

# **When Eastern and Western CFL Learners Make Requests and Refusals: The Issue of Cultural Backgrounds**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigated Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) learners' pragmatic competence in making requests and refusals, specifically concerning the influence of cultural backgrounds on these learners' speech act performance. The participants were 29 CFL learners, including 21 easterners and 8 westerners. Data collected from a 42-item Written Discourse Completion Task revealed potential transfer from participants' native cultures to the use of target language. The major findings showed that eastern learners outperformed westerners in making requests but not in refusals, referring to the rubrics of directness, politeness, and Grice's maxims. Generally, both groups of CFL learners attended to different social statuses when delivering these two speech acts. Yet, the extent to which eastern learners used polite utterance was more significant, compared to their counterparts. Pedagogical implications for Chinese language education and suggestions for future researchers are offered.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, Speech acts, Cultural background, Chinese as a foreign language, Chinese request, Chinese refusal

以「中文為外國語言」之東方和西方學習者表達請求與拒絕：

## 探究文化背景之議題

劉美惠

張容瑄

### 摘要

本研究探討以中文為外國語言學習者在表達請求與拒絕時所呈現之語用能力，特別是深究文化背景對其「言語行為」表現之影響。參加本研究之語言學習者共包括 29 位，其中 21 位來自東方國家、8 位則來自西方國家。資料蒐集之來源為對答型「言談情境評量試卷」（共 42 題），資料分析顯示參與研究者之文化背景對其學習中文產生可能性之轉移效應。根據語用學相關理論（包括直接性、禮貌性、和 Grice 的會話原則），主要研究發現東方學習者在以中文「表達請求」時比西方學習者之表現較為良好，但於「表達拒絕」時，雙方之表現則未達顯著性差異。一般而言，不論東方或西方學習者皆根據對話者不同的社會階級而表達其「言語行為」；然而，相較於西方學習者，東方學習者擅長於使用禮貌性對談方式之程度則達到顯著性之差異。最後，本研究針對中文語言教育和未來相關研究提供改善措施和建議。

**關鍵字：**語用學、言語行為、文化背景、以中文為外國語言、以中文表達請求、以中文表達拒絕

## Introduction

The promotion of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) education is a worldwide effort (Orton, 2008; Starr, 2009; Taguchi, 2015). This trend draws many researchers' attention to document CFL learners' language acquisition and performance in terms of phonology, vocabulary, grammar, or learning strategies (e.g., Bassetti, 2006; Liu, 2009; Wang, Spencer, & Xing, 2009; Xing, 2006). As noted by foreign language educators, learners' ability to communicate appropriately in the target language is not only determined by their familiarity with vocabulary and linguistics structures but also pragmatic competence (Alcón & Martínez-Flor, 2008; Jordà, 2005). Interlanguage pragmatic research documented that successful foreign language learners are equipped with both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence (Kasper & Rose, 2001). The former refers to one's linguistic competence for formulating particular speech acts; the latter represents one's ability to determine appropriate pragmalinguistic choices based on one's judgements on social and contextual variables (Leech, 2016).

In the extant literature, researchers mainly investigated CFL learners' pragmatic development in a study abroad context, documented heritage learners' pragmatic performance, or examined the effectiveness of pragmatic-focused instruction (see a review in Taguchi, 2015). Some studies further compared speech act behaviors between or among native Chinese speakers, heritage Chinese learners, and/or nonnative Chinese speakers mostly recruited from North America (e.g., Hong, 2011; Li, 2014; Wen, 2014; Zhang, 2012). A few Taiwanese researchers investigated the pragmatic performance of CFL learners from France, Australia, or Japan (Hu, 2015; Lai, 2012; Osaki, 2011). Yet, very limited research has conducted comparisons between CFL learners from eastern and western cultural backgrounds, except for Shu (2007) investigating Chinese learners whose mother tongue was either Japanese or English. According to *Association for Psychological Science* (2011), the differences embedded in Asian and Caucasian cultural backgrounds influence how people perceive and interact with others, which might in turn determine their pragmatic performance in daily speech acts. Previous research depicted that cultural backgrounds may lead to second/foreign language learners' success or failure in interlanguage pragmatic transfer into the appropriateness, politeness, and (in)directness of speech acts in the target language (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Jiang, 2015; Lee, 2013; Zhang, 2012). This conclusion raises a research issue that eastern and western foreign language learners might or might not have different pragmatic performance in speech acts. Regarding the appropriateness of pragmatic interaction in target languages, four maxims relating to Grice's cooperative principles in conversation are the major indicators, including quantity, quality, relation, and manner (Yule, 2008).

The levels of politeness and directness are both related to language learners' speech act delivery under the latent influence of different cultural norms or values (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Spencer-Oatey & Žegarac, 2010).

Mindful of the above reasons, the current study fills the literature gaps by addressing the following research questions concerning eastern and western CFL learners' requests and refusals, which are the most common speech acts in daily life (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969). It aims to examine the influence, if any, of different cultural backgrounds on CFL learners' request and refusal utterances. Also included are these learners' pragmatic performance in the two speech acts delivered to various interlocutors as well as the relationship between appropriateness and directness/politeness revealing in these learners' speech acts.

1. Do eastern and western cultural backgrounds influence CFL learners' request and refusal performance?
2. Is there any significant difference in these CFL learners' requests and refusals delivered to interlocutors with various social statuses?
3. Is there any significant correlation between the appropriateness of these CFL learners' pragmatic performance and the directness or politeness of their language usage?

## **Related Literature**

As noted by Taguchi (2015), a scarcity of studies documented CFL learners' pragmatic behaviors in speech acts. This review section will hence primarily cover the studies in relation to refusals and requests performed by general language learners after presenting a brief introduction of speech acts<sup>1</sup>. The essence of these research findings may serve as the baseline for investigating the pragmatic performance of eastern and western non-native speakers of Chinese.

### ***Speech Acts and Foreign/Second Language Learning***

Speech acts are utterances serving as functional units in communication, which not only are statements or descriptions but also have performance functions to provoke actions (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969). In other words, utterances embrace two kinds of meaning: 1) propositional meaning—the literal meaning of the spoken or written utterance, and 2) illocutionary or functional meaning—the effect that the spoken or written utterance has on the reader or listener (Yule, 2008). Accordingly, a speech act is

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<sup>1</sup> According to the article reviewer's recommendation, there is a need to add a section of speech acts during the revision process. To meet the urgent request, the first author attended to and composed the main issues by referring to her recent publication (Liu, Liao, & Gauss, 2017).

interpreted to refer to the illocutionary force of an utterance as the communicative intention, plan, or design behind a speaker's delivered remark (Leech, 2016). As note by Sykes (2005), a speech act refers to "a communicative act, performed through speech, which demonstrates how meaning and action are related to language" (p. 403).

