaah University, Al-Majmaah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract:
This paper investigates the speech act of refusal taking as a case study British responses to a salesperson's offer through the study of recordings of 109 conversations between the salesperson and a potential British customer. The data are analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively with the aim of finding the most frequent responses that denote refusal by the English native speakers. Most of the expressions used to reflect the British people's annoyance with the use of cold calls, the majority being brief phrases of refusal. In addition to the recorded calls, two questionnaires were conducted in Britain to shed light on the frequent expressions used on the phone in response to the salesperson. It is interesting here to catalog the range of strategies used by individuals, most of the time verbal, to avoid talking to the salesperson. These strategies seem to exist on a continuum of directness-indirectness. Firstly to perform an act of refusal efficient enough to end the call. Secondly to make the balance between the impacts of refusal per se and the keeping up with the social convention of mutual cooperation presented in the theory of politeness.

Key words: phone conversation, politeness theory, refusal, speech act, salesperson-customer

Cite as: Samaali, I., & Bayouli, T**.** (2019). Speech Act of Refusal on the Phone. *Arab World English Journal, 10* (2) 165-180.
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no2.14

Introduction

Background to the study:

This paper studies some verbal phrases used in response to a salesperson in a phone conversation focusing on negative attitudes that British people had towards cold calls in the light of speech-act theory. Upon analysis of the responses, the researcher noticed that most of the strategies that had been used by the potential British customers consisted of using some phrases that are typical of answering cold calls over the phone. Most of the time, these phrases denote refusal. In addition, these phrases signal the kind of relationship that characterizes the potential British customers and the salesperson. In this respect, the potential British customers employed certain strategies in an attempt to stop the flow of the calls.

Theoretical framework

This paper draws on the work of eminent researchers who showed that refusal as a speech act required deep studies in different cultures. A good deal of such studies worked on the multiple aspects of the speech act of refusals like Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990), Tnack (2002), and Nelson et al. (2002). These researchers demonstrated that refusals comprise a series of other speech acts like requests for clarification, the promise to comply, and the expression of regret or apology. Along with the refusal response, there is often a positive remark, an expression of willingness, an expression of gratitude and showing a partial agreement with the interlocutor (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008, p. 196). According to Nelson, Carson, Al Batal and El Bakary (2002) refusals are "particularly interesting because they are face-threatening acts, and we would expect many face-saving strategies to be used, especially in refusing individuals of higher status" (p. 165). Based on the influential studies led by Beebe et al. (1990), other researchers followed their method of eliciting data. They used Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as a tool for collecting data from participants. Nelson et al. (2002) defined the Discourse Completion Test as "a structured written discourse that provides the context/impetus for the speech act being studied with rejoinders that cue for eliciting the desired speech act being studied" (p. 165). It is worth pointing out that most of the studies on refusal used DCT to collect data. However, Nelson et al. (2002) criticize it arguing that "what people claim they would say in a hypothetical situation is not necessarily what they actually would say in a real situation" (p. 168). In most cases these studies are carried out in order to understand the discrepancies between native and non-native complaints and refusals (Tnack, 2002). Nelson et al. (2002) studied refusals in American English and Egyptian Arabic. Similarly, Beebe et al. (1990) investigate the speech act of refusal produced by two different language groups: native speakers of Japanese and native speakers of English. Al-Kahtani (2005) also worked on the speech act of refusal studying how Americans, Arabs, and Japanese refuse, seeking to see whether there was any difference in the ways people realize this speech act. Cold calling requires the presence of two main participants, the cold caller and the customer. The success of the cold caller's task depends entirely on the rapport that the salesperson establishes with the customers.

For our own study, the analysis will rely on 109 recorded calls of salespersons-customers exchanges and two questionnaires carried out in the UK with native speakers of English. The framework of the present study also takes into consideration the politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987). The choice of the theoretical framework stems from the fact that both the phone call operator and the potential customer act and react according to what may be called a stimulus-response pattern. As for the salespersons, the initiators of the exchange, they expect the

interlocutor to acknowledge, or "co-operate" to realize the goals above-mentioned, technically called wants/desires.

Research objectives:

The present study has three objectives:

- Explore British answers on the phone to the salesperson.
- Document negative attitudes the British have towards the cold calls that they receive.
- Unveil most of the responses used by the potential British customers in an attempt to cover most of the contents of their strategies of refusal on the phone.

Methodological Design

The researchers had work experience in an offshore oriented call center. This call centre is established in Tunis. As in any call center's strategy, they provided workers with a script to use that is supposed to lead to the establishment of some kind of relationship between the salesperson and the potential customer, and ultimately to a sale. Despite the script, we realized that to a large extent the answers were the same. These similarities lie in the strategies of refusal used to deal with the sale proposal. So, the researchers became interested in the replies potential British customers made on the phone. There were two means used in collecting data from the potential British customers: recorded calls and questionnaires.

