

## CHAPTER 11

# I'm Sorry—Can I Think About It? The Negotiation of Refusals in Academic and Nonacademic Contexts

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The objective of the activities introduced in this chapter is to develop learners' pragmatic ability by raising their awareness of the structure of refusals and their use in specific situations. Because refusals are usually negotiated, this chapter promotes the learning of refusals at the discourse level by looking at how strategies are used to express pragmatic intent across turns. We explore two main contexts: refusing offers from advisors in an academic context and refusing invitations from friends in a social context.

Refusals differ from many of the acts discussed in previous chapters in that they are responding acts—acts uttered in response to initiating acts such as invitations, suggestions, requests, and offers. This has consequences that are particularly challenging for learners. Because practically any reply is interpreted in terms of the act preceding it, it is often difficult to opt out of a refusal. In addition, refusals are often negotiated across many turns in a conversation, and they may require "face-saving maneuvers to accommodate the noncompliant nature of the act" (Gass & Houck, 1999, p. 2). Moreover, what is considered appropriate refusal behavior may vary across cultures.

### CONTEXT

The refusal data that informed the pedagogical activities included here were gathered in academic and nonacademic settings at Indiana University (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993) and the University of Minnesota (Félix-Brasdefer, 2004, 2008). The participants in these studies were English as a second language (ESL)

and English as a foreign language (EFL) learners at intermediate and advanced proficiency levels, and none had received instruction in refusals. In addition, production data from native English speakers were collected to establish norms for refusal behavior in English in the same contexts. These data were supplemented by retrospective verbal reports that reflect the sociocultural values of the U.S. culture with respect to how native English speakers perceive refusals in formal and informal situations.

Using the production and reflection data of native English speakers as a source of pragmatic input, we developed pedagogical activities to raise learners' awareness of appropriate ways to refuse in advising sessions and informal invitations. In line with Rose's (1994) pragmatic consciousness raising approach, these activities help "sensitize learners to context-based variation in language use and the variables that help determine that variation" (p. 57). The activities presented here for ESL and EFL students were first developed for teaching refusals to learners of Spanish and were successfully tested with 4th-semester Spanish classes in a university foreign language context (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006). The examples that focus on refusing academic advice are geared toward university-bound ESL and EFL students; the invitation examples may be used with all intermediate or advanced students.

Refusals are a speech act by which a speaker fails "to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor" (Chen, Ye, & Zhang, 1995, p. 121). In this chapter the term *refusal* includes both general refusals, such as refusing to do something, and refusals for which there are special verbs in English, such as *declining* an invitation and *rejecting* advice. The linguistic resources used may vary according to the situation (e.g., refusing a professor's advice or a friend's invitation), topic of conversation, participants' gender, setting (e.g., a university vs. a grocery store), and relationship between the participants.

Refusals may be direct or indirect. Direct refusals are often short and clear (e.g., "No, I can't," "I can't," "No") and are frequently softened or mitigated (e.g., "Unfortunately, I don't think I'll be able to come"). Because any response that indicates nonacceptance or noncompliance will be interpreted as an attempt to refuse, refusals are often indirect, with no expression of negative willingness or ability. Thus, they require interpretation by the listener. Indirect refusals include the following strategies:

1. Reason or explanation ("But—the problem is that summer classes meet daily.")
2. Alternatives ("Well, I'd kind of thought of taking another class." "Why don't we go out for dinner next week?")
3. Expression of regret or apology ("I'm really sorry." "I apologize.")

mediate and advanced refusals. In addition, procedures to establish norms for data were supplemented by cultural values of the U.S. receive refusals in formal and

English speakers as a source to raise learners' awareness of informal invitations. In line with this approach, these activities help to explore the variables that are presented here for ESL and EFL learners of Spanish and English in a university foreign language program that focus on refusing invitations to ESL and EFL students; the use of direct or advanced students. (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1995, p. 121). In this chapter we focus on refusing to do something, such as *declining* an invitation (e.g., a friend's invitation), topic of university vs. a grocery store),

are often short and clearly softened or mitigated (e.g., "I'm sorry"). Because any response can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid or soften a negative willingness or refusal. Indirect refusals include

is that summer classes meet

taking another class." "Why

am I sorry." "I apologize.")