Searle (1985) developed Austin's notion of speech acts and classified five major categories of illocutionary force, including representatives (e.g., assertions, reports), directives (e.g., requests, suggestions), commissives (e.g., promises, threats), expressives (e.g., apologies, gratitude), and declaratives (e.g., decrees, declarations). Of which, the current study investigated the speech act sets of directives and commissives in terms of "request" and "refusal" because foreign language learners usually have difficulties in performing these two acts in daily life and are likely to cause misunderstandings and threaten their interlocutor's face in foreign language contexts (Jalilifar, 2009; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). They are hence both face-threatening acts and speakers need to make further adjustments considering social variables to deliver appropriate pragmatic behaviors (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Trosborg (1995) defines the speech act of requests as "an illocutionary act whereby a speaker (requester) conveys to the hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to perform an act which is for the benefit of the speaker" (p. 187). As Hassall (2001) noted, making requests is a complex speech act that allows investigations on several aspects of language learners' pragmatic performance in interlanguage pragmatic studies. By contrast, refusals are responding acts to be delivered in intentional responses to several initiating speech acts such as invitations, requests, offer, or suggestions (Félix-Brasdefer & Bardovi-Harling, 2010), which may be regarded as negative counterparts to acceptances and consents (Searle & Vandervken, 1985). Al-Eryani (2007) found that foreign language learners in his study needed to develop a high level of pragmatic competence when making refusals in the target language, which could remain interlocutors' negative face unthreatened. In addition to matching linguistic knowledge to the intended meaning presented in request or refusal utterances, foreign language learners need to make social judgments by referring to social variables embedded in the target language culture (Leech, 2016). When stressing the politeness of speech acts, Brown and Levinson (1987) indicated that the seriousness of a "face-threatening act" (such as requests and refusals investigated in this study) involves three factors: 1) social distance between the speaker and the hearer, 2) relative power relation, and 3) absolute ranking of imposition in the particular culture.

To some extent, foreign/second language learners' proficiency levels may determine their pragmalinguistic performance in speech acts, yet are not necessarily related to sociopragmatic perspectives (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2011; Li, 2014). It was documented that learners with higher proficiency level in the target language had better potential to

perform specific speech acts in more native-like manner as their pragmatic competence were equipped with more linguistic forms and structures, such as those studies on EFL learners' request or refusal strategies (Dendenne, 2014; Lin, 2009; Lin, 2014; Lundell & Erman, 2012). Yet, on account of interlanguage transfer from first language (L1) to second language (L2), language learners may not successfully deliver appropriate speech acts in accordance with social values or norms embedded in the target language culture (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Instead, the semantic formula of speech acts (e.g., requests or refusals) the L2 learners employed was similar to what they would use in L1 discourse, despite their various foreign/second language proficiency levels (Barron, 2003; Li, 2005; Roever, 2009).

### ***Making Requests by Language Learners***

The speech act of request is widely investigated in the field of cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics. Most of the previous studies were related to native speakers' language behaviors and/or learning strategies. For instance, Chen, He, and Hu (2013) found that native Chinese speakers' request making was determined by Brown and Levinson's (1987) notions of power and distance between the interlocutors, which echoed Hong's (1996) study conducted two decades ago. Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) explored directness and politeness in making requests among native speakers of American English and those of Saudi Arabic. Seemingly, Americans preferred using indirect strategies to show their politeness in requests, while Saudi Arabic speakers' speech performance mostly depended on the social statuses and distance. Among the Saudi students, directness was often defined as closeness and connectedness in intimate situations rather than impoliteness. Such a phenomenon suggests that learners from different cultures may define the levels of directness and politeness without a congruence (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

In the extant literature, some studies on foreign/second language learners' request performance were mainly conducted with English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL) participants (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010; Jalilifar, Hashemian, & Tabatabaee, 2011; Konakahara, 2009). As depicted in these research projects, most EFL learners tended to overuse indirect strategies when making an English request. They appeared to fail in performing the appropriateness of this speech act in specific contexts where different interlocutors with various social statuses and power relationships were involved in a conversation. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010) investigated the effects of social/situational factors on requests delivered by native and non-native speakers of English. The results indicated that the Greek ESL speakers' directness was not always affected by power, familiarity, or imposition. Taguchi (2007) found that it was

significantly easier for Japanese EFL learners to make requests when the power difference, social distance, and the degree of imposition were not obvious. In addition, Hassall (2003) examined the request performance of Australian learners of Indonesian in comparison with native Indonesian speakers. The findings revealed that both groups preferred the same type of requests (i.e., query preparatory). It also showed that these foreign language learners were often unsure about their ability to correctly convey their ideas; therefore, they tended to choose more explicit expressions.

Very recently, a few researchers have started to document non-native Chinese speakers' pragmatic competence in making requests (e.g., Li, 2014; Li & Taguchi, 2014; Wen, 2014). Li (2014) documented the influence of different linguistic proficiency levels on making Chinese requests in a study abroad program. The participants were 31 American CFL learners studying in China, with 15 placed in the intermediate level (G1) and 16 in the advanced (G2). Data were collected from a computerized-oral Discourse Completion Task and were analyzed with appropriateness rating, planning time, and speech rate. The outcome showed that both G1 and G2 gained significant improvement in appropriateness ratings but not in planning time after joining this program. Only G2 performed better in the speech rate. Li and Taguchi (2014) compared the effects of instructional interventions (i.e., input-based and output-based practice) on the language accuracy and performance speed of CFL learners with the same linguistic proficiency. The recruited 50 American CFL learners were randomly assigned to input-based, output-based, or control group. The findings showed that the two experimental groups shared across-task modalities on measures of performance accuracy, but not on performance speed. Relying on the analysis of DCT items, Wen (2014) compared 48 CFL learners' request strategies with baseline data collected from native Chinese speakers in America. Compared to lower-level group (N= 24), the advanced group of CFL learners (N= 24) employed more conventional indirect hedges and less bare imperatives. Both groups of CFL learners were aware of the sociopragmatic differences in various request scenarios.

### ***Making Refusals by Language Learners***

In the literature, earlier studies primarily documented major differences in making refusals between native American and Asian speakers, highlighting the directness and indirectness in communication patterns (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991; Ma, 1992; Yum, 1988). Yum (1988) noted that the direct mode was common among North Americans, while the indirect mode was often deliberately used by East Asians. Ma (1992) elaborated that "indirectness" frequently used among native Chinese speakers' refusals helped people avoid the confrontation or conflicts, and "directness" on the other hand displayed strong emotion which may deliver explicit feelings in the utterance. As stressed

by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1991), non-native speakers of target languages may be less capable of using “status preserving strategies” in making refusals than the native speakers were.

The majority of research about foreign language learners’ refusal behaviors focused on Asian EFL learners, and only very limited studies investigated this speech act in the CFL field. When analyzing cross-culture issues in EFL learners’ refusal behaviors, previous studies argued that L1 transfer very often occurred in their participants’ refusal responses (e.g., Lin, 2014; Mohammad, Alireza, & Shirin, 2013; Wannaruk, 2008). Furthermore, Chang (2011a) showed that Chinese EFL learners’ mother tongues influenced their refusals by speaking indirectly and giving excuses, while Jiang (2015) uncovered that American speakers were more likely to use direct refusal strategies and express positive feelings than Chinese EFL speakers would be. Lee (2013) showed that Korean EFL learners encountered more difficulties in making refusals as speakers with lower statuses than those with higher or equal statuses. The lower-status situation hence made the participants spend longer time to produce the speech act. Lin (2014) found that EFL learners tended to perceive face-threat more often and used softeners better than native speakers of English did.

A few researchers have depicted the aforementioned phenomena appearing in western and/or eastern learners of Chinese (e.g., Chen, Ye, & Zhang, 1995; Hong, 2011; Hu, 2015; Shu, 2007; Zhang, 2012). Chen et al. (1995) revealed that “giving a reason” was the strategy most frequently used by Americans when making Chinese rejections, which was transferred from the participants’ L1 culture. Hong (2011) investigated the refusal performance of 30 native and 30 nonnative speakers of Chinese, solely relying on the data collected from one written DCT item. When asked to make a refusal to their professor’s invitation to a party, the American CFL learners tended to use direct refusal strategies. Yet, their counterparts were proficient in providing alternative solutions and making exclamation when receiving such an invitation. Zhang (2012) compared 37 CFL learners’ production of refusals in English and Chinese contexts. Data analysis of DCT items showed that the cultural awareness of different norms, customs and beliefs had an impact on the participants’ production of this face-threatening speech act. The western individualist perception still dominated their decision making during the refusal process. It was further found that linguistic competence did not significantly correlated to their confidence and success in performing refusal behaviors.

