

OCCURRING ORDER OF THE SEMANTIC FORMULA IN REFUSAL EXPRESSION

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Abstract

Semantic formula (SF) is an analyzing unit for speech acts such as refusal or apology. For example, there are “reason”, “apology”, and “refusal” in the refusal expression. Data from my previous study (Candy, 2015) shows that the SF occurs in the same order in each test set of every group, “apology”–“reason”–“refusal” in the Japanese data, and “apology”–“refusal” in the Indonesian data. Considering this clear pattern, language structure is considered to affect the “thought pattern” in constructing the refusal expression. Preliminary results of 32 Korean and 43 Vietnamese data further support this hypothesis.

Key words: semantic formula, refusal expression, Japanese, Indonesian, Korean, Vietnamese

1. BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PURPOSE

Semantic formula (SF) is an analyzing unit for speech acts such as refusal or apology. For example, there are “reason”, “apology”, and “refusal” in the refusal expression. The SF allows us to compare refusal expression between languages. In my previous study (Candy, 2015), I dealt with Japanese native speakers’ (JNS) and Indonesian native speakers’ (INS) refusal expressions, observing the direct refusals and the level of closeness. For this purpose, I conducted a survey called DCT (Discourse Completion Test) towards 87 Japanese and 100 Indonesian native speakers between March and August 2014. The test was set with 4 levels of closeness; stranger, acquaintance, friend, and best friend, and with 2 levels of request burden; 1 and 3 days of volunteer work for a charity event. The refusal expressions were analyzed by their SF.

The result showed that JNS use direct refusal more significantly than INS towards strangers, with a result which is contradictory with the previous researches conducted by Fujiwara (2004) and Yoshida (2010), both of which showed that JNS have a tendency to avoid using direct refusal. On the other hand, INS use more direct refusal expressions if they become acquainted with the requester. However, both of them showed their intentions to maintain the relationship with the requester. The level of request burden has no significant effect on both of their refusal expressions.

In the data from my previous study (Candy, 2015), I also noticed that the SF occurs in the same order in each test set of every group (JNS and INS), “apology”–“reason”–“refusal” in the JNS data, and “apology”–“refusal” in the INS data. Table 1 below shows the occurring order of the semantic formula in the JNS and INS refusal expression data. The first left column is the setting of the level of closeness and the level of request burden. “Order 1” shows the first SF with the highest percentage that occur in a refusal expression. “Order 2” shows the next SF with the highest percentage that occur after the first SF (“Order 1”). “Order 3” shows the next SF with the highest percentage that occur after the second SF (“Order 2”).

In the table 1 below, the JNS data shows that “apology”–“reason”–“refusal” is the common order of each test set. On the other hand, the INS data shows that “apology”–“refusal” is the common order. The point is the position of the main SF of a refusal expression, the “refusal” itself. In the JNS data, the main SF, the “refusal”, occurs after the “reason”, meanwhile in the INS data, the “refusal” occurs before the “reason” or “showing intentions”. The SF which occurs in the same order in each test set of every group, made me consider that language structure affects to some extent the occurring order of the SF.

Therefore, in this present study, I am researching whether there is any relation between the occurring order of the semantic formula in refusal expression and the language structure.

Table 1. Occurring Order of the Semantic Formula in the JNS and INS Refusal Expression Data

Setting	JNS			INS		
	Order 1 (%)	Order 2 (%)	Order 3 (%)	Order 1 (%)	Order 2 (%)	Order 3 (%)
Stranger – 1 day work	Apology (56.32)	Reason (45.98)	Refusal (28.74)	Apology (86)	Refusal (43)	Reason (14)
Acquaintance – 1 day work	Apology (63.22)	Reason (51.72)	Refusal (31.03)	Apology (72)	Refusal (46)	Showing Intentions (14)
Friend – 1 day work	Apology (60.92)	Reason (52.87)	Refusal (32.18)	Apology (68)	Refusal (43)	Refusal (22)
Best Friend – 1 day work	Apology (54.02)	Reason (41.38)	Refusal (27.59)	Apology (59)	Refusal (40)	Reason (19)
Stranger – 3 day work	Apology (52.87)	Reason (48.28)	Refusal (28.74)	Apology (87)	Refusal (44)	Reason (14)
Acquaintance – 3 day work	Apology (57.47)	Reason (47.13)	Refusal (35.63)	Apology (76)	Refusal (51)	Reason (21)
Friend – 3 day work	Apology (51.72)	Reason (40.23)	Refusal (26.44)	Apology (74)	Refusal (47)	Showing Intentions (19)
Best Friend – 3 day work	Apology (52.87)	Reason (35.63)	Refusal (29.89)	Apology (65)	Refusal (49)	Reason (14)

*The percentage represents the respondents per language.