4. Avoidance—There are a variety of avoidance strategies such as the following:
  - (a) Postponement ("Can I think about it?")
  - (b) Hedging ("I don't know.")
  - (c) Request for clarification ("Did you say Saturday?")
  - (d) Request for additional information ("Can you tell me more about the class?")
  - (e) Partial repeats of previous utterance (A: "I'm having a party on Monday and I would love it if you could come." B: "*Monday*." [partial repeat in italics])
5. Indefinite response ("Maybe." "That's a possibility.")

If these strategies occur with a direct refusal such as "no" or "I can't," they function as external modifications of the direct act. Refusals can be preceded or followed by expressions of gratitude (e.g., "Thanks for the invitation, but . . ."), positive remarks (e.g., "That's a good idea, but . . ."), expressions of willingness (e.g., "I'd love to, but . . ."), partial agreements ("Yes, I agree, but . . ."), or minimal vocalizations or discourse markers and expressions ("Oh, darn it, tomorrow I can't"). The preference for strategy use and the degree of internal modification also vary according to the situation and the relationship between the participants.

### Refusals in Advising Sessions

The two most dominant refusal strategies used by native speakers to reject the advice of their advisors during academic advising sessions are (a) reasons or explanations and (b) alternatives (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991). Native-speaker rejections in advising sessions are frequently mitigated by *downgraders* such as mental state predicates (e.g., *I think*) and modal adverbs (e.g., *probably*; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991, 1993; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). Postponement, characterized by a request to delay a response, is typically used in the advising context by nonnative speakers but is also used by native speakers in other settings. Examples 1–4 provide example refusals (softeners are in italics):

(Ex. 1) Reason or explanation

"Shoot! That's the one that conflicts with what I have to take."

(Ex. 2) Alternatives

"Well, I *kind of* thought of taking phonetics."

(Ex. 3) Mitigated direct rejection

"OK, well, I, I, I'm actually looking at doing some grad school, in—the literature field, um, so: *I think probably* I'm not gonna take the class."

(Ex. 4) Avoidance: Postponement

"Can I think about it?" "Can I decide next week?"

Native speakers of American English tend to avoid refusals in advising sessions, but when they occur, they are short and typically unambiguous as in Example 5, in which a native speaker rejects the advisor's suggestion to take a class (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; the refusal is included in the box).

(Ex. 5) Advisor accepts rejection (native speaker to native speaker interaction)

A: Advisor; S: Student. (A suggests that S take Mary Smith's class.)

Advice 1 A: Um . . . what you might want to do is

2 S: yeah

3 A: is go over and talk to them, um, . . . I could call Mary

4 and ask, that's Smith, and ask her. But . . . let me see if

5 S: um-hm

6 A: she's in

Reason 7 →	S: Except that that's a clash, 10:20 to . . . yeah
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8 A: Oh it is? Oh, okay, so

In this example, the successful native-speaker rejection is accomplished through an explicit and appropriate explanation that effectively rejects the professor's advice and that is also delayed across the interaction. There are pauses by the advisor in lines 3 and 4 where the student could have made a contribution, but did not. This rejection is accepted by the professor (line 8). Example 5 shows that when native English speakers reject a professor's advice, their refusals are mitigated but firm and provide legitimate reasons or explanations for the rejection. In contrast, when rejecting advice in advising sessions, nonnative English speakers show a preference for avoidance strategies such as requesting repetition of information or postponement of a response, as in "I'm sorry. Can I think about it?"

### Refusing an Invitation

Similar to rejecting a professor's advice, declining invitations in English generally entails the interaction of direct and indirect strategies, as well as expressions that preface or follow the refusal. Strategies include (a) direct refusals that are often mitigated or softened (e.g., "Unfortunately, I can't make it to the party"); (b) indirect refusals including reasons or explanations, suggestions or alternatives, expressions of apology or regret, and postponements or avoidance; and (c) expressions that preface or follow a direct or indirect strategy such as partial agreements, expressions of gratitude, positive remarks, indications of willingness, and demonstrations of empathy (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). In the e-mail in Example 6, Anne declines Emily's invitation (lines 1-9) for their families to go to the park. Notice that Anne does not refuse directly. (The refusal is included in the box [lines 14-20].)