Comparing the pragmatic performance between CFL learners and Taiwanese native speakers of Chinese, two typical studies shed light on the cultural impact on participants’ refusal strategies. Hu (2015) conducted WDCT items with 39 French learners of Mandarin (FM) and 44 local Taiwanese (TM). In terms of politeness, data analysis

showed that there were more FMs than TMs in the overall frequency of using direct refusals, although overall both groups tended to use indirect strategies (e.g., reasons, regret/apology, or dissuasion) to alleviate face-threatening impact. FMs were more direct to peers while TMs were to subordinates. As to social status issues, both groups often used the same direct strategies (i.e., straightforward “No” and self-incompetence) to peers, subordinates, and superiors. When it comes to social distance, both groups were most direct to close interlocutors, and less direct to strangers and common friends. Shu (2007) investigated the refusal performance (strategies and sentence patterns) of 12 nonnative speakers of Mandarin, respectively including 6 from Japan (JM) and English speaking countries (EM). Quantitatively, JMs used much more indirect strategies than EMs did, and these eastern learners usually expressed self-incompetence in conversation scenarios under the influence of Japanese humble culture. It is interesting to find that JM and EM groups both frequently applied easy expressions to be acquired (e.g., *duì bù qǐ* [sorry], *xiè xiè* [thank you]) to soften the face-threatening of their refusals.

Additionally, several thesis projects conducted by graduate students in Taiwan documented western CFL learners’ refusal strategies in comparison with native Chinese speakers’ performance (e.g., Lai, 2012; Li, 2005; Osaki, 2011). Li (2005) employed role plays and interviews when examining refusal strategies used by 30 native Chinese speakers and 30 western learners of Chinese from America or Canada. Compared to their counterparts, the participating western CFL learners used more direct strategies, in particular straightforward “No”, due to their limited pragmatic competence. With the interlanguage transfer, these learners often showed their willingness to help out or receive invitations (e.g., *wǒ xiǎng qù dàn shì... [I’d like to go, but...]*) before delivering Chinese refusal utterances. The excuses further employed by these learners to refuse interlocutors’ requests were mostly in relation to how they tried to stand their ground. The aforementioned language expressions were similar to those in their L1 semantic formula. Osaki (2011) focused on the interlanguage pragmatic behaviors performed by Japanese learners of Chinese. Data collected were DCTs completed by the 17 target participants and two groups of counterparts (i.e., 25 Taiwanese native speakers of Chinese and 25 native Japanese speakers). In spite of Chinese language proficiency levels, these learners were found to experience interlanguage transfer when making refusals. Most of them used “regret” and “excuses” to express this speech act; both are similar to Japanese usages and the former expression was early covered in their learning materials. They often used “apology” and “gratitude” to mitigate face-threatening impacts on interlocutors. Those Chinese learners who had high proficiency levels also delivered refusals in a direct way, despite that they tried to use softeners (e.g., *kě néng* [maybe], *huò xǔ* [perhaps] in this speech act performance.

Different from the other studies, Lai (2012) collected both production and perception data from closed role-plays and an online questionnaire. The former was conducted with 10 native Chinese speakers, 10 Australian English speakers, and 10 Australian learners of Chinese, and the latter with 100 native Chinese speakers. It was found that Chinese learners' refusal behaviors resembled English native speakers' semantic formula in terms of frequency, content, and order. Yet, Chinese learners' pragmatic performance was similar to the social norms embedded in the target culture when they were talking to people in higher status due to their classroom learning experience. Furthermore, the perception data revealed that these CFL learners encountered pragmatic failures when delivering this speech act to interlocutors with equal and low social statuses as well as to those who are intimates and acquaintances. Both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic issues emerged from such investigations. These Australian learners of Chinese not only misused modals, hedges and particles relating to refusals but also were not familiar with the levels of directness, formality and modesty highlighted in the target language.

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

The participants of this study were 29 CFL learners, including 21 from the eastern countries (ECFL) and 8 from the western (WCFL). The nationalities of ECFL learners included Japan, Vietnam, Korea, or Indonesia, and those of WCFL learners were the United States, Spain, Argentina, Germany, or Belgium. With the age ranging from 18 to 30, they were 15 female and 14 male full-time language learners. This convenient sample was recruited from a Chinese Language Center established in central Taiwan more than 10 years ago. This language center offers training courses to non-native speakers of Chinese in small classes with 4 to 6 students belonging to the same proficiency level. According to language assessment rubrics of Common European Framework, the recruited CFL learners' proficiency levels ranged from B1 (intermediate level of Chinese) to C2 (mastery level of Chinese). This means all of the participants were able to recognize Chinese characters, read simple paragraphs and write daily dialogues (see Table 1 for the demographic information). Researchers noted that foreign language learners' proficiency levels do not necessarily determine their pragmatic performance (e.g., Kasper & Roever, 2005; Li, 2011; Li, 2014). This study hence did not consider this issue as a major variable, and instead recruited participants who were competent to understand the Chinese conversation scenarios to be investigated. In addition, the issue of gender was beyond the focus of this research project, although male or female language learners may or may not encounter different pragmatic transfer (Bou-Franch, 2013; Itakura, 2002).

According to the data collected from a demographic survey, the major comparisons between the ECFL and WCFL participants were in terms of 1) years of learning Chinese, 2) self-rated degree of Chinese speaking competence<sup>2</sup>, 3) self-rated satisfaction with Chinese speaking performance, 4) traveling experience to Chinese speaking countries, and 5) motivation to learn Chinese. Both groups had similar average extracurricular hours spent on Chinese speaking (Mean= 1.81 and 1.88) and almost all of them had chances to practice daily Chinese conversation. The westerners' average years of learning Chinese were longer than the easterners' (Mean= 3.75 > 2.19). As to the self-rated speaking competence and satisfaction of speaking performance, the westerners had higher self-rated score than the easterners did (Mean= 3.75 > 3.10; Mean= 3.38 > 3.10). Additionally, all the western learners had ever traveled to Chinese speaking countries, compared to 52% of the easterners. Furthermore, both groups mainly learned Chinese for the purpose of studying overseas (50% and 44%). Finally, the eastern learners' major motivation for learning Chinese was regarding job requirement (46%), while the westerners were due to academic pursuit (38%) and personal interest (38%).

*Table 1. Demographic information of the participants*

Demographic Information	ECFL (N) <sup>a</sup>	WCFL (N)
Class Level <sup>b</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B1 (11)</li> <li>• B2 (2)</li> <li>• C1 (6)</li> <li>• C2 (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B1 (2)</li> <li>• B2 (2)</li> <li>• C1 (1)</li> <li>• C2 (3)</li> </ul>
Nationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Japan (11)</li> <li>• Vietnam (6)</li> <li>• Korea (3)</li> <li>• Indonesia (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The United States (3)</li> <li>• Spain (2)</li> <li>• Argentina (1)</li> <li>• Germany (1)</li> <li>• Belgium (1)</li> </ul>
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (7)</li> <li>• Female (14)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (7)</li> <li>• Female (1)</li> </ul>
Years of learning Chinese	Mean= 2.19	Mean= 3.75
Self-rated Chinese speaking competence (on a scale of 1-5)	Mean= 3.10	Mean= 3.75

<sup>2</sup> The participants were invited to self-rate their 1) degree of Chinese speaking competence and 2) satisfaction with Chinese speaking performance when they were placed in different class levels. This set of data were employed as a reference when depicting the participants' pragmatic performance at conversational scenarios, because they were not available for cooperating with an additional speaking proficiency test.