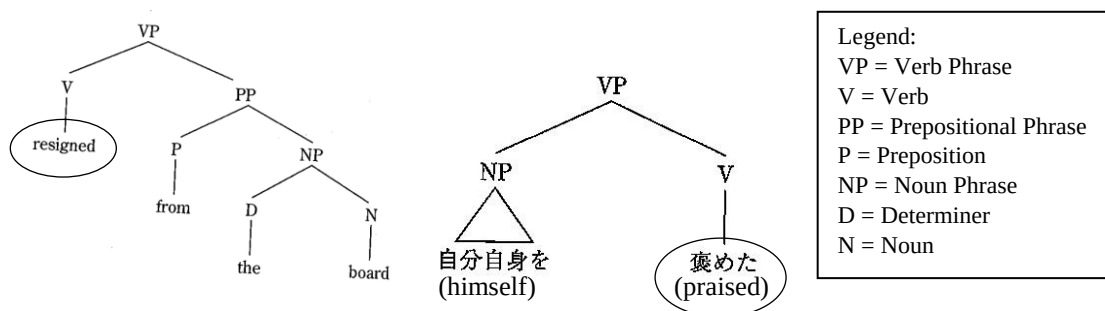
2. PREVIOUS STUDY AND HYPOTHESIS

Yamanashi (1986) mentioned that there is a close relation between grammar and pragmatics in order to define a discourse accomplishment. Sakuma, Kato and Terada (2004) confirmed that discourse also has structure, similar with a sentence. Considering this, language structure is thought to affect the “thinking pattern” in constructing a sentence.

One thing that we can consider here is the position of the “head”, the main part of a phrase (Tanaka, 2013). Tanaka (2013) mentioned that English is “head-initial” language, where the head positioned in the first place of a phrase, and Japanese is “head-final” language, where the head positioned in the last place of a phrase. Meanwhile, in constructing a paragraph or a text, inductive style (“head-heavy”), where the main idea is located in the first part, is preferred in English, and deductive style, where the main idea is located in the last part, is preferred in Japanese (Connor, 1996; Yamanaka, 1998; Hinds, 1983). We consider that the position of the “head” affects the thinking pattern style. Figure 1 below shows the position of head in a phrase example (marked with circle).

Benjamins (2010) explained that refusal is one type of speech acts, which the speaker could not engaged in the action proposed by the other party. In addition to this matter, Yoshii (2009) mentioned that expressing refusal in an appropriate way is very important in order to maintain the relationship with the other party and avoid misunderstanding.

Figure 1. Position of the Head (left: English, right: Japanese)



3. RESEARCH METHOD

First, I will explain the analyzing unit of the refusal expression. Table 2 below shows the type of the SF based on their function. The “Type of SF” column refers to Beebe (1990) and Fujiwara (2004, see attachment 1 – Types of Semantic Formula). I grouped the “Apology” in a separate group and not in the “Maintaining Relationships” considering that we also apologize to strangers and use it as one way to show politeness.

Table 2. Type of SF based on Function

Code	SF Function	Type of SF
A	Apology	Apology
B	Justification	Reason (explicit and non-explicit), Set Conditions, Persuasion and Critic, Principle
C	Refusal	Performative and Non-performative Statement
D	Maintaining Relationships	Showing Regret, Wish, Contact in the Future, Gratitude, Affirmative Expression, Calling (with name or nickname), Giving Alternatives, Sympathy, Showing Postponed Intentions
E	Buying Time/ Avoiding Immediate Refusal	Filler, Repetition, Exclamation, Postponement, Avoidance

Sentences below are some examples in analyzing refusal expressions with the SF function. Sentence (1) is in Japanese, and sentence (2) is in Indonesian. Both of them consists of three SF function groups.

(1) すみません、その日は予定が入っているから できません。

(Sorry) (because I have plan on that day) (I cannot go)
A (Apology) B (Justification) C (Refusal)

(2) Maaf, saya tidak bisa bantu karena ada urusan lain.

(Sorry) (I cannot help) (because I have another thing to do)
A (Apology) C (Refusal) B (Justification)

The questionnaire I conducted in this study called DCT (Discourse Completion Test). In the DCT, there are some explanations about the setting and also blank spaces (or options depend on the DCT) for respondents to write or choose what they will say or what kind of expression they are going to use in a particular setting. Using a DCT allows us to control and analyze qualitatively multivariable data. It also made the generalization of the refusal formula becomes possible. Beebe and Cummings (1996) mentioned that DCT is an effective survey method for finding the main classification of SF for particular speech act and also finding the stereotype of appropriate response used in a society.