(Ex. 6) Invitation refusal by e-mail

#### Emily's invitation:

- 1 Hi Anne! How are you guys? Hope you're doing well.
- 2 It was great to see you at the Trike-A-Thon the other day.
- 3 I just realized that with no class on Monday, we would be free
- 4 for a play date if you guys are going to be in town.
- 5 Mark would love to have Alex over (or we could meet at a park
- 6 or something) if you guys are going to be in town.
- 7 Would you like to get together on Monday afternoon?
- 8 Let me know if you guys want to get together and then
- 9 we can make plans. Have a great day!--Emily

#### Anne's refusal:

- Opening →
- 10 Hi Emily!
  - 11 Hope you're having a great weekend with this beautiful weather.
  - 12 Sorry it has taken me so long to get back to you,
  - 13 we've had a busy few days again.

- Gratitude → 14 Thanks for the invitation for tomorrow afternoon,
- Reason → 15 but we already have plans for the day since Stephen rarely gets time off.
- Suggestion → 16 I know you must be really busy with your classes and all,
- 17 so I hope that we will have a chance to get together soon.
- 18 What does next weekend Saturday/Sunday look like for you?
- 19 Of course, we'll have to play it by ear with the weather and all,
- 20 but as far as I know we don't have any plans for then.



- Closing →      21 Let me know what works for you and we can plan from there.  
                     22 Enjoy the rest of the weekend, Anne.

The e-mail response consists of three moves (lines 10–22): a greeting and message initiator (lines 10–13), a refusal to the invitation (lines 14–20), and a closing move (lines 21–22). The actual refusal to the invitation is presented later in Anne's turn (lines 14–20). It is prefaced by an expression of gratitude followed by the reason or explanation (lines 14–15), concluding with an initiated suggestion to make plans that leaves the interaction open for further negotiation (lines 16–20). The refusal structure in Example 6 (Gratitude + Reason + Initiated Suggestion) is common among North Americans in refusals to invitations (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008).

Without instruction, the refusals produced by learners of English and other languages show frequent unmitigated direct forms, avoidance strategies that yield nonnative-like refusals, and a lack of alternatives. Learners generally use a small set of expressions to downgrade refusals, and they use them less frequently than native speakers (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Félix-Brasdefer, 2004). Moreover, nonnative speakers often end refusal sequences abruptly, which can hinder the negotiation of the refusal (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Félix-Brasdefer, 2004; Gass & Houck, 1999).

## **CURRICULUM, TASKS, MATERIALS**

This section presents a four-step lesson<sup>1</sup> (Activities 1–4) to raise learners' pragmatic awareness of refusals, using academic advising sessions as the context. A follow-up activity expands the context to refusing a friend's invitation. This lesson was designed for intermediate learners who are learning English in both ESL and EFL classrooms. The lesson can be completed in two to three 50-minute class sessions: 1–2 class sessions devoted to teaching rejections in advising sessions, with a follow-up class to teach refusals to an invitation. For the following activities, teachers and students listen to role-play interactions and follow along in written transcriptions. These and other activities can also be accessed directly from the Indiana University website (see Félix-Brasdefer, 2010a, 2010b).<sup>2</sup>

To begin, the teacher explains that in conversation we use language to request something, apologize for something, or refuse something, and the way we do this may vary across cultures. The expressions used to carry out these actions vary according to the situation and the relationship between the interlocutors. The teacher explains that the focus of the class for that day will be on learning about English refusals in a college or university environment between students and professors. For example, refusing a professor's advice to take a class or revising a final paper.

<sup>1</sup>The audio files and transcripts for this chapter are available at <http://www.tesolmedia.com/books/pragmatics>. The transcripts also appear in Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup>The online materials and exercises for this chapter were created by the first author.

and we can plan from there.