Self-rated satisfaction of Chinese speaking performance (on a scale of 1-5)	Mean= 3.10	Mean= 3.38
Average extracurricular hours spent on Chinese speaking	Mean= 1.81	Mean= 1.88
Chances to have daily Chinese conversation with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes (19)</li> <li>• No (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes (8)</li> <li>• No (0)</li> </ul>
Travel to Chinese speaking countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes (11)</li> <li>• No (10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes (8)</li> <li>• No (0)</li> </ul>
Purpose of learning Chinese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traveling (5)</li> <li>• Studying (6)</li> <li>• Immigration (0)</li> <li>• Other (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traveling (1)</li> <li>• Studying (4)</li> <li>• Immigration (2)</li> <li>• Other (2)</li> </ul>
Motivation for learning Chinese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic pursuit (7)</li> <li>• Job requirement (11)</li> <li>• Personal interest (6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic pursuit (5)</li> <li>• Job requirement (3)</li> <li>• Personal interest (5)</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> N= Number of participants

<sup>b</sup>B1= Intermediate level; B2= Upper-intermediate level; C1=Advanced level; C2= Mastery level

### ***Instrument***

The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was employed in this study to explore the participants' pragmatic performance. Widely employed to examine language learners' speech act delivery, DCTs have the benefits of controlling the scenarios under investigation and collecting a large amount of data within a limited time frame (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Zhang, 2012). Previous studies concluded that data elicited from DCTs were similar to those from role plays and field notes of daily conversation (e.g., Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Yuan, 2001).

The designed Chinese Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) included 42 sets of items (21 for making requests and refusals respectively). In each speech act, the items were evenly set up in the scenarios related to peer-to-peer, superior-to-subordinate, and subordinate-to-superior conversations (N= 7). This research instrument was piloted and reviewed by two experts in Chinese language education. In each WDCT item, the first section described the scenario and conversation context in which a rejoinder was left blank to be answered in a sentence. In the second section, an answer line was offered to have the participants write down the most appropriate answer to match the described scenario (see Figure 1 for an example of the WDCT items). All the Chinese characters were paired up with paralleled Pinyin to help non-native speakers understand the meanings of conversation lines more easily. The participants may complete answers to DCT items either in Chinese or Pinyin according to their preference.

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xiao hua he xiao cao shi lin ju , xia ke hou chang chang ju zai yi qi wan shua 。 zui jin you ge hen you ming de ma xi tuan yao dao shi  
小花和小草是鄰居，下課後常常聚在一起玩耍。最近有個很有名的馬戲團要到市

qū biǎo yǎn , xiǎo huā jué dìng zhǎo xiǎo cǎo péi tā qù kàn 。  
區表演，小花決定找小草陪她去看。

xiǎo huā : xiǎo cǎo , wǒ gēn nǐ shuō , nǐ zhī dào zuì jìn yuè liang mǎ xì tuán yào lái biǎo yǎn ma ?  
小花：小草，我跟你說，你知道最近月亮馬戲團要來表演嗎？

xiǎo cǎo : dāng rán ya ! zěn me le ma ?  
小草：當然呀！怎麼了嗎？

xiǎo huā : \_\_\_\_\_

xiǎo cǎo : hǎo ya ! wǒ gāng hǎo yě xiǎng zhǎo nǐ yì qǐ qù ne !  
小草：好呀！我剛好也想找你一起去呢！

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\* Please write down the answer to the above blank either in Chinese or Pinyin.

Your Answers: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1. An example of the WDCT items

### Data Collection and Analysis

Overall, the data collection procedure lasted for six months from August 2015 to January 2016. Following the ethics guidelines, we contacted the Chinese Language Center, visited several classes, and gained the consent from potential participants by offering clear information letters. Despite a high expectation to collect similar sets of data from eastern and western non-native speakers of Chinese, it ended up with having 21 ECFL and 8 WCFL learners complete the two sets of request and refusal WDCT items. Most of the invited WCFL learners were not available to help with the 42-item task. The data were collected anonymously and safely stored for research analysis.

Data analysis were completed in four phases. First, the participants' WDCT answers were reviewed and coded according to the categories of Grice's maxims (i.e., quantity, quality, relation, and manner), politeness, and directness. As reviewed in Yule (2008), quantity means whether the message delivered by speakers contains sufficient information; quality refers to whether the information speakers offer is truthful and supported by evidence; relation is regarding the information pertinent to the discussion; and manner is related to clear information without obscurity and ambiguity. Politeness stresses speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by speech acts between interlocutors (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Directness refers to speakers' use of grammatical structures matching the intention of speech acts (Spencer-Oatey & Žegarac, 2010). The total score in each WDCT item was 6 points. One point was tallied for each of the rubrics an answer reached. Second, to ensure the scoring reliability, a well-trained research assistant was invited to help grade all the participants' answers to the WDCT items. A Cronbach  $\alpha$  value was calculated to ensure the inter-rater reliability ( $r = .867$ ).

Third, Shapiro-Wilk's tests were conducted to investigate whether the data collected were normally distributed. The analysis results showed non-normal distribution of data sets, which determined the employment of non-parametric statistics (i.e., Mann-Whitney U tests and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests) to examine the eastern and western CFL learners' speech act performance in different social situations. Finally, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analyses were performed to examine the correlation, if any, among Grice's maxims, directness, and politeness in these participants' speech act performance.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Sample Characteristics***

According to the Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p > .05$ ) (Razali & Wah, 2011) as well as a visual inspection of data histograms, normal Q-Q plots and box plots, the request and refusal scores are not normally distributed for the ECFL group ( $N = 21$ ,  $p = 0.034$  and  $0.000$ ), although the results show an approximate normality for the WCFL group ( $N = 8$ ,  $p = 0.964$  and  $0.380$ ). As a whole, the data collected are not eligible for the operation of parametric analyses when most of the participants' scores are lack of normality (Razali & Wah, 2011). A non-parametric Levene's test ( $p > .05$ ) was further used to verify the equality of variances in the sample (Nordstokke & Zumbo, 2010). The statistical analysis shows the homogeneity of variance in the request and refusal scores ( $F = 0.000$ ,  $p = 0.999$ ;  $F = 0.684$ ,  $p = 0.416$ ) between two groups.

### ***Cultural Backgrounds and Pragmatic Performance***

The results of Mann-Whitney U analyses show the potential influence of cultural backgrounds on the participants' pragmatic performance. The ECFL learners significantly outperformed the WCFL learners when making requests in all social scenarios ( $Z = -2.327$ ,  $p < .05$ ; see Table 2). As shown in these participants' answers to WDCT items, the WCFL participants appeared to use more direct, if not explicit, expressions in delivering Chinese requests. This is inconsistent with the assumption that western learners usually transfer their indirect strategies in L1 to their pragmatic performance in using Chinese as a foreign language (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Yet, this may echo the findings in Hassall (2003) that western learners would choose more explicit expressions when they are uncertain about their ability to correctly convey their requests in a foreign language. By contrast, the ECFL participants tended to offer reasons and use softeners (e.g., qǐng, bù hǎo yì si) to show politeness when they were making requests to superiors, subordinates, or peers

in Chinese (see Example 1 and 2)<sup>3</sup>. These phenomena revealed that the participating ECFL learners had more appropriate performance in Chinese requests, compared to their counterparts in this study. In line with the notion of interlanguage pragmatics that L1 language cultures would influence L2 learning outcomes (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 1992), the finding supports the assumption that these eastern language learners (mostly from Japan, Korea, and Vietnam) usually transferred L1 polite expressions, such as “sorry” (すみません, 미안, xin lỗi), “could you please” (して頂けますか, 당신은 할 수 주십시오, bạn có thể vui lòng) to their use of “sorry” (bù hǎo yì si) and “could it be” (shì bú shì kě yǐ) when making Chinese requests.