Structure of the study

The research is divided into five parts. The first part gives a description of the call center and refers to studies conducted on the speech act of refusal and the politeness theory. It highlights some issues linked to call centers in Tunisia and the United Kingdom. While Tunisia has witnessed a rapid growth in the industry of call centres, the United Kingdom passed laws to organize electronic marketing and reduce or even stop cold calls. The second part presents the methodology followed in the analysis of the data as well as the instruments used in collecting that data. The instruments included in the present study are 109 recorded phone calls with two questionnaires conducted in the United Kingdom. The third part focuses on the analysis of the recorded data and the two questionnaires. It reveals most of the strategies used by the British people to respond in refusal to call centers' offers. The fourth part summarizes the findings. Finally, the last chapter is dedicated to the conclusion that provides the recommendations and the limitations of the study.

Literature review

A number of studies have so far been carried out on the speech act of refusal and its classifications along with the politeness theory.

Politeness and face

Holmes (1995) describes politeness as a "behaviour which actively expresses positive concern for others, as well as non-imposing distancing behaviour" (p. 5). This makes of politeness a "general form of an expression of good-will or camaraderie, as well as the more familiar non-intrusive behaviour which is labelled 'polite' in everyday usage" (p. 5). As a fundamental constituent, "face" is a frequently recurring concept in the literature about politeness and can even amount to a defining agent in theory. The notion of face is derived from "the work of Goffman (1967) and Brown Levinson (1987)" (p. 5). This "technical term", as mentioned in Holmes (1995)

and Yule (1996), refers to "the emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize" (Yule, 1996, p. 60). From this perspective, "everybody has face needs or basic wants", which requires that "people generally cooperate" to maintain and show concern for each other (Holmes 1995, p.5). In other words, politeness will materialize only if its prerequisites, namely face needs, are respected. This is obvious in Yule's (1996) linkage between the two notions when he defines politeness as "the means employed to show awareness of another person's face… accomplished in situations of social distance or closeness" (Yule, 1996, p. 60). Accordingly, if an interlocutor transgresses the social convention to "cooperate" to satisfy the hearer's face needs, the latter is said to disobey the very basics of polite conduct. That very basic conduct of politeness is a covenant where both the speaker and the hearer cooperate to satisfy their mutual basic wants. This is an effort made by participants where they employ strategies meant to show "respect for each other's" expectations regarding self-image, take account of their feelings, and avoid face-threatening acts (FTAs)" (Cutting, 2002, p.45). FTAs are a central core in the theory of politeness around which evolves much of the literature. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are certain acts that threaten face as they "run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/ or of the speaker" (p. 65). Holmes (1995) considers suggestions, advice and requests as potential face- threatening acts. She claims that "polite people" avoid face-threatening acts such as "insults" and "orders" by "softening them or expressing them indirectly" (p. 5). Face-threatening acts are incorporated in the broader sphere of politeness which is divided in the literature into "positive politeness‟ and "negative politeness‟. Positive politeness is portrayed by Brown and Levinson (1987), cited in Holmes (1995), as "sociable behaviour expressing warmth towards an addressee" (p. 5). Negative politeness on the other hand is the "behaviour which avoids imposing on others" (p. 5). In their approach to politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish between two kinds of face needs: "negative and positive." Positive face needs are "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" while negative face needs are "the want of every „competent adult‟ that his actions be unimpeded by others" (p. 62). In this regard, FTAs are the acts whereby cooperation between participants collapses, which results in a difficulty "to maintain the face of all people involved in an interaction" (Nelson et al., 2002, p.165). In the context of an interaction, an FTA, according to Nelson et al. (2002), can either be threatening to the hearer's or to the speaker's face. Some other acts, nonetheless, are threatening to both participants‟ face wants. Holmes (1995) advocates that "any utterance which could be interpreted as making a demand or intruding on another person's autonomy can be regarded as a potential face-threatening act" (p. 5).

Gender and politeness

As a response to the question dealing with gender as to who is more polite, men or women, Holmes (1995, p.6) affirms that women are more polite. She justifies this on the ground of women's expression of positive politeness or friendliness in the way they use language. In an attempt to show that women tend to be more verbally polite than men, Holmes (1995, p. 193) cites a variety of evidence to prove this claim by saying: Women give more encouraging verbal feedback to their conversational partners than men do, they disruptively interrupt less often than men. Women ask questions and introduce topics aimed at maintaining talk that is of interest to others in informal and private interactions. In public where the floor is highly valued, they participate much less and leave the floor to men more often. Women agree with others, compliment

others, and apologise more often than men, demonstrating sensitivity to the feelings of other people and using these speech acts as tokens of solidarity.

The speech act of refusal

It is of great importance at this stage to note that most of the responses in the recorded calls expressed refusal, whether directly or indirectly; hence the significance of studying the speech act of refusal. However, with the scarcity of work done on the speech act of refusal on the phone, it seems necessary to study in depth the main articles that have so far been written about the general use of this speech act.

Definition

Researchers have been attempting to provide an accurate and precise definition to cover the entire meaning of the speech act of refusal. Most of the time, the use of this speech act reflects an intention of declining an offer, suggestion or request on the part of the speaker. Basically, it is when the speaker directly or indirectly says "no" to a request or invitation (Tnack, 2002, p. 2). According to Tnack (2002), refusal is "a face-threatening act to the listener because it contradicts his own expectation and is often realized through an indirect strategy" (p. 2). Refusal is claimed to "respond negatively to an offer, request, invitation, etc" (AlKahtani 2005, p. 37). In fact, refusal denotes the state of being uncooperative with someone about something. Al Kahtani (2005, p. 37) refers to Searle and Vanderveken (1985) who define the speech act of refusal as "the negative counterparts of acceptances and distinguish them from rejections". It has been noted that "how one says "no" is probably more important than the answer itself" and therefore "sending and receiving a message of "no" is a task that needs a special skill" (p. 37).