“Thus, the similarities between natural spoken refusals and written questionnaire refusals are quite strong – strong enough to suggest that Discourse Completion Tests are a good way to discover what semantic formulas are frequently used (or expected) in performance of speech act.” (p.73)

For this study, I surveyed 32 Korean (KNS–Korean Native Speakers, as a sample from a head-final language) and 43 Vietnamese (VNS–Vietnamese Native Speakers, as a sample from a head-initial language) refusal expression data, obtained by using a similar DCT as in my previous study (Candy, 2015). The data were collected between August and September 2015 using an online survey website, Lime Survey (www.limesurvey.org). I prepared the DCT in two languages, English and Japanese, and asked the respondents to choose based on their preference.

The DCT setting is refusing a working request as a volunteer in a charity event (the requester asks for the hearer’s time, see attachment 2 – Questionnaire about Refusal Expression). The test was set with 4 levels of closeness; stranger, acquaintance, friend, and best friend. I made two sessions in the DCT. Session I is free writing. The respondents can write their refusal expression freely. Session II is ordering the options. The respondents were asked to order the main four SF function groups; “Apology”, “Justification”, “Refusal”, and “Maintaining Relationships” (exclude “Buying Time/ Avoiding Immediate Refusal”), based on what they consider as the best order in their mother language. All of the Session I data have been checked by one Vietnamese native speaker and one Korean native speaker. The refusal expressions were analyzed by the SF function groups. I focused on the position of the Justification (B) towards the Refusal (C). I used R and Excel for counting the data.

4. PRELIMINARY RESULT

The result shows that KNS have a similar occurring order of the semantic formula as JNS (“Justification” followed by “Refusal”), while VNS data shows no strong tendency of using BC or CB Type (see table 3 – “Justification and Refusal Usage” (%), and Figure 2 Correspondence Analysis Result of BC Type and CB Type). From the Figure 2, we can see clearly that the JNS and KNS mark is very close, meanwhile the VNS mark is somewhere between JNS/KNS and INS.

Table 3. “Justification” and “Refusal” Usage (%)

	Total number of Refusal Expression Data	B and C Usage (%)*	BC Type Usage (% from B and C Usage)**	CB Type Usage (% from B and C Usage)**
JNS	696	57.3	99.0	1
INS	800	32.4	20.8	79.2
KNS	128	26.6	91.2	8.8
VNS	172	14.5	64	36

*B and C Usage percentage represents the total data.

**BC and CB Type Usage percentage represents B and C Usage

BC Type = “Justification” followed by “Refusal”

CB Type = “Refusal” followed by “Justification”

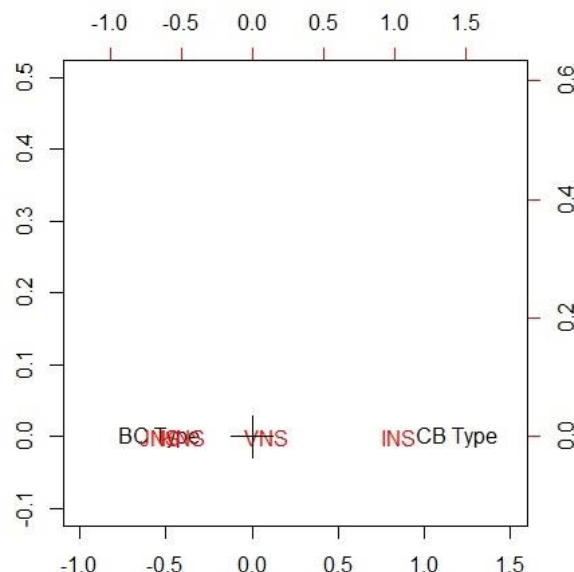


Figure 2. Correspondence Analysis Result of BC Type and CB Type

I did cross-checking with a native Vietnamese speaker, that in Vietnamese, the occurring order of “reason” and “refusal” does not affect the intended meaning of the sentence (see Table 4 Examples of BC Type and CB Type). Meanwhile in the Japanese and Korean, BC Type is not possible grammatically. In Indonesian, BC Type is also possible, but only for reason emphasizing.