2): a greeting and message (4–20), and a closing move presented later in Anne's turn followed by the reasoned suggestion to make initiation (lines 16–20). The initiated Suggestion) is common (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008). Speakers of English and other avoidance strategies that yield speakers generally use a small set of them less frequently than Félix-Brasdefer, 2004). More abruptly, which can hinder (Ford, 1991; Félix-Brasdefer,

–4) to raise learners' pragmatic sessions as the context. A first speaker's invitation. This lesson focusing on English in both ESL and EFL contexts over three 50-minute class sessions in advising sessions, followed by writing activities. For the following activities and follow along in writing to be accessed directly from the text (10a, 2010b).<sup>2</sup> In this lesson we use language to request something, and the way we do to carry out these actions vary between the interlocutors. The focus of the day will be on learning about the interaction between students and the teacher to take a class or revising a

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 ted by the first author.

The activities included here are divided into four phases: raising awareness, recognizing refusal strategies, identifying softeners, and producing refusals.

### Activity 1A: Raising Awareness

In the first part of Activity 1, the teacher builds on the introduction to speech acts by explaining that there are various ways of saying “no” in response to requests, suggestions, or invitations. (See the list of strategies in the Context section.) The teacher uses a warm-up activity in which the class brainstorms on various ways to say “no.” At the end of the warm-up, the teacher introduces the key concepts: Refusals can be expressed directly or indirectly and can convey different degrees of politeness.

### Activity 1B: Perceptions of Refusals

During the second part of Activity 1, students listen to refusals by North American university students in two role-plays<sup>3</sup> (see Appendix B for transcripts) and then read comments by the same speakers on their refusal strategies. In this way, students are exposed to the structure of refusals and the reasons speakers used them. Worksheet 1 (see Appendix A) includes introspections by some of the speakers in the role-play refusals. Students read the comments and identify the expressions that North American students used, the degree of politeness students tried to convey, and the directness level students aimed for. After 5–10 minutes of discussion among the students, the teacher asks the class to comment briefly on the questions as a group. (See Appendix A for answer keys.)

### Activity 2: Recognizing Refusal Strategies

In the recognition phase, students analyze rejection sequences in advising interactions with a North American professor. Activity 2 exposes students to relevant pragmatic input to raise their awareness of the pragmalinguistic resources commonly used in rejections of advice. Pragmatic input is presented in two parts: analysis of written input (e.g., analyzing refusals) and listening comprehension (e.g., analyzing *mitigators* and refusal strategies at the discourse level; the examples of rejection sequences are taken from data collected by Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991, and by Félix-Brasdefer, 2008).

In Worksheet 2 (see Appendix A), students read the examples of rejections to advice (Part I, 1–8), and then work together in pairs to complete a matching activity (Part II). Once students have completed Part II, the teacher reviews the answers with the class.

<sup>3</sup>To access the audio files and transcripts from Félix-Brasdefer (2010a), go to “Listen to Refusals” and scroll down the drop-down menu to “A Professor’s Advice 1 and 2.” Then click on the audio icon above the text to hear the interactions.

### Activity 3: Identifying Softeners

Activity 3 raises awareness of certain expressions utilized in refusals to soften the rejection of a professor's advice.

In preparing learners to listen to native-English-speaking (NES) students' refusals, the teacher points out that when refusing a professor's advice to take an extra class, North Americans soften the negative effects of a direct refusal and present the refusal more tentatively by using expressions called *mitigators* or *downgraders*. These expressions may occur in reasons or explanations, alternatives or suggestions, and indefinite replies or acceptances that function as refusals, as well as in mitigating direct refusals.

The activity begins with an awareness-raising task (see Worksheet 3 in Appendix A) in which students identify softening expressions before they listen to a role-play.<sup>4</sup> The teacher can distribute the transcript (see Appendix B) as a handout for students working on Part III of Worksheet 3 or have students find it online.

### Activity 4: Producing Refusals

During Activity 4, students can practice up to five role-plays using the practice activities.<sup>5</sup> Three of these activities involve refusing a professor's advice, and two involve refusing a friend's invitation. The main part of the activity, which is discussed here, focuses on the three situations that involve refusing a professor's advice.

1. Selecting a linguistics class: Students hear a professor suggest that a graduate student take a linguistics class. (See Worksheet 4 in Appendix A.)
2. Selecting an English class: Students hear a professor recommend a writing and composition class to an English major.
3. Final-paper review: Students hear a professor offer advice to a student on revisions of a final paper.