Methodology

The background

This chapter describes the methodology adopted to investigate the research problem stated in the introduction. It also presents the description of the data collection methods that were followed throughout the analysis of the recorded calls and the two questionnaires. In the analysis of the recorded conversations and the questionnaires, the researcher followed the descriptive method. The descriptive method is mainly used in analyzing the common responses that are found in both the questionnaires and the recorded calls. The recorded calls and the questionnaires are analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. They are classified according to the responses of the potential British customers to the salesperson. The basic concern is to reveal and explore the most common phrases spoken by the potential British customers to the salesperson. These responses aim at mapping the verbal strategies of refusal that are more likely to be used in answering cold calls along with some features that are typical of the telephone conversations.

Subjects

When preparing for this study, a decision was made concerning the specific population which the researchers were working on. The participants for the current study included 109 English native speakers that made up the recorded calls which were conducted in Tunis, with 91 people in the first questionnaire and 75 in the second one in London.

Instruments

Most of the researchers who worked on the speech act of refusals like Beebe et al (1990), Nelson et al (2002), and Tnack (2002) used a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) in eliciting refusals in which participants should respond to some situations as prompts. Nelson (2002, p. 167) mentioned three reasons which account for the use of a DCT as an efficient tool for eliciting data. To elicit data, Nelson et al. (2002) made some modifications on the DCT; subjects had to respond verbally on audiotape. Beebe and Cummings (as cited in Nelson et al., 2002) made a comparison of two kinds of methods in eliciting data, „talk versus written questionnaire" and they found "that subjects talked four times more than they wrote" (p. 168). The DCT also has some limitations pointed out in the work of Nelson et al. (2002). They referred to Rose and Ono (1995) who said that "we should not expect a single data source to provide all the necessary insights into speech act usage" (p. 207). This section provides the data for this present research including the participants in both the recorded calls and the questionnaires.

Two types of data were used in this study:

- ✓ 109 recorded calls.
- ✓ Two written questionnaires.

The way of classifying the recorded calls

We thoroughly considered the influential method used by Beebe et al. (1990), in which the speech act of refusal was classified in terms of semantic formulae and adjuncts. This classification influenced a lot of studies like those by Nelson et al. (2002), Tnack (2002), and Al Kahtani (2005). We developed a method, based on collecting the major responses uttered by the potential British customers because we were more concerned with the content of different responses given to the salesperson rather than classifying them according to Beebe et al. (1990) classifications. We followed this method in analyzing the content of both recorded calls and the questionnaires for several reasons. While considering the method used by Beebe et al. (1990) to classify refusals, we found that it could not be applicable to the phone conversations because there was a new context that would govern the whole conversations. First, the inapplicability evolves around the nature of the phone conversations under scrutiny. This call was in essence commercially oriented, and procedure which molded the way operators conversed. Beebe et al. (1990) used the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) to elicit refusals; while our way of collecting data was recording 109 calls using a script as a 32 prompt. In the light of the responses given by the potential British customers, we wrote two questionnaires depending on the frequent responses given by the potential British customers. The whole conversation occurred on the phone, which meant the absence of eye-contact as an essential part in establishing any kind of relationship between speaker and interlocutor. Furthermore, and as far as our experience is concerned, while starting the phone call, we as salespersons could not predict the answer to be "no". Yet to our surprise, most responses look the same even if the strategies differ. This was among the main motives behind the choice of considering the responses of the potential British customers as the focal points. These responses typify the features of answering cold calls. Therefore, we developed our own classification of the British answers based on the content.

The Transcription of the conversations

Relying on the recorded calls, as our primary data, we transcribed the conversations the way they were said by the potential customers and the agent. This method was used because we were interested in the content of what was said by the potential customer and using phonetics is beyond the scope of this paper. In the recorded calls, there were certain phrases that were used by the potential customers in order not to be engaged in long conversations with the salesperson. These answers were spoken repeatedly, which made us consider them as the components on which these classifications were based.

Classifying the conversations

After transcribing the conversations, the researchers used their own way of classifying the recorded calls based on the content and found that the potential British customers used different refusal strategies with the intention of avoiding speaking to the salesperson in general and of ending the conversations in particular. In answering cold calls, the potential British customers may use some expressions regularly to show their discontent in receiving such kinds of telemarketing. These expressions were quite revealing; they were in fact ways of refusing the proposed offers of the salesperson. It meant that they were verbal strategies of refusals, which were typical of the phone. After studying the recorded calls, we realized the common ground that was omnipresent in most of the British answers to the salesperson. We chose these classifications because they stated some of the refusal expressions, which were more likely to be used in dealing with a cold call. These conversations were classified according to their types of refusals.