• *Example 1: A request of passing a course*

ECFL: wǒ zhī dào cóng qián wǒ bú rèn zhēn shàng kè kě shì rú guǒ zhè mén kè bèi dāng de huà bú huì bì yè 。  
我知道，從前我不認真上課，可是，如果這門課被當的話，不會畢業。

qǐng gěi wǒ bǔ jiù bàn fǎ  
請給我補救辦法。(I know. I didn't work very hard for my study. But, I can't graduate if I fail this course. Please give me a make-up method.)

WCFL: nǐ yǒu méi yǒu bàn fǎ ràng wǒ chéng jì hǎo yí diǎn ma  
你有沒有辦法讓我成績好一點嗎？(Do you have any method to make my grades better?)

• *Example 2: A request of raising salary*

ECFL: lǎo bǎn bù hǎo yì si wǒ zuì jìn mǎi le xīn de fáng zi suǒ yǐ jīng jì fù dān yǒu yí diǎn zhòng kě bù kě  
老闆，不好意思，我最近買了新的房子，所以經濟負擔有一點重，可不可

yǐ jiā xīn yí xià  
以加薪一下？(Boss, I'm sorry. I've bought a new house recently, so my financial burden is a bit heavy. Could I have a pay raise?)

WCFL: lǎo bǎn wǒ kuài yào mǎi fáng zi dàn wǒ pà wǒ qián bú gòu wǒ xū yào jiā xīn  
老闆，我快要買房子，但我怕我錢不夠，我需要加薪。(Boss, I'll buy a house very soon, but I'm afraid that I don't have enough money. I need a pay raise.)

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<sup>3</sup> The paired examples listed in the section of Results and Discussion were retrieved from the data collected from the participating ECFL and WCFL learners placed in the same class level (i.e., B1, B2, C1, or C2).

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U analyses of group differences

Speech Act	Group	N	Median	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Sig. (2-tailed/1-tailed)
Request	ECFL	21	100.00	17.26	362.50	-2.327	.018/.009 *
	WCFL	8	88.00	9.06	72.50		
Refusal	ECFL	21	27.00	16.00	336.00	-1.029	.316/.158
	WCFL	8	25.50	12.38	99.00		

\* $p < .05$

Different from their performance outcome of making requests, statistically the ECFL and the WCFL learners had similar pragmatic competence when making refusals in all social scenarios ( $Z = -1.029$ ,  $p > .05$ ; see Table 2). Both of these CFL groups tended to offer reasons when turning down a request raised by interlocutors with different social statuses (see Example 3 and 4). Interestingly, most of the WCFL participants offered more relevant reasons (especially personal reasons) or sometimes showed apologies when expressing their refusals in Chinese, compared to their performance in making requests. According to Morkus (2014), the use of personal reasons to make refusals is a native language attribute for Americans; this proves a pragmatic transfer from L1 to Chinese learning experiences among the WCFL learners in the current study. In order not to offend others, the ECFL learners mainly employed apology strategy to reduce possible face-threatening impact, which also echoes L1 transfer from Asian cultural norms and values (Lin, 2014; Osaki, 2011; Sattar, Lah, & Suleiman, 2011). Moreover, in most conversational scenarios, the ECFL learners deliberately used indirect mode when rejecting a request, while the western participants tended to make more direct refusals. This is similar to the findings of previous foreign language research regarding the direct or indirect modes performed by western and eastern learners (Chang, 2011a; Hu, 2015; Jiang, 2015; Li, 2005; Shu, 2007; Yum, 1988).

• *Example 3: A refusal of offering a help to a stranger*

ECFL: bù hǎo yì sī wǒ xiàn zài méi yǒu shí jiān bāng nǐ 不好意思，我現在沒有時間幫你。(Sorry, I don't have time to help you.)

WCFL: bù hǎo yì sī wǒ bù néng zhè yàng zuò yīn wèi wǒ men bù rèn shi 不好意思我不能這樣做因為我們不認識。(Sorry, I cannot do this because we don't know each other.)

• *Example 4: A refusal of doing translation for a friend*

ECFL: 翻譯不是那麼簡單的，不好意思！(Translation is not that easy. I'm sorry.)

WCFL: 對不起，我最近很忙，沒辦法幫你做。(Sorry, I've been busy lately and can't help out.)

***Pragmatic Performance in Various Social Scenarios***

The analysis of Wilcoxon signed-rank test shows that as a whole these recruited CFL learners (N= 29) had significantly different performance in making requests to interlocutors with different social statuses ( $Z = -4.633, -4.124, \text{ and } -3.156, p < .05$ ; see Table 3). The results of negative and positive ranks further showed that all of the participants performed best when making requests to superiors, compared to their interaction with peers and subordinates ( $S1 > P > S2$ ). This finding is different from Taguchi (2007) reporting that it was significantly better for foreign language learners to make requests to interlocutors with less power and social distances than themselves which could mitigate imposition during the conversation.

*Table 3. Wilcoxon signed-rank test of making requests between different interlocutors*

Requests between Interlocutors <sup>a</sup>		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	Z	p
S2 - S1	Negative ranks	28	14.50	406.00	-4.633	.000*
	Positive ranks	0	.00	.00		
	Ties	1				
P - S1	Negative ranks	24	14.02	336.50	-4.124	.000*
	Positive ranks	2	7.25	14.50		
	Ties	3				
P - S2	Negative ranks	5	10.30	51.50	-3.156	.002*
	Positive ranks	21	14.26	299.50		
	Ties	3				

\*  $p < .05$ ; <sup>a</sup> S1= requests made to superiors; S2= requests made to subordinates; P= requests made to peers

As further portrayed in Figure 2 and Example 5, 6, and 7, the ECFL learners were more competent than the WCFL learners in delivering Chinese requests to various interlocutors (ECFL: Mean= 35.76, 29.57, 33.04; WCFL: Mean= 31.12, 27.62, 30). The result may be mainly attributed to the quantity of information (i.e., offering more reasons) these ECFL participants offered (e.g., “wǒ jué de...” and “wǒ xī wàng...”) or the polite softeners they applied in request delivery (e.g., “kě yǐ... ma?” and “kě bù kě yǐ?”). The

current study showing the eastern CFL learners' appropriate choice of direct or indirect request utterance is incongruent with previous literature that documented indirect strategies overused by eastern English as a foreign language (EFL) learners who showed no different pragmatic utterances in performing English requests to interlocutors with various social statuses and power relationships (e.g., Jalilifar et al., 2011; Konakahara, 2009). In general, Asian learners tend to make more indirect requests in their native languages, yet it was found that sometimes the participating eastern CFL learners' use of directness in making requests is not affected by power, familiarity, or imposition, but due to a failure in L1 pragmatic transfer, similar to the EFL learners examined by Economidou-Kogetsidis (2010).