Each situation has an audio component in which the professor speaks, followed by silence during which the student responds, followed by a second turn for both professor and student. The teacher plays the audio file and asks a volunteer to respond to the simulated role-play. The different situations elicit various types of rejection responses.

After the three role-plays are completed, the class comments on the effec-

<sup>4</sup>To access the audio file and transcript from Félix-Brasdefer (2010a), go to "Listen to Refusals" and scroll down the drop-down menu to "A Professor's Advice 1." Then click on the audio icon above the text to hear the interaction.

<sup>5</sup>These five audio files and transcripts are available from Félix-Brasdefer (2010b). See "Refusing a Professor's Advice" and "Refusing a Friend's Invitation." The audio files and transcripts for the three situations discussed in the chapter are also available at <http://www.tesolmedia.com/books/pragmatics>. In addition, a transcript of Situation 1 appears in Worksheet 4.



tiveness of the students' responses in light of the information discussed in the previous activities: (a) selection of linguistic resources to perform the refusal and (b) appropriateness of the response and content of strategies used. The teacher encourages students to practice these activities outside of class.

### Follow-Up Activity: Refusing Invitations

The activities presented in this chapter can be extended to other contexts, such as refusing a friend's invitation. In the follow-up session, the teacher shows that the strategies that were identified for refusing advice from a professor can also be used when refusing an invitation from a friend, but with different distribution. The most frequent strategies for refusing a friend's invitation to a birthday party (and other contexts) include (a) reasons or explanations, (b) direct refusals, (c) postponements and (d) alternatives, along with expressions that preface the refusal, such as (e) partial agreements, (f) expressions of gratitude, or (g) statements of empathy. The teacher can adapt the discussion questions for the advising session presented earlier to declining invitations. (For a general classification of strategies commonly used in refusal responses and examples of these strategies, see Félix-Brasdefer, 2010a). The teacher should again convey that an invitation-refusal sequence is complex and has a structure similar to that of advising sessions. The teacher presents the following five sequenced parts for refusing an invitation in English:

1. Opening
2. Invitation-refusal sequence
3. Insistence-response (optional)
4. Suggestion to make plans-response
5. Closing

Three refusals to invitations according to the participants' gender (male-male, female-male, female-female), can be found online (see Félix-Brasdefer, 2010a).<sup>6</sup> A sample transcript of an invitation-refusal interaction, featuring the five sequences just described, is included in Appendix B.

Finally, the website (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010b)<sup>7</sup> offers two role-plays similar to the one described in Worksheet 4, in which students can practice

<sup>6</sup>These three audio files and transcripts are available from Félix-Brasdefer (2010a). Go to "Listen to Refusals" and scroll down the drop-down menu to "Refusing in English." See "A Friend's Birthday Invitation." The female-male interaction and transcript are also available at <http://www.tesolmedia.com/books/pragmatics>.

<sup>7</sup>Scroll down the page. See "Refusing a Friend's Invitation." These files are not available on the book's website.

invitation-refusal sequences. Students select activities according to their gender (male-male or female-female):

1. Refusing a male friend's invitation to a birthday party (male-male)
2. Refusing a female friend's invitation to her graduation party (female-female)

## REFLECTIONS

This chapter presents activities that attempt to raise learners' pragmatic awareness of linguistic resources that are used to make refusals in accordance with the sociocultural expectations and norms of interaction in a specific academic or social context. Such activities can serve as supplements to academic and other curricular content.

The activities described here can be used in ESL and EFL contexts. We recommend that in an EFL context the teacher expose learners to various forms of pragmatic input including e-mail refusals (see Example 6 in the Context section), films, YouTube, and online radio discussions where other types of disagreements occur. In addition, students should be encouraged to listen to and practice interactions in a variety of refusal situations.

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## APPENDIX A: WORKSHEETS AND ANSWER KEYS

### Worksheet 1: Analyzing Native English Speakers' Reflections After Refusing a Professor's Advice

These are comments from the students in the dialogues you just heard: "A Professor's Advice 1 and 2" (available at <http://www.tesolmedia.com/books/pragmatics>). In them, they explain what strategies they used to refuse to take an extra class as recommended by their professor. Read them and do the following:

1. Identify some expressions that students use in their rejection of a professor's advice.
2. Comment on the degree of politeness and respect that native English speakers try to convey when rejecting advice from a professor.
3. Comment on the native English speakers' degree of directness or indirectness when rejecting advice from a professor. Should a student be direct or vague when conveying the final rejection?