There were nine main categories:

- General not interested "I am not interested".
- Hanging up.
- Direct rejection and the notion of "Ex-directory".
- Polite rejection: "No thanks".
- Excuse: "Being busy" and" in the middle of doing something".
- "I have not got any money" and "it is expensive".
- Rejection: Not wanting anything.
- "Call me back".
- Other reasons "I could not hear properly" or "someone has phoned me before."

Based on these nine categories, we analyze these conversations quantitatively and qualitatively.

3.6. Piloting

In order to determine the frequent strategies of refusal, we used two questionnaires. We suggested some of them to a few people. Then we stopped, and discussed the pilot results. Piloting gave us the opportunity to see whether there should be any modifications or revisions of the questionnaires. Both questionnaires were piloted with a small sample of the target population. No changes were needed, so we carried on as the pilot data was considered valid to be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

The previous part has dealt with the methodology employed in the study. It has been devoted to describing the corpus chosen to work on, and the two instruments used in collecting data which

have contributed to identifying most of the British responses to the salesperson on the phone and stressing the negative attitude towards the reception of the cold calls.

Analysis

British responses

Receiving phone calls for British people is not a new phenomenon. Throughout the researchers experience in the call center, they have become familiar with the different responses they use in responding to the sale proposal. After subdividing 109 calls, we ended up with nine parts.

British refusal responses on the phone

Most of the responses were direct when it came to talking to a salesperson over the phone, in such a way as to quickly end the call. While the salesperson tried to convince the potential British customer to buy a basket of Italian biological products, the latter seemed to develop verbal strategies to deal with the cold call offers and not to be engaged in such conversations which may necessitate buying, with a simultaneous concern to maintain the salesperson's face wants: the need not to be rejected. These verbal strategies reflect disinterest in Italian products. The answers were expressed with precision and clarity through the 39 choices of words given by the potential British customers in an attempt to avoid leaving any opportunity for the salesperson to stay a longer time on the phone and selling any of their products. The data elicited from the recorded calls and the two questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The responses can be classified as follows:

General, not interested

This category was often expressed by phrases like "I am not interested, thank you", "I do not think I am interested" and "I am not interested in whatever you are selling or offering". With these people not being interested, it was hard to confirm whether the British customers did not find the content of the offer interesting, or just say it so that they can end the call as quickly as possible. Here positive politeness is not attended to and the speaker, here the customers, can be said to breach the "covenant" of cooperation to maintain the salesperson's face needs by setting forth their reason for not conversing in a direct manner or, in Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, "without redressive action, baldly" (p. 60). The very answer, "not being interested" was ubiquitous in various parts of the conversations. There were some interlocutors who gave the "I am not interested" response at a too early stage of the conversation, without even recognizing the person they were talking to. The statistics above confirm that "general not interested" is the dominant strategy of refusal which the respondents tend to use to react to the different cold calls they receive. This strategy is realized by two components which are a reason/ excuse "I am not interested" and a statement of gratitude, "Thank you". Out of 109 calls, 24 people said that they were not interested. These potential clients represented 20.33%, which means that a considerable portion was interested neither in the salesperson nor in the offer. It is worth pointing out that the potential customers tended to say "I`m not interested" even before the salesperson utters a word about their merchandise, leaving them just with the opportunity to introduce themselves This "general not interested" can be divided into four categories: Firstly, "not being interested" came before the salesperson even introduces themselves. There was one person who reacted this way in conversation 52. One possible interpretation of this is that the potential clients, being greatly targeted by cold calls, recognized that the voice was not familiar to them, and thus it must be a

salesperson. Secondly, “not being interested” came after knowing the person they were talking to was a salesperson. As can be seen from conversations 9, 22, 36, 46, 48, 70, 81 and 98 after the salesperson 'A' has introduced himself “Hello my name is Paolo Castello…,” the potential client 'B' end the conversation straight away. The possible interpretation is that 'B' is not listening to 'A', the salesperson, in the first place, with B‟s presupposing 'A' is selling some worthless products. Another way of interpreting this is to assume that 'B', after having heard the name of the salesperson, realized that it was not someone they knew. Therefore, by way of being accustomed to such situations, 'B' infers it must be someone selling a product. All that 'B' wants to do now is stop the conversation as quickly as possible. This results in B's reaction exemplified in the utterance “No thank you, goodbye;” which is to end the exchange politely. Thirdly, “not being interested” came after being asked by the salesperson whether they have tasted Italian food or not. In conversations 1, 50, 66 and 90 the potential customers wanted to end the dialogue. “Have you ever tasted Italian food?” the question asked by the salesperson triggers 'B' into ending the conversation quickly. It may be tempting to note that B could construe this question as one asked by a salesperson selling something, or, in some cases, as someone making a survey. In either case, the potential customers by no means wish to be involved in a series of questions that may invade their privacy. Fourthly, “not being interested” came after mentioning the name of the firm the salesperson works for. In conversations 15, 16, 17, 20, 43, 49, 64, 68, 100 and 104 the 41 potential British clients allowed the salesperson to introduce the company and the reason of this call. After “B” had an idea about the purpose of the call, they were still not interested.