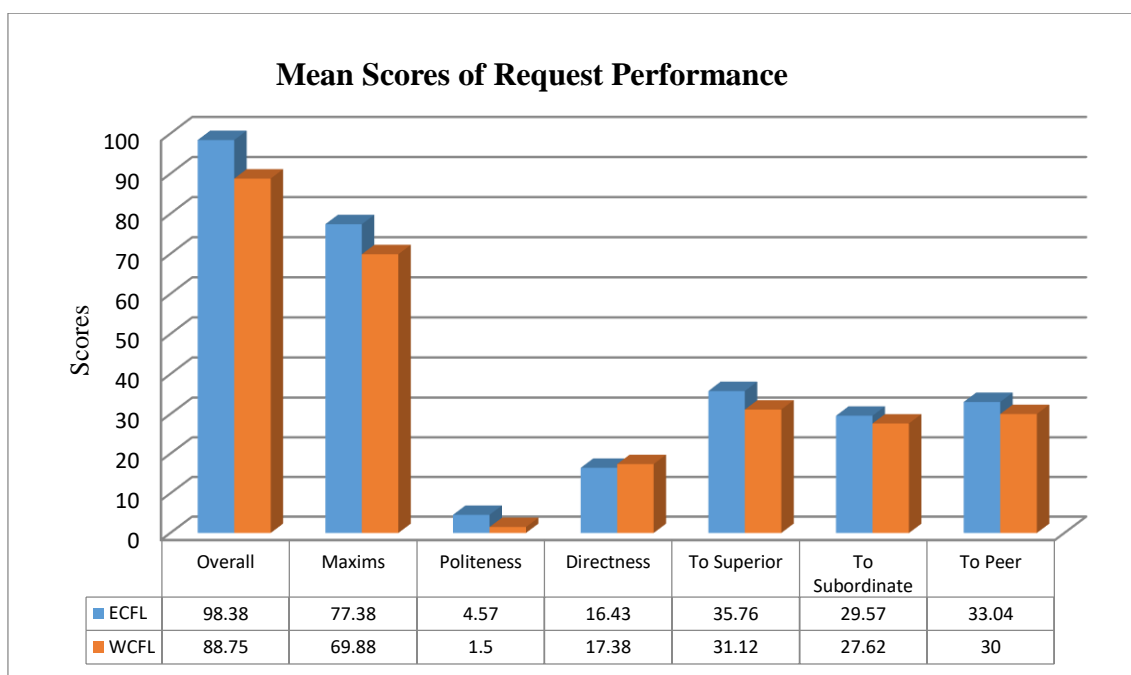


Figure 2. Request performance between the ECFL and the WCFL learners

• *Example 5: A request to a subordinate for swimming contest*

ECFL: wǒ jué de nǐ hěn huì yóuyǒng suǒ yǐ xī wàng nǐ dài biǎo xué xiào qù cān jiā bǐ sài zěn me yàng  
 我覺得你很會游泳，所以希望你代表學校去參加比賽，怎麼樣？ (I feel you are very good at swimming. So, I hope you can represent our school to attend the contest. How is it?)

WCFL: nǐ huì xiǎng dài biǎo xué xiào ma  
 你會想代表學校嗎？ (Would you like to represent our school?)

• *Example 6: A request to a superior for recommendation to an album company*

ECFL: <sup>wǒ de mèng shì chéng wéi xǐ hā de chàngshǒu</sup> 我的夢是成為嘻哈的唱手，<sup>zuì jìn chuàng zuò le jǐ shǒu gē</sup> 最近創作了幾首歌，<sup>kě yǐ bāng wǒ tuī jiàn nǐ de</sup> 可以幫我推薦你的

<sup>chàngpiàngōng sī ma</sup> 唱片公司嗎？(My dream is to become a hip-hop singer and I've created several songs recently. Could you recommend me [to] your album company?)

WCFL: <sup>wǒ xī wàng wǒ kě yǐ chū zhuān jí</sup> 我希望我可以出專輯，<sup>nǐ kě yǐ bāng wǒ wèn yí xià ma</sup> 你可以幫我問一下嗎？(I hope to release my own album. Could you check it for me?)

• *Example 7: A request to a peer for borrowing a car*

ECFL: <sup>wǒ de jī chē huài le</sup> 我的機車壞了，<sup>kě shì wǒ gēn péng you yì qǐ qù yè shì</sup> 可是我跟朋友一起去夜市，<sup>kě bù kě yǐ jiè wǒ nǐ de chē</sup> 可不可以借我你的車？

(My motorbike is broken, yet I'm going to a night market with friends. Could I borrow your car?)

WCFL: <sup>wǒ kě yǐ jiè nǐ de chē ma</sup> 我可以借你的車嗎？(Can I borrow your car?)

In line with their pragmatic competence in making requests, these CFL learners overall had significant different performance in making refusals to interlocutors with different social statuses ( $Z = -4.338, -4.070, \text{ and } -4.628, p < .05$ ; see Table 4). This echoes the foreign language literature (e.g., Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008) that both eastern and western learners would adjust their refusal responses depending on social statuses and distances. The results of negative and positive ranks further showed that all of the participants performed best when making refusals to peers, compared to their interaction with subordinates and superiors ( $P > S2 > S1$ ). The findings are consistent with previous foreign language research depicting that most of the recruited learners had difficulties making refusals to interlocutors with higher social statuses than to those with equal or lower ones (e.g., Abed, 2011; Lee, 2013). As shown in Figure 3, the participants' refusal strategies resulted in their performance outcome in various conversational scenarios (ECFL: Mean= 30.66, 29.80, 31.91; WCFL: Mean= 29.31, 29.87, 31.28). Compared with each other, the ECFL and the WCFL learners had similar performance in expressing refusals to interlocutors with different social power/statuses. These learners tended to rely on reasons or excuses (e.g., “ná qù xiū bú shì jiù hǎo le ma?” and “wǒ yǒu hěn duō xiǎo kǎo”) when turning down other interlocutors' special requests (see Example 8, 9, and 10).

Table 4. Wilcoxon signed-rank test of making refusals between different interlocutors

Refusals between Interlocutors <sup>a</sup>		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	Z	p
S2 - S1	Negative ranks	2	2.50	5.00	-4.338	.000*
	Positive ranks	24	14.42	346.00		
	Ties	3				
P - S1	Negative ranks	0	.00	.00	-4.707	.000*
	Positive ranks	29	15.00	435.00		
	Ties	0				
P - S2	Negative ranks	0	.00	.00	-4.628	.000*
	Positive ranks	28	14.50	406.00		
	Ties	1				

\*  $p < .05$ ; <sup>a</sup> S1= refusals made to superiors; S2= refusals made to subordinates; P= refusals made to peers

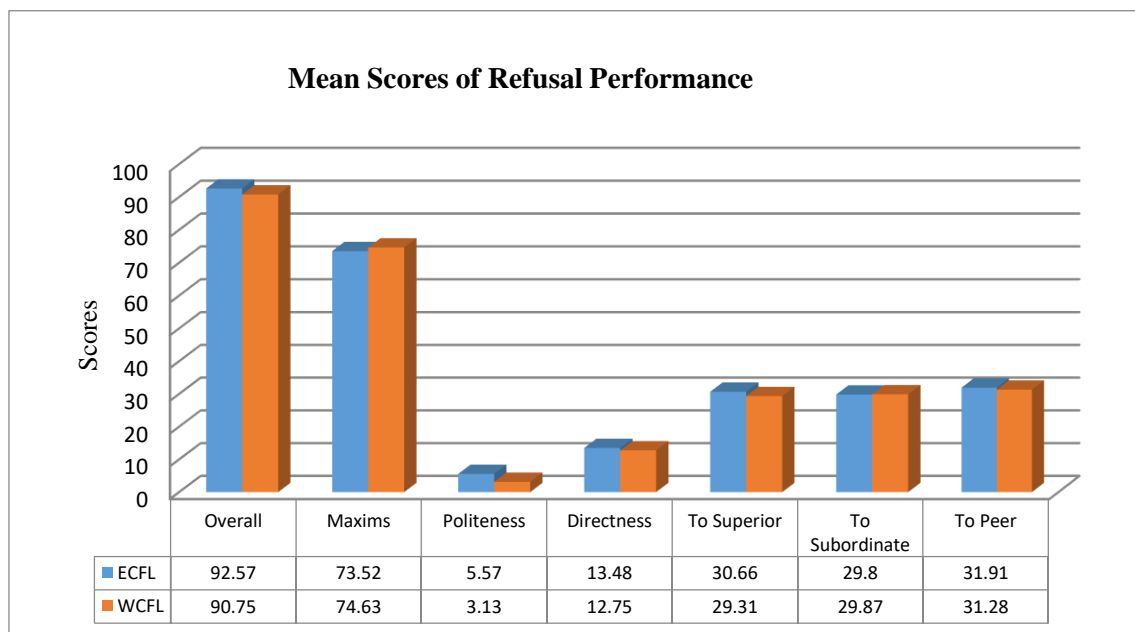


Figure 3. Refusal performance between the ECFL and the WCFL learners

• Example 8: A refusal to a subordinate for buying a new cellphone

ECFL: hái kě yǐ zài yòng ba nǎ qù xiū bú shì jiù hǎo le ma shén me shí hòu bù néng xiū wǒ cái mǎi gěi nǐ (Is it still usable? Send it to a shop for a repair, OK? I'll buy you a new phone if the old one cannot be repaired.)