#### Comments

- (a) "I was trying to politely let him know that I couldn't [take the course] this semester, that it wasn't working out and it seemed to me that he thought it'd be a good idea, rather than I needed to take it, so I thought that I was trying to be very polite and trying not to offend him, but at the same time letting him know that I can't do it."
- (b) "Thinking that I put a lot of time into organizing my schedule and he had a suggestion, I asked him if it was going to affect graduation; I appreciated his input and I wanted to make that known, but at the same time I wasn't willing to change."
- (c) "I wanted to convey a certain amount of respect and appreciation to the professor for making a recommendation to me, but at the same time I knew I didn't want to take the class and I wanted to make that clear."
- (d) "[In my rejection I was] indirect at the beginning—[you] cannot be direct right away ( . . . ) [I tried] to be polite by asking questions, asking for explanations, ( . . . ) [you] need to be sincere with a professor, but not give a 'no' bluntly."

#### Worksheet 1: Answer Key

1. Reason or explanation, suggestion, *I don't know, could, probably, possibly, I think, maybe*
2. Native English speakers try to be polite, state appreciation, and convey respect.
3. Try to be indirect first. Then be clear.

## Worksheet 2: Recognizing Refusal Strategies in Advising Sessions

The examples in Part I (1-8) include refusals used by students during advising sessions. The arrow (→) indicates the student's refusal response. Read the refusals listed in Part I (1-8) and match them with the refusal strategies in Part II (1-8). Select the strategy that best describes each refusal and complete the blanks.

### Part I: Student Refusals

- (1) Advisor: So, I'd like you most up-to-date in the area that you will be pursuing um  
→ Student: Definitely. So, I have to decide which area I want to pursue and, uh, I'm still thinking a little about that.
- (2) Advisor: Here, Educational Psychology, P501, page 49.  
→ Student: I've taken that.
- (3) Student: That might be a solution.
- (4) Student: I should try to work something out for the summer which is where I will need your advice if I want to do these three.
- (5) Student: That's the one that conflicts with what I have to take.
- (6) Student: By the way, I *could* look into the *possibility* of having that requirement waived . . .
- (7) Student: OK, well, I, I, I'm actually looking at doing some grad school, in—the literature field, um,  
→ so: *I think probably* I'm not gonna take the class.
- (8) Student: OK, *could* you—just tell me *a little bit* about it?

### Part II: Refusal Strategies

For each example number on the left, fill in the blank the with appropriate strategy letter from the right-hand column.

#### Example # Strategy

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (a) asking for explicit advice  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (b) direct short rejection  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (c) postponing the rejection  
4. \_\_\_\_\_ (d) offering an alternative  
5. \_\_\_\_\_ (e) requesting additional information  
6. \_\_\_\_\_ (f) offering an indefinite reply  
7. \_\_\_\_\_ (g) making a mitigated refusal  
8. \_\_\_\_\_ (h) offering a reason or an explanation

### Worksheet 2: Answer Key

#### Part II: Refusal Strategies

1. (c); 2. (b); 3. (f); 4. (a); 5. (h); 6. (d); 7. (g); 8. (e)



### Worksheet 3: Identifying Expressions, Softeners, and Strategies

#### Part I: Focusing on Softeners

With a classmate, discuss the function of the expressions in italics in the following examples. What do these expressions do? How does the speaker use them?

Student: By the way, I *could* look into the *possibility* of having that requirement waived . . .

Student: OK, well, I, I, I, I'm actually looking at doing some grad school, in—the literature field, um,  
→ so: *I think probably* I'm not gonna take the class.

Student: OK, *could* you—just tell me *a little bit* about it?

#### Part II: Listening

Listen to the audio file “A Professor’s Advice I” (available at <http://www.tesolmedia.com/books/pragmatics>). In this role-play interaction, a North American student refuses his professor’s advice. Read along on the transcript (also available online). You will hear the interactions twice. Complete the following activities as you listen to the conversations.