Hanging up

There were 20 people who simply hung up the phone. Generally speaking, at different parts of the script the potential customers abruptly ended the call. It is worth pointing out that putting the phone down is a typical way of refusal and/ or rejection on the phone. At this point, both the salesperson and the potential customers can be said to have made a face-threatening act. As to the former, the act of calling seems not to respect the customers’ want to be independent and not imposed on simply because from the perspective of the customers this act invades their “territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). The customers’ reaction is manifested through putting the phone down, an act which may be among the toughest of face-threatening acts. Here the customers do not pay attention, of course intentionally, to the salesperson’s want to be accepted and therefore do not employ a face-saving strategy. There was one person who hung up the phone after saying “Hello”. This was in conversation 75. This person recognized that the person on the phone was unknown to her. As a consequence, she put the phone down straight away. There were five people who hung up the phone after the salesperson ‘A’ wanted to check if 'B' was the potential British customer they intended to speak to. This can be observed in conversations 19, 26, 53, 78 and 92. 42. Another five people hung up the phone after the salesperson mentioned their name. These are in conversations 3, 23, 61, 67 and 87. Six people hung up the phone after the salesperson asked them this question: “Have you ever tasted Italian food?” These are in conversations 2, 12, 47, 58, 88 and 97. In these cases, the potential British customers were aware of the trigger behind this cold call. However, the so-called special offer failed in drawing the attention of the potential customers. This was because the salesperson managed only to speak four turns, which was not enough to establish “relationship” with the customers. Only two people let the salesperson continue with their speech till he started introducing the firm he was working for. This stage of the script witnessed the cut of the call.

These are in conversations 84 and 65. There was only one person in conversation 95 who put the phone down, once he knew that the salesperson wanted to talk to someone who did not live in the house anymore. Hanging up seems to be the safest strategy on the part of the customers, in order not to have any conversation with the operator.

Polite rejection

The people included in this section tended to use the thanking expression "no, thank you" or "no, thanks" with the intermediary intention of minimizing the threat to the salesperson's positive face, thereby softening the directness of rejecting the offer, which is the ultimate goal. From this angle, the customer can be said to satisfy, even to a minor degree, their interlocutor's need to be, and have their request accepted. Making use of positive politeness is just a superficial utilization of a strategy that maximizes the benefit to the speaker, here customer, and minimizes benefit to the hearer, here call center operator. In other words, the salesperson's want to be accepted is not really considered since what they aimed at, the act of selling; is declined with an expression that apparently stands for acceptance. This part is divided into four categories: Firstly, the potential customers said "no thank you," before even knowing the person they were talking to. In conversation 59 the potential customer said "no thank you," and she hung up without knowing the person she was talking to. For her, the person who was talking was a stranger. Secondly, the potential customers said "no thank you," after recognizing the person they were talking to. In conversations 4, 29, 40, 57, 60, 86, 99 and 101 the potential customers noticed that "A" is a salesperson at the moment "A" mentioned the country they are calling from. Thirdly, the potential customers said "no thank you," after the salesperson "A" asked them the key question "have you ever tasted Italian food before?" In conversations 10, 21, 37, 39 and 63, the potential customers seemed to be disturbed by the question, and in order not to be perceived as impolite, they just said "no thank you," and put the phone down. Fourthly, the potential customers said "no thank you," after knowing the offer. In conversations 31, 54, 56, 94 and 101 the potential customers ended the conversations saying "no thank you". This reveals disinterest in the offer promoted by the salesperson. By saying "no thank you", the salesperson could not carry on with their patterned speech because the customers put the phone down.

Excuse: "Being busy"; "In the middle of doing something"

Eighteen people said that they were busy or in the middle of doing something. Often, the potential British customers' statement that they were busy was followed by an expression of apology like "sorry". There were two potential customers who said that they were in the middle of doing something and had no time to discuss anything. Firstly, in conversations 51 and 107, there were two potential customers who said that 44 they were in the middle of doing something before knowing who the caller was. One possible interpretation is that the salesperson is unknown to them so they do not want to talk to them. Secondly, the potential customers said that they were busy after knowing the name of the salesperson, as can be seen in conversations 5, 35, 74 and 82. This reveals that the potential British customers just made excuses in order not to speak to the salesperson.

What is common to all responses is that the potential customer avoids direct rejection of the offer in a way that may seem to reflect their care for the salesperson's positive face, that of the need to be accepted. Yet, and once more, what the customer cares for most is to end the exchange

as soon as possible. This appears in their use of the same excuse even before the callers uttered a word about what they were calling for.

Not wanting anything

This part includes 12 people. "I do not want anything," "No, I do not care," or "I am not interested in buying anything," are the common expressions used in this part. These expressions illustrate a negative willingness and show the indifference on the part of the 45 customer to the special offer proposed by the salesperson. The British customers used these phrases so as to avoid having a talk with the salesperson. These are in conversations 6, 7, 14, 32, 38, 41, 43, 44, 45, 48, 93 and 96. As a reaction to the flow of unwanted calls, the customers used different expressions showing that they do not need anything. This directness on the part of the clients, and which is face-threatening in essence, pushed the salesperson to end the call with a minimum degree of embarrassment to save his face simply because his wants were not accepted nor shared by the call recipient.