In Indonesian, it is more natural to use “refusal” first, followed by the “reason” (CB Type), since the main idea should be put in the first part of the sentence (Suyanto, 2015). This is one condition of an “effective sentence”, a sentence that expresses the idea of the speaker and is able to be understood correctly by the hearer. (Putrayasa, 2010). This is the main reason why INS have tendency of using CB Type. Meanwhile, JNS and KNS have tendency of using BC Type because CB Type is grammatically not possible in their language. And VNS don’t have any tendency of using BC Type or CB Type because there are no difference between them.

From the VNS result that showing no tendency of using BC Type or CB Type, it seems that the position of the head of a phrase in a language has no relation with the occurring order of the semantic formula in refusal expressions. Here I would like to re-propose that the structure of effective sentence in a language affects the occurring order of the semantic formula. A further step to support this hypothesis would be expanding this study to include other languages.

Table 4. Examples of BC Type and CB Type

Language	Grammatical Possibility
Japanese	BC Type >> Grammatically possible <u>その日は予定が入っているから</u> <u>できません。</u> (because I have plan on that day) (I cannot go)
	CB Type >> Grammatically not possible
Korean	BC Type >> Grammatically possible <u>그 날은 이미 약속이 있어서</u> <u>못갈거 같아.</u> (because I have plan on that day) (I cannot go)
	CB Type >> Grammatically not possible
Indonesian	BC Type >> Grammatically possible (reason emphasizing) <u>Karena ada urusan lain,</u> <u>saya tidak bisa bantu.</u> (I cannot help) (because I have another thing to do)
	CB Type >> Grammatically possible (daily) <u>Saya tidak bisa bantu</u> <u>karena ada urusan lain.</u> (I cannot help) (because I have another thing to do)
Vietnamese	BC Type >> Grammatically possible <u>Vì phải đi công tác nên</u> <u>tôi ko thể tham dự.</u> (because of a business trip) (I can't participate)
	CB Type >> Grammatically possible <u>Tôi không tham gia được</u> <u>vì phải đi công tác.</u> (I can't participate) (because of a business trip)

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Attachment 1. Types of Semantic Formula (Beebe, 1990; Fujiwara, 2004)

(I) Direct

	Types of SF	Examples	Function
A	Performative	I refuse	Perform the act of refusal
B	Non-performative Statement	I can't, I won't, I don't think so	Shows explicitly the inability to fulfill the intentions of the other party

(II) Indirect

	Types of SF	Examples	Function
C1	Reason (explicit)	C1) I am going to have dinner with my family/ I am not interested	Explain the excuses/ situations
C2	Reason (non-explicit)	C2) I am busy/ I have another plan/ I don't have time	Explain the excuses/ situations
D	Showing Regret	I feel terrible	Maintain and reinforce relationships
E	Apology	I am sorry	Maintain and reinforce relationships
F	Wish	I wish I could help you	Maintain and reinforce relationships
G	Contact in the Future	Tell me if you have another thing to help	Maintain and reinforce relationships
H	Gratitude	Thank you	Maintain and reinforce relationships
I	Affirmative Expression	I hope it is going well/ Do your best/ That is a great thing	Maintain and reinforce relationships
J	Filler	Uhm/ Well	Buying time/ avoid direct refusals
K	Repetition	Moving out? / One day is enough?	Confirmation/ buying time/ avoid direct refusals
L	Set Conditions	If you had asked me earlier, I would have...	Set conditions for future or past acceptance, used as refusal justification.
M	Calling	(name)	Call the other party, maintain relationships
N	Exclamation	Ah!	Express the speaker's feeling towards the intention of the other party, buying time/ avoid direct refusals
O	Giving Alternatives	Why don't you ask (name)? / How about next week?	Give alternative to the other party, maintain and reinforce relationships
P	Sympathy	Moving out, must be tough!	Show understanding towards the condition of the other party, maintain and reinforce relationships
Q	Persuasion and Critic	We will rush a lot even if I'm helping you, and it will bother you instead.	Refusal justification
R	Showing Postponed Intentions	I will do it after I finish this / Next time I will participate	Show intention to help in the different time
S	Principle	I should give priority to my family	Refusal justification
T	Postponement	What kind of event? / Let me read the brochure first	Buying time/ avoid direct refusals
U	Avoidance	I don't know / Excuse me / Please ask another person	Buying time/ avoid direct refusals

Attachment 2. Questionnaire about Refusal Expression

Nationality : _____ Mother Language : _____

Age : _____ Sex : Female ▪ Male

The purpose of this questionnaire is to check whether there is any relation between refusal expressions and degree of intimacy. Please answer truthfully part I and II based on the instructions.