1. Write down the various expressions that the student used to soften his refusal.
2. Compare your list of expressions with a classmate’s and decide what strategies were used in those expressions (e.g., reasons or explanations, mitigated refusals, postponements, expressions of uncertainty, or others).

#### Part III: Postlistening

This activity consists of four sections:

1. Listen to the role-play interaction again. This time, follow along on the role-play transcription (available at <http://www.tesolmedia.com/books/pragmatics>). While you listen, underline or write down all the forms used by the student to soften a refusal response or to present the refusal more tentatively.
2. Compare your responses with a classmate. Make sure to include those expressions that are used at the beginning of each of the native-English-speaking (NES) student’s turns.
3. Class discussion. Discuss all the mitigators identified in the role-play. Your teacher will write these expressions on the board.
4. Finally, with a classmate compare the three refusals by the NES student (see lines 5–7, 11–15, and 17 on the transcript). How is each of these responses different? What strategy does the student use to make his last refusal?

**Worksheet 3: Answer Key**

**Part II: Listening**

1. *Could, possibility, I think, probably, a little bit*
2. Some strategies include: soften, sound less certain, start a negotiation.

**Part III: Postlistening**

1. *I don't know, kind of, I guess, well*
2. Compare answers with partner
3. Compare answers with class
4. Lines 5–7, explanation and alternative; lines 11–15, explanation; line 17, postponement

**Worksheet 4: Refusing a Professor's Advice—Situation 1**

For the following situation imagine yourself at your advisor's office. Read the situation carefully. Take a minute to look over the conversation. You will have 15 seconds to respond. Press [start] on the audio when you are ready to begin the advising session (available at <http://www.tesolmedia.com/books/pragmatics>).

**Situation 1: Selecting a linguistics class for next year**

**Advisor–Student:** It is class registration time and you go to your advisor's office to finalize your schedule for next year. After exchanging greetings, your professor begins the advising session.

(Student hits Play button to begin the advising session.)

**ADVISOR:** [Professor begins advising session]

[Tone]

**YOU:** Respond: Briefly agree with your professor's suggestion and provide a reason for not taking the class.

[Tone]

**ADVISOR:** [Professor responds]

[Tone]

**YOU:** Respond. Provide a partial agreement response, then an alternative or a suggestion.

[Tone]

**ADVISOR:** [Professor ends advising session].

**Worksheet 4: Answer Key**

Sample responses provided by a North American female graduate student. An audio file is also available at <http://www.tesolmedia.com/books/pragmatics>.

**ADVISOR:** [Professor begins advising session.]

**YOU:** Respond: Briefly agree with your professor's suggestion and provide a reason for not taking the class.

**Student's response:**

Oh—yeah, I think I think it would be helpful—um—however it's at the same time as um this brilliant important seminar that I'm—that I'm taking in theoretical linguistics—um—

so I think I'd probably better take that one.

**ADVISOR:** [Professor responds.]

**YOU:** Respond. Provide a partial agreement response, then an alternative or a suggestion.

**Student's response:**

OK, maybe I can—um—talk to the—theoretical linguistics professor to see if he is going to offer another s—um—section of the class—is there another time that the second language class would be offered?

**ADVISOR:** [Professor ends advising session.]

## APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTS

*Note:* Activity 1B: Perceptions of Refusals uses “A Professor’s Advice 1 and 2.”

Activity 3: Identifying Softeners also uses “A Professor’s Advice 1.”

### A Professor's Advice 1

- 1 Advisor: Taylor, I've looked over your—transcript and I've noticed
- 2 that you've taken a lot of—literature classes but you haven't
- 3 taken any linguistics classes, and there's a Spanish linguistics class
- 4 that I think it would be really beneficial for you to take this semester↓
- 5 → Student: Yeah, I don't know—I thought about that, but I really—I really felt
- 6 that I've, I've learned enough—linguistics before in my other classes
- 7 so::—I—I kind of felt like I wanted to take a literature class.
- 8 Advisor: Yeah, well this focuses not just on the linguistics that you've learned
- 9 but it applies to Hispanic Linguistics—so I think it would be
- 10 really beneficial if you had some other linguistics background.
- 11 → Student: M-kay—well—I don't know—I'm really—I'm really not—
- 12 I don't feel completely ah—like I need—ah—I guess I feel
- 13 like I can—get enough out of the books that I've read and—
- 14 just from previous classes
- 15 so:: I'm st—I'm still kind of unsure about it ((laughs))—uh
- 16 Advisor: OK, well I just think that it would—it would be very beneficial.
- 17 → Student: OK, well, I'll—I'll look into it—I'll think about it some more.
- 18 Advisor: OK.