Rejection: "I do not like it" and "I like my own food"

There are six potential customers who said "I like my own food", or "I like Scottish/ Indian dishes". Though they may express dissatisfaction with the Italian food, the two statements are not typical of face-saving strategies given that the speakers here do not attend to the hearer's want to be admired. Rather, what the customers aim at is an entire linguistic switch off and a direct way out once they know about the aim of the salesperson. That very directness, especially in "I like my own food", might be considered as a categorical excuse, but more importantly, it leaves salespersons little or no chance to go along with their speech having lost their face-wants. These are in conversations 5, 20, 33, 34, 55 and 62.

Direct rejection and the notion of "Ex-directory"

There were certain expressions that were used to show people's discontent with being called because they were "ex-directory" or just for "not accepting cold calls" as a principle. The refusals were achieved by these expressions that act as reasons for not talking to the salesperson: "I do not accept cold calls," "you should not have this number," "how did you get my number, because I am ex-directory?" and "you should not be calling me."

Common to all of the above-mentioned responses, there is absolutely no desire on the part of 47 of the customers to exhibit any degree of concern for their interlocutors' positive face given that their own negative face has been threatened. Noticeably, when some customers find out that their privacy has been transgressed, they become very suspicious to the extent that they are no longer concerned about the face-wants of the person they are talking to, let alone the latter's offer.

"Call me back"

In conversations 10, 20, 27 and 105, there were four potential British customers who were busy and asked the salesperson to call them back. These potential customers have some reasons for not talking at the moment the salesperson rang. "Call me back" seems to be the less face-threatening and the most face-saving. Unlike the other statements, this one does not aim at abruptly ending the call nor somehow deceiving the hearer by giving fake reasons for not answering the call, but rather gives an extra chance for the call center' operators to have their offer considered next time they call. What contributes to making this strategy less face-threatening to the hearers is that the

customers themselves are at ease enough not to feel they are under the threat of the former's intrusion into their territories, and thereby abstain from using a counter positive face-threatening reaction.

"I have not got any money" and "it is expensive"

Here the target of the call can be said to have proceeded by respect to their interlocutors' positive face wants, the need to have one's proposition appreciated by others. By being patient enough to give excuses, while not being obliged to, the customer treats the addressee not as a stranger but "as a member of an in-group", in Brown and Levinson' s (1987) terms. This in-group is any business deal between a seller and a customer. It remains to say that the initial intention of the customer in this exchange is not total cooperation or acknowledgement of the addressee's total freedom of action, but just to minimize the potential face threat of the hidden intent of refusal. Here the means to hide the threat is to be tolerant enough to speak about the financial situation. In both questionnaires, it was very rare for potential British customers to reveal their personal financial situations to strangers. However, there were some exceptions revealed in the recorded phone calls. There was one older person who was frank enough to reveal that she was a pensioner and she could not afford to buy these products. There were two customers who had become disinterested after coming to prices.

Results and Discussions

This part surveys the different reasons that may account for the failure of some call centers in achieving success in doing the business over the phone in the UK, and also provides a summary of the different responses used as strategies of refusal on the phone. 5.1. Strategies of refusal over the phone. The two questionnaires together with the 109 recorded calls investigate the responses which the British people would normally use to reply to a salesperson's sale offers on the phone. Both have led to cataloging a variety of strategies most frequent to phone exchanges of this kind and that reveal how potential British customers would refuse the sale proposal when answering the cold caller. These strategies classified according to their frequency help make a comparison between the recorded calls and the questionnaires.

The first observable piece of information is the fact that the recorded calls reveal more strategies of refusal as compared to the two questionnaires. As outlined above, there are four extra-strategies particular to the recordings, namely "Not wanting anything", "other reasons" like not being able to hear the salesperson, the notion of ex-directory, and "I do not have money" and "it is expensive". This result may have two different interpretations. First, in the questionnaires participants seem to have more time to reflect as to the best thing to say or do to decline cold calls; and therefore the absence of spontaneity in the questionnaires may make some kind of feedback that would possibly come out otherwise in other situations, and which is not called for on the part of the customers. Second, some strategies are typical of telephone exchanges. An instance of this falls under the category "other reasons". Here the interlocutor may intentionally or unintentionally say that they are not able to hear the caller. The notion of ex-directory is also quite likely to appear in direct telephone conversations because the potential customers presuppose that they would never receive strangers' calls when their phone numbers are ex-directory, which explains why the first thing these customers say is "I am ex-directory", being surprised by a call from somebody they does not know. In addition to mentioning the refusal strategies that are particular to the

recorded calls, it is also important to refer to those strategies that are common to both recorded calls and questionnaires, and which constitute the largest bulk of data.