WCFL: bú yào chā zuǐ bǎ shǒu jī ná qù xiū jiù hǎo le ! (Stop nagging! Just send your phone to a shop for a repair.)

• *Example 9: A refusal to a superior for extra workload on the weekend*

ECFL: zhè ge zhōu mò wǒ yǐ jīng yǒu shì , bù hǎo yì sī 。 (I have something to do this weekend. Sorry about that.)

WCFL: kě shì wǒ yǒu gēn nán péng yǒu yuē huì ! (But, I have a date with my boyfriend.)

• *Example 10: A refusal to a peer for seeing a movie*

ECFL: bù hǎo yì sī , wǒ jīn tiān děi zhǔn bèi míng tiān de xiǎo kǎo 。 (Sorry, I have to prepare for tomorrow's quiz.)

WCFL: wǒ méi bàn fǎ qù , míng tiān wǒ yǒu hěn duō xiǎo kǎo 。 (I cannot go with you. I'll have many quizzes tomorrow.)

### **Correlation Between Pragmatic Performance and Politeness/Directness**

#### ***Making requests***

As Table 5 indicates, when making requests in Chinese, the extent to which all the CFL learners' adherence to Grice's maxims is significantly correlated to the directness/politeness of their language usage ( $r = .461, p < .05$ ). The statistical result signals that on the one hand the more these recruited CFL learners applied polite and direct language usages together in request delivery, the more these participants complied with the maxims. On the other hand, the less they paid attention to politeness and directness as a whole, the less their request delivery would match the maxims. Echoing Ogiermann's (2009) argument, the current study revealed these participants' use of "on-record strategies combined with redressive action" (p. 191) which made their requests delivered in both clear and polite manners without flouting Grice's conversational maxims (see Example 11).

Table 5. Correlations, means, and standard deviations (requests) (N= 29)

	2.	3.	4.	M	SD
1. Maxims	.352	.369*	.461*	75.31	7.04
2. Politeness		.202		3.72	2.88
3. Directness				16.69	2.24
4. Politeness + Directness				20.41	3.99

\* $p < .05$

• *Example 11: A request of writing a recommendation letter (Participants' direct and polite language usages lead to better performance in maxims.)*

ECFL: 請麻煩老師你幫我寫一封推薦信嗎？我最近在準備國外留學。(Am I allowed to bother you teacher to write me a recommendation letter? I've been preparing for overseas study recently.)

WCFL: 教授，我申請研究所需要推薦信，我可不可麻煩您幫我寫？(Professor, I'm applying for graduate study and need a recommendation letter. Could I bother you to help me write the letter?)

In addition, these participants' performance in matching the maxims slightly correlate with their use of directness ( $r = .369, p < .05$ ), but not with their adherence to politeness. Neither does these CFL learners' polite request delivery correlate with their direct language usage. The findings imply that these CFL learners' direct language usage matched the conversation cooperation principles (i.e., quality, quantity, manner, and relevance) of their request delivery in various social scenarios (see Example 12). Yet, the participants' politeness did not facilitate their appropriate formulation of requests (see Example 13).

• *Example 12: A request for passing a course (Participants' direct language usage matches their adherence to maxims.)*

ECFL: 我想畢業，請你幫忙。(I want to graduate and please help me.)

WCFL: 請問我有機會補救嗎？(Do I still have a make-up chance?)

• *Example 13: A request of going to a night market* (Participants' polite language usage does not match their adherence to maxims.)

ECFL: yǒukòng ma yào bú yào gēn wǒ yì qǐ qù 有空嗎？要不要跟我一起去？(Are you free? Would you like to go with me?)

WCFL: nà nǐ yǒu shí jiān kě yǐ dài wǒ yì qǐ qù ma 那你有時間可以帶我一起去嗎？(Then, do you have time to take me over there together?)

Furthermore, these learners' direct Chinese language usage did not necessarily reflect their impolite attitude toward the request utterance they made. As shown in Example 14 and 15, directness in request behaviors is not related to the essence of politeness either from the eastern or the western cultural values (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Skewis, 2003). In particular, these participants' pragmatic performance included far more direct requesting utterance (Mean<sub>all</sub> = 16.69, Mean<sub>ECFL</sub> = 16.43, Mean<sub>WCFL</sub> = 17.38) than polite language expressions (Mean<sub>all</sub> = 3.72, Mean<sub>ECFL</sub> = 4.57, Mean<sub>WCFL</sub> = 1.5). According to Ogiemann (2009), some cultures appreciate pragmatic clarity when associating requesting behaviors with directness more than their concerns with politeness. The intercultural communication styles appeared to influence how the recruited participants transferred L1 cultures into CFL learning in this study.

• *Example 14: A request of seeing a movie* (Participants' direct language usage does not include the essence of politeness.)

ECFL: yào bú yào yì qǐ qù kàn 要不要一起去看？(Do you want to see it together?)

WCFL: nǐ yào yì qǐ qù ma 你要一起去嗎？(Are you coming together?)

• *Example 15: A request of not being late again* (Participants' polite language usage does not include the essence of directness.)

ECFL: bài tuō nǐ zěn me kě yǐ děng nà me jiǔ 拜託你，怎麼可以等那麼久。(Please, how long we have been waiting for you.)

WCFL: (not available)

### ***Making refusals***

Data analysis shows a significant correlation between these CFL learners' pragmatic performance following Grice's maxims and the politeness of their language usage ( $r = .411, p < .05$ ) when making refusals in Chinese (see Table 6). The finding suggests

that on the one hand the more the recruited CFL learners applied polite language usages in refusal delivery, the more these participants followed the maxims (see Example 16). On the other hand, the less they attended to politeness of their refusals to interlocutors' requests, the less their conversation delivery would be compatible with the maxims. As shown in the mean scores of politeness (i.e., Mean<sub>all</sub> = 4.90, Mean<sub>ECFL</sub> = 5.57, Mean<sub>WCFL</sub> = 3.13), it seems that in general these CFL learners were not familiar with how native Chinese would choose to refuse a request by “marginally touching the point” to restore relationship between people (Honglin, 2007; Liao & Breshnahan, 1996).

Table 6. Correlations, means, and standard deviations (refusals) (N= 29)

	2.	3.	4.	M	SD
1. Maxims	.411*	.225	.366	73.83	11.60
2. Politeness		.313		4.90	2.44
3. Directness				13.28	3.63
4. Politeness + Directness				18.17	4.97

\* $p < .05$

• *Example 16: A refusal of eating fruit* (Participants' polite language usage matches their adherence to maxims.)

ECFL: bù hǎo yì sī wǒ bù xǐ huān liú lián xiè xiè nǐ 。 (I'm sorry. I don't like Durian. Thank you.)

WCFL: bù hǎo yì sī kě shì wǒ bú tài xǐ huān chī nà gè shuǐ guǒ 。 (I'm sorry, but I don't like eating that fruit.)