**A Professor's Advice 2**

- 1 Advisor: Well—I've been reviewing your transcript and uh while you've taken a lot  
2 of Spanish classes, a lot of literature classes for your Spanish major, you  
3 you haven't taken any linguistics classes yet—and uh—I think it'd be a real  
4 good idea for you to take this linguistics class that's being offered,  
5 it's a really good class.
- 6 Student: OK, when does that meet?
- 7 Advisor: Um, it meets um Tuesdays, Thursdays in the afternoon.
- 8 Student: OK um, my Tuesdays and Thursdays are really wrapped up right now,  
9 um I'm not gonna be able to do that this semester, um, hopefully  
10 I can get around to it next semester—if that's a necessity for . . .
- 11 Advisor: Well it's not a requirement, but it's a really good class and it's it's  
12 something that I REALLY think you should take.
- 13 Student: OK, do you think that it would be helpful in me doing better  
14 in these classes?
- 15 Advisor: It's gonna help you understand the Spanish language better, yeah.
- 16 Student: OK, um, well like I said—maybe next semester, I can't do it now,  
17 uh per se
- 18 Advisor: Um—I I think it'd be very beneficial for you to take it uh—  
19 uh as soon as you can.
- 20 Student: OK, um, do you think I should try to rearrange my schedule . . .  
21 or should—is it something [that I could put off?
- 22 Advisor: [Well, well, I think so,  
23 I think you should take it uh—  
24 you know—I think it would really be helpful for you
- 25 Student: OK, um . . .



**Follow-Up Activity: Refusing Invitations**

Erin (female) and Paul (male) are two college students at an American University in the southern United States. Erin invites Paul to her birthday party and Paul declines.

Erin: Hey Paul—how's it going?

Paul: hey, Erin how are you?

Erin: I'm fanta::stic

Paul: I haven't seen you in a long time— [where you been?

Erin: [I—

I've just been working—going to class

Paul: [oh good—good

Erin: [the usual—

I'm so glad that I saw you—I've been trying to figure out how to get in touch with you cuz—um—I just turned 21—yesterday—and I'm gonna have a party this Friday night and I'm just trying to get in touch with everybody—um—from last semester—that we were all in class together and everything and I really wanted you to come—it's gonna be at eight o'clock at my house

Paul: ooh—this Friday?

Erin: yeah

Paul: ohh—my goodness—it's my grandmother's birthday this weekend

Erin: you're kidding

Paul: and my grandmother lives out of town - too

Erin: oh— [no:::

Paul: [and—normally—you know—my parents go of course— you know

Erin: umhm

Paul: so—when we go, we spend the weekend with 'em

Erin: yeah

Paul: because I live so far away—

we just can't come back and forth on [a day

Erin: [yeah

when are you leaving?

Opening

Invitation-refusal

Paul: Thursday night

Erin: oh man::—

Paul: and we're gonna get there Friday morning and stay until Sunday

Erin: and—there's no way you can—like =

Paul: —oh, I wish I could—I—I wish I could make it because, you know—I haven't seen you for such a [long time

Insistence-response

Erin: [yeah

Paul: and I'd like to get—you know—I'd like to get back with you but—um—maybe next—are you busy next week?

I mean—I'll take you out for dinner or =

Erin: —ohh ((laughs)) that's nice of you—um yeah we can just—we can get together—that's cool

Suggestion-response

Paul: would that work?

Erin: yeah

Paul: ok

Erin: well, I'm sorry you can't come, but have a good time with your grandmother

Paul: alright—I'm sorry too—

Erin: alright

Paul: happy birthday

Erin: thank you.

Closing

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