I. Please write what you would say in your mother language to refuse a request which is explained in the numeral 1 to 4 below.

1. A stranger is asking your help to participate as a volunteer in a charity event. What would you say in your mother language to refuse his/her request? Please write down your response/ answer in the box below.

In mother language:

Translation in English:

2. Imagine an acquaintance of the same age and hierarchical level as you. That person is asking your help to participate as a volunteer in a charity event. What would you say in your mother language to refuse his/her request? Please write down your response/ answer in the box below.

In mother language:

Translation in English:

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3. Imagine one of your friends of the same age and hierarchical level as you. That person is asking your help to participate as a volunteer in a charity event. What would you say in your mother language to refuse his/her request? Please write down your response/ answer in the box below.

In mother language:

Translation in English:

4. Imagine one of your best friends of the same age and hierarchical level as you. That person is asking your help to participate as a volunteer in a charity event. What would you say in your mother language to refuse his/her request? Please write down your response/ answer in the box below.

In mother language:

Translation in English:

Continue to the II part >>

II. There are 4 basic expressions for refusing. Please refer to the following four patterns for answering the questions.

Basic Expressions in Refusing

No.	Expression	Example
1	Apologize.	“Sorry”, etc.
2	Justification (using reasons, etc.)	“I have another schedule in that day”, “I can go if it is not in that day”, “Even if I can help you, I might be rushing and it can be a troublesome for you instead”, “I must give priority for my family time”, etc.
3	Refuse clearly.	“I can’t go on that day”, “I can’t help you”, etc.
4	Say something to maintain relationships.	“That’s too bad”, “I want to help, but...”, “Let’s keep contact”, “Thank you for inviting me”, “That sounds like a good event”, “Jeff” (calling the person), “How about asking (name) for help?”, “That must be tough”, “I want to participate in the next chance”, etc.

1. A stranger is asking your help to participate as a volunteer in a charity event. What would you say in your mother language to refuse his/her request? Please put in order ALL of the options 1 to 4 below based on what you consider as the best order in your mother language. You can either drag the 1 to 4 options and put it inside the box below it, or write the number of the options in the box.

1. Apologize	2. Justification (using reasons, etc.)	3. Refuse clearly.	4. Say something to maintain relationships.
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(a) The first thing that you will say.	(b) The next thing that you will say after saying the (a).	(c) The next thing that you will say after saying the (b).	(d) The next thing that you will say after saying the (c).

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2. Imagine an acquaintance of the same age and hierarchical level as you. That person is asking your help to participate as a volunteer in a charity event. What would you say in your mother language to refuse his/her request? Please put in order ALL of the options 1 to 4 below based on what you consider as the best order in your mother language. You can either drag the 1 to 4 options and put it inside the box below it, or write the number of the options in the box.

1. Apologize	2. Justification (using reasons, etc.)	3. Refuse clearly.	4. Say something to maintain relationships.
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(a) The first thing that you will say.	(b) The next thing that you will say after saying the (a).	(c) The next thing that you will say after saying the (b).	(d) The next thing that you will say after saying the (c).

3. Imagine one of your friends of the same age and hierarchical level as you. That person is asking your help to participate as a volunteer in a charity event. What would you say in your mother language to refuse his/her request? Please put in order ALL of the options 1 to 4 below based on what you consider as the best order in your mother language. You can either drag the 1 to 4 options and put it inside the box below it, or write the number of the options in the box.

1. Apologize	2. Justification (using reasons, etc.)	3. Refuse clearly.	4. Say something to maintain relationships.
--------------	--	-----------------------	--

(a) The first thing that you will say.	(b) The next thing that you will say after saying the (a).	(c) The next thing that you will say after saying the (b).	(d) The next thing that you will say after saying the (c).

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4. Imagine one of your best friends of the same age and hierarchical level as you. That person is asking your help to participate as a volunteer in a charity event. What would you say in your mother language to refuse his/her request? Please put in order ALL of the options 1 to 4 below based on what you consider as the best order in your mother language. You can either drag the 1 to 4 options and put it inside the box below it, or write the number of the options in the box.

1. Apologize	2. Justification (using reasons, etc.)	3. Refuse clearly.	4. Say something to maintain relationships.
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(a) The first thing that you will say.	(b) The next thing that you will say after saying the (a).	(c) The next thing that you will say after saying the (b).	(d) The next thing that you will say after saying the (c).

(*) I am Candy, graduate student of Doshisha University. All of the answers that you have provided here are only for the research purpose and would not be used for violating your privacy. Thank you for your cooperation.