These strategies are:

- General not interested
- Hanging up
- Excuse: Being busy
- Polite rejection
- Direct rejection: I do not buy over the phone
- Call me back later

Both questionnaires and recorded calls confirm the fact that the potential British- customers, in about 50% of cases, tried just to give excuses in order not to be engaged in a conversation which may lead to a loss of time or, to the very detriment of the customer, loss of money. However, the British potential customer may ultimately succumb to the overwhelming rush of words and agree to the salespersons' offers. After examining most of the given strategies, it is noticeable that the potential customers once called have one thing in mind, which is impeding all kinds of attempts made by the cold caller to "defeat" the customer's resistance. The attempt of the customer in half of the exchanges to give excuses may fall into the attempt not to be too direct and therefore not threaten the face of the interlocutor, the salesperson, and give some space however small or "freedom of action". It is very important to note that "General not interested" came as the most frequent/dominant strategy of refusal used by the potential British customers. This might be due to the disinterest and the negative attitudes that customers hold towards such kind of business, or it can be the customer's disinterest in the product itself. Concerning the "polite rejection" strategy, it appears in the third place in the recorded calls and the two questionnaires. It is also worth pointing out that in the second questionnaire, where questions were asked in an open-ended style, the polite rejection seems to be more familiar to female rather than male. However, in the first one, the close-ended questionnaire, showed that males remarkably may use this strategy to put an end to the cold call. Refusals as face-threatening acts pose a difficult challenge on the part of the hearer, here the salesperson. On the phone, the salesperson is left with little room to persuade the client and go on with his speech, and therefore he does not have any chance to draw the attention of the latter. The potential customers just give their responses without considering the impact on the hearer. This lack of concern might be explained by the cold caller's invasion of the territory of the interlocutors, one which, from the client's perspective, maximizes benefit only to the salesperson. This irritation-caused rejection is manifested in the form of the strategies present in most of the conversations. Once the rejection takes place, the caller's script, ideally thought to lead to success, has to be instantaneously reconsidered or none of the goals would be realized. At this point, the most difficult challenge is the struggle to keep the hearer listening, something that both the recorded calls and the questionnaires have proved to be difficult to attain. At this point we must question the effectiveness of telemarketing in such a cold-call targeted country as the UK. Here the notion of privacy and claim to territory seem to be central in the "conflict of wills" between the caller and the target of the call.

Conclusion

This conclusion gives a summary of the main findings of the study. It also draws attention to the limitations of the research.

The study set out to investigate the responses given by British people to cold calls. Two types of data were collected: primary data collected through recording phone calls of potential British customers and a salesperson, and secondary data gathered by means of two questionnaires to provide feedback on how native speakers of English tend to respond to cold calls, and to explain the negative attitudes towards cold calls in general. The analysis of the primary data, the recorded calls, raised a number of questions that needed to be more closely scrutinized later through the two questionnaires. One of those questions, one which makes the core of the study, is the background of responses used by the potential British customers to answer the salesperson. These responses have a unique and conspicuous function, one that denotes refusal. None of the given responses showed attempts on the part of the customers to cooperate with the caller. This lack of cooperation is quite understandable since every stimulating action of the caller directly results in proportionate feedback on the part of the interlocutor. For instance, the operator's intrusion into the potential customer's privacy on a regular basis brings about a seemingly inevitable consequence: rejection of the offer. This is because that action was threatening enough to the negative face wants of the customer that the latter's claims to intrusion-free territory were violated. The use of the politeness theory suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) proved how difficult it is to have two parties with two contradictory sets of wants cooperate. In Brown and Levinson's terms (1987), negative politeness is "essentially avoidance-based, and realisations of negative-politeness strategies consist in assurances that the speaker recognises and respects the addressee's negative-face wants and will not (or will only minimally) interfere with the addressee's freedom of action" (p. 70). It is quite important here to note that what the call centre agent aims at is by no means intrinsically threatening since it is legitimate, at least from the seller's own perspective, to exhibit his merchandise to others within the conventional frames of social exchanges. But it is also important to note that if we follow the claim that the seller has to proceed by total avoidance, they will end up abstaining from the deal altogether. It remains therefore to note here that the failure of the exchange rests in factors other than the mere seller's want to exhibit the product. These factors can be said to have an even more intense effect of threat than the primary intrusion of the call.

About the authors:

Imed Samaali is currently a lecturer of English language and Applied Linguistics at the Department of English, Azzulfi College of Education, Majmaah University, KSA. He obtained his Master's Degree from the Faculty of letters, Arts and Humanities Manouba, Tunisia in 2011**.** He taught from 2011 to 2014 at the Higher School of Economic and Social Sciences of Tunis, Tunisia.

Tahar Bayouli is an assistant lecturer of English language and literature at the Department of English, Azzulfi College of Education, Majmaah University, KSA. He obtained his PhD from the University of Paris West France in 1994. Thesis "*The Image of the Orient in Elizabethan Drama*"**.** His research interests include drama, semiotics and orientalism.
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9133-8290