Interestingly, these participants' adherence to maxims has no significant correlation with the directness of language usages in the CFL learners' refusal entries (see Example 17) while these participants employed more direct refusal strategies (Mean<sub>all</sub> = 13.28, Mean<sub>ECFL</sub> = 13.48, Mean<sub>WCFL</sub> = 12.75). When comparing Chinese and Canadian refusal strategies, Guo (2012) found Chinese people tended to use indirect expression or “beating around the bush” which is Chinese culture- and language-specific usage. Such native-like utterance is not found in the participating CFL learners' pragmatic performance in the current study. These recruited CFL participants were similar to those American learners of Chinese examined in Hong (2011), mostly tending to use direct refusal strategies.

• *Example 17: A refusal of visiting a relative* (Participants' direct language usage does not match their adherence to maxims.)

ECFL: <sup>wó zhēn de bù xiǎng qù</sup> 我真的不想去！(I really don't want to go.)

WCFL: <sup>wǒ jiù bù yào</sup> 我就不要。(I just don't want.)

Moreover, the extent to which these CFL learners followed Grice's maxims does not correlate with the politeness and directness which are counted together in their language usage. That is, these participants appeared not to rely on both politeness and directness which may contribute to the degree of matching their refusal entries with the maxims. This finding does not concur with the studies on eastern EFL learners in previous studies (e.g., Al-Eryani, 2007; Kuhl & Jadidi, 2012) which showed participants' attention to polite and direct/indirect strategies in order to formulate their refusal expressions more appropriately. Finally, similar to the findings of making requests, there is no relationship between the CFL learners' polite refusal delivery and direct language usage (see Example 18 and 19). In line with the EFL learners in Ghana (Sarfo, 2011), these CFL learners' direct language usages did not necessarily reflect their impolite attitude toward the refusal utterance they made in Chinese.

• *Example 18: A refusal of switching TV programs* (Participants' direct language usage does not include the essence of politeness.)

ECFL: <sup>bù kě yǐ wǒ de diànyǐng pín dào gāng yào kāi shǐ</sup> 不可以，我的電影頻道剛要開始！(No, my movie channel is going to start.)

WCFL: <sup>bù xíng wǒ zài kàn huán méi jì shù</sup> 不行，我在看，還沒結束。(No, I'm watching, not finished yet.)

• *Example 19: A refusal of extra workload on the weekend* (Participants' polite language usage does not include the essence of directness.)

ECFL: <sup>bù hǎo yì sī wǒ yào hé wǒ nán péng yǒu yǒu yuē</sup> 不好意思，我要和我男朋友有約。(I'm sorry. I'll have a date with my boyfriend.)

WCFL: <sup>lǎo bān bù hǎo yì sī wǒ nà tiān yǒu yuē le</sup> 老闆不好意思，我那天有約了。(Boss, I'm sorry. I got an appointment that day.)

## Conclusion

This research project shows that to some extent cultural backgrounds may reflect CFL learners' performance in Chinese speech acts, in case of L1 pragmatic transfer. When making requests in various conversational scenarios, the participating ECFL learners significantly had better performance than the WCFL learners, while all these CFL participants would attend to their expressions delivered to interlocutors with superior, subordinate, or equal social statuses. Specifically, the ECFL participants positively transferred the cultural norms of politeness and indirectness in L1 pragmatics into their Chinese language expressions more often than their counterparts. By contrast, when making refusals in different conversational contexts, both groups had similar pragmatic performance, despite that the ECFL learners performed better in politeness which may be attributed to a positive transfer from L1 culture to the target language usage. However, these ECFL participants seemed to be more direct in refusal behaviors which may imply a failure in L1 transfer. As to the WCFL learners, they seemed not to have a positive transfer from L1 usages (i.e., indirect refusals) to Chinese pragmatic utterances due to frequent use of directness in this speech act, although their refusals included much politer expressions than requesting behaviors did. Similar to the Chinese requests they made, all of these CFL participants paid attention to interlocutors' different social statuses when delivering refusals in various conversational scenarios.

The aforementioned different or similar pragmatic performance between the eastern and the western non-native speakers of Chinese may not be strongly attributed to these recruited participants' demographic backgrounds. As previously described in the section of Participants, more percentage of the WCFL learners (4 out of 8) studied in advanced or mastery classes (C1 or C2) than that of the ECFL learners (8 out of 21). On average the WCFL learners perceived more satisfaction with their Chinese pragmatic competence and had more chances to travel to countries where Chinese is the first language. Both groups had similar satisfaction with their pragmatic performance in Chinese and spent similar amount of time on learning Chinese outside formal classes. Instead, these CFL learners' request and refusal performance concurred with the central feature of interlanguage pragmatics that learners sometimes may transfer certain cultural norms and strategies embedded in native languages into personal second/foreign language learning process (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Such a cross-cultural transfer may lead to positive or negative impacts, revealing a convergence or divergence between native and second/foreign languages in respect of pragmatic essence and values (Kasper, 1992).

Several pedagogical implications could be drawn from these CFL learners' speech act performance. First of all, CFL instructors are expected to offer more information and

guidance to assist language learners to differentiate the socio-cultural values between native and foreign languages. As stressed by language researchers (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Taguchi, 2011), pragmatic knowledge is teachable and it is paramount to instruct second or foreign language learners regarding the resemblances and/or disparities between their native and target language cultures (i.e., the sociopragmatic competence). In addition, enhancing CFL learners' language proficiency levels may improve their linguistic expressions in pragmatic performance (i.e., pragmalinguistic competence), which is closely related to the development of sociopragmatic competence in foreign/second language learning (Chang, 2011b). CFL learners' pragmalinguistic competence may be fostered by teaching activities (e.g., role plays, video-clip watching, and computer-assisted learning) with a focus on consciousness-raising and meta-pragmatic awareness (Takimoto, 2006; Wishnoff, 2000). Finally, task-based and strategy-based instructional modules (Brown & Lee, 2015; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014) may be employed to reinforce CFL learners' self-directed learning in real-life scenarios. In so doing, the negative L1 transfer could be gradually reduced when language learners have more chances to be assimilated into the target culture.

This exploratory study generally answers the proposed research questions, yet future related research may refer to the limitations of this project. First, the sample size only included a small number of eastern and western CFL learners, which was far more under the expected number of participants in each group (N= 30) due to the difficulties of recruiting potential participants in the research context. Further efforts should be made to invite more available CFL learners in order to enhance the generalizability of research findings. Second, collecting data solely from DCT tasks may not provide every aspect of the eastern and the western language learners' speech act strategies or performance, in particular the lack of indirect expressions emerging from learners' pragmatic utterances. A variety of data collection methods retrieving more comprehensive data (e.g., role plays and interviews) may bring up different insights into these learners' learning outcome. Third, relying on the overall class placement levels or having participants self-rate their Chinese levels may not fully ensure whether participants are competent enough to deliver speech acts in the target language. Future studies may screen and recruit eastern/western Chinese learners by conducting a language proficiency test with potential participants before investigating their pragmatic performance. Finally, more related empirical studies could be conducted by investigating other speech acts (e.g., apology, advice or complaint) in research contexts where CFL learners have different culture backgrounds. This will help interlanguage pragmatic researchers compare and contrast CFL learners' speech act performance in various ethnicities.

The current study contributes to our understanding of how the speech acts of request and refusal were performed by the eastern and the western CFL learners. It further shows that speech acts may reflect the cultural norms and values espoused by these Chinese language learners during L1 pragmatic transfer. Raising the awareness of cultural differences leading to appropriate or inappropriate pragmatic performance is conducive to the global efforts for the promotion of Chinese language education.

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