References

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford.
Al-Kahtani, S. A. (2005). *Refusals Realizations in Three Different Cultures: A Speech Act Theoretically-based Cross-cultural Study*. J. King Saud Univ: Lang. & Transl., 18: 35-57, Riyadh. Aperçu (2009).
Baldwin, H. (n.d.). *Inbound vs Outbound call*. Retrieved January 15, 2009, from http://www.allbusiness.com/company-activities-management/managementpersonal/7396089-1.html
Barmak, A. (2007). *The accidental salesperson.* USA: iUniverse.
Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T, & R. Ultiz-Weltz. (1990). *Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals. In R. Scarcella, E. Anderson, & S.D. Krashen(eds), On the Development of Communicative Competence in Second Language (pp.55-73).* New York: Newbury house.
Brown, P. & S. C. Levinson, (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (3rd ed.) (2008). UK: Cambridge University Press.
Cameron, D. (2000). *Good to Talk. London*: Sage Publications Ltd.
Cold calls (2009). *Cold calls and the law*. Retrieved January 10, 2009, from http://www.aboutidentitytheft.co.uk/cold-calls-law.html
Collins Concise English Dictionary (7th ed.). (2008). UK: HarperCollins Publishers.
Coney, J. (2009). *Phone Shopping puts card details of millions at risk as Fraudsters target call centres*. Daily Mail. Retrieved November 20, 2009 from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1220731/Phone-shopping-puts-card- detailsmillions-riskas-fraudsters-target-centres.html
Cutting, J. (2002). *Pragmatics and Discourse: A Resource Book for Students*. London: Routledge.
Dawson, K. (1999). *Call Center Savvy.* The United States of America: Telecom Books.
Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition.* UK: Oxford *University Press*.
Fatnassi, C. (2005*). A cross-cultural study of Tunisian and English Refusals.* Unpublished M.A. dissertation. Université 7 Novembre à Carthage, Tunis.
Félix-Brasdefer, J. César. (2008). *Politeness in Mexico and the United States: A contrastive study of realization and perception of refusals.* Amsterdam:John Benjamins
Félix-Brasdefer, J. César. (2008). *Perceptions of Refusals to Invitations: Exploring the minds of foreign language learners.* Language Awareness, 17(3): 195-211.
Gardner, D., Knill, R. & Smith J. (2005*). Horizons: Geography* 11-14 1. UK: Nelson Thomas Ltd.
Gass, S. M. & Selinker, L. (2001). *Second Language Acquisition.* The United States Of America: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
Gass, S. M & Houck, N. (1999). *Interlanguage refusals: A cross-cultural study of Japanese-English. Studies on language Acquisition*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
Gauntlett, A. (2004). *Net Spies.* UK: Firewall Media.
Goldner, P. S. (2006). *Red Hot Cold Call Selling: Prospecting Techniques That Really Pay Off.* USA: AMACOM

Hargie, O., Dickson, D. & Tourish, D. (1999). *Communication in Management.* London: Cambridge University Press.
Hargie, O., Dickson, D. & Tourish, D. (1999). *Communication in Management.* England: Gower Publishing Limited.
Hocutt, J. (2007). *Cold Calling for Cowards: How to Turn the Fear of Refection into Opportunities, Sales and Money*. The United States of America: Chugwater. Publishing. Holmes, J. 1995. Women, Men and Politeness. USA: Longman Group Limited.
Kwon, J. (2004). *Expressing refusals in Korean and American English*. Multilingua, 24 (4): 339-364.
Kitao, S. K. (1996). *Communicative competence, preference organization, and refusals in British English*. Sougou Bunka Kenkyujo Kiyou, 13: 47-58.
Lowe, I. (2007). *Textbook of Research Writeup and Statistics*. Tunis: Centre de Publication Universitaire.
Marmaridou, S. A. (2000). *On Speech Acts. In: Pragmatic Meaning and Cognition.* Amsterdam /Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
Mey, J. (1993). *Pragmatics. An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Miller, B. E. (n.d.). *Patterns of Refusal for requests and invitations in Costa Rican Spanish Speakers*. USA: Framingham State College, MASS.
Nelson, G. L., J. Carson, M. Al Batal, & W. El-Bakary (2002). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Strategy use in Egyptian Arabic and American English refusals*. Applied Linguistics, 23(2): 163-189.
Price, J. ,Smith, S., Grig, R., Jacobs, R. M., & Roncoroni, S. (2008).
TPS REPORT on unwelcome calls 2008. UK. Retrieved September 10, 2009 from http://www.dma.org.uk/docframe/docview.asp?id=4957&sec=-1
Privacy (2003). *The Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations.* Retrieved January 10, 2010 from http://195.99.1.70/si/si2003/20032426.htm.
Serale, J. R.(1979). *Expression and Meaning. Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sharp, D. (2003). *Call Center Operation. Design, Operation, and Maintenance.* The United States of America: Digital Press.
Sinha, P. K & Sinha, S. (2007). *Current Trends in Management. Mumbai*: Nirali Prakashan.
Tonkiss, F. (2006). *Contemporary economic sociology: globalisation, production, inequality*. USA and Canada: Routeledge.
Tanck, S. (2002). *Speech Act Sets of Refusal and Complaint: A Comparison of Native and NonNative English Speakers' Production*. Retrieved January 2, 2010 from http://www1.american.edu/tesol/wptanck.pdf
Telephone directory. (n.d). Wikipedia. Retrieved February 10, 2010, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telephone_directory
Telephone Preference Service. Retrieved January 10, 2010, from http://www.tpsonline.org.uk/tps/what/
UK phone numbers. Over 60% of UK phone numbers now registered with the Telephone Preference Service. Retrieved January 15, 2010, from http://www.prleap.com/pr/102600/
Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics. Oxford: Oxford* University Press.