50 ways to say “No” in Japanese

A study in refusals among Japanese people

Daniel Maciejewski

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Department of Cultural Studies and Oriental Languages
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Daniel Maciejewski

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate how Japanese people say no without directly saying no in refusals. The research examines a variety of strategies used by Japanese people in specific refusal situations and if these refusal strategies differ from each other in different situations. In order to investigate the refusal strategies, interviews were conducted with 10 Japanese (aged 18-30) residing in Tokyo. The participants were requested to refuse in four fictive situations, where two of these situations referred to a refusal to a boss, and the other two a refusal to a colleague or friend.

In the situation of refusal, people often avoid refusing directly but rather convey the refusal indirectly. Politeness is generally considered as the most important reason for being indirect in refusals. Thus the indirect refusal strategies explain general politeness strategies. However, this indirect strategies seem to be more prevalent in Japanese culture than in Western cultures. The results of my interviews show that Japanese participants used mostly indirect strategies such as excuse, reason, explanation, and statement of regret as refusal strategies.

However, indirectness as a polite refusal strategy in Japanese can often lead to misunderstandings since indirectness is not always regarded as polite in other languages. The competence of being able to understand each other is important especially in intercultural communication. It is essential for preserving relationships between people. I therefore hope that this study can shed some light not only on the indirect refusal strategies but also the general politeness strategies in Japanese.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

While studying Japanese at the University of Oslo, I learned quite early in the textbook that the expression “sore wa chotto…,” which literally means “it is a bit…,” was used in a refusal to an invitation instead of saying no directly. Later I understood that this unfinished sentence was considered to be polite and that the use of omissions and ellipsis was quite common in Japanese politeness. This was quite surprising for me since it is unusual to use omissions and ellipsis in my mother tongue, Polish. Later I went to Japan and studied at a Japanese university to improve my Japanese proficiency for a year and a half. During this period, I sometimes misunderstood what the Japanese friends said to me because they said things in a very indirect and vague manner, and at that time I did not have the competence to understand the hidden meanings.

In communication, irrespective of one’s background, it is important to avoid hurting another’s feelings in refusing an offer or request. This is especially important in communication between people from different cultures. In many situations, people may not say what they really mean and only imply it indirectly. And this indirectness and vagueness seem to be more prevalent in Japan than in Western cultures. There are thus many Japanese people who think that it is not appropriate to refuse a request directly. Accordingly, a direct refusal “no” is avoided and various other strategies are preferred in order to avoid being direct.

The competence of being able to understand each other is important especially in intercultural communication. It is essential for improving and preserving relationships among people. Japanese people use often indirectness and vagueness as politeness strategies. The indirectness and vagueness, however, can often lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, I became interested in Japanese politeness and how it was manifested linguistically. However, in this thesis, I chose to focus on politeness strategies in refusals of request and invitation.

1.2 The aim and research questions

The aim of this study is therefore to investigate how Japanese people say no without directly saying no in refusals. And the concrete research questions are as follows:

1) Which refusal strategies do the Japanese use in refusal?
2) Are strategies different in different situations?
The purpose of this study is to explore what refusal strategies are used by Japanese people in various situations. I would like to find out what linguistic expressions are used mostly by them and if these expressions differ from each other depending on different situations. For instance, I would like to find out if the refusal strategies of refusing a boss and a colleague will be different. This is because I assume that it might be much harder to refuse an invitation from a boss than for example from a friend.

1.3 Thesis structure

This paper consists of 6 chapters. In chapter 2, I present the cultural background in Japan by demonstrating various concepts and factors in order to explain better why many Japanese prefer a more indirect and vague way of communication.

In chapter 3, I present general politeness theories presented by western scholars in addition to explaining politeness strategies specific in the Japanese language. This is because politeness is one of the most important reasons for avoiding to directly say no in refusal.

In chapter 4, I present different refusal strategies which are assumed to be universal. There has not been much research on refusals until now. However, Brown and Levinson (1978) include refusal strategies within the broader politeness strategies. Another influential researcher in refusals is Beebe (1990) who categorized strategies of refusals into three groups. These refusal strategies will be used in order to analyze my findings. Additionally, there are also two comparative studies about refusal strategies that were conducted among Japanese people and English speakers by Takahashi & Beebe and by Kinjo. Finally, the research specifically about the refusal strategies in Japanese language is also presented. It was conducted by Ueda (1974): Sixteen Ways to Avoid Saying ‘no’ in Japan. This is the only research I found regarding the concrete refusal strategies in the Japanese language. However, the article contains a list of refusal strategies and some explanation, but the author does not mention how frequently and in what situation these strategies are used or why these strategies were selected. Based on this, none of the presented literature, has specifically concentrated on how the Japanese say no without saying no.

In chapter 5, I present the results of my findings from the interviews which were conducted in Tokyo, Japan. In order to answer research questions mentioned in the previous section, I conducted qualitative interviews with 10 participants in Japan by presenting four various fictive situations. The two of the situations include an invitation from a boss and two others include an invita-
tion from a not-so-close friend and a colleague. The interviews were conducted with Japanese stu-
dents and workers between 18-30 years old. This is the age group of people who are mostly gradu-
ating or starting to work in Japanese companies. I presented them four different situations in terms
of social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition. This was in order to examine if the re-
fusal strategies would differ in refusing a boss and in refusing a not-so-close friend or a colleague.

Finally, in chapter 6 I summarize my thesis and attempt to assess my findings.
2. Japanese cultural background

2.1 Introduction

In order to answer my research question, “How Japanese people say ‘no’ without saying no,” we have to find out strategies to avoid directly saying no in refusal. The strategies may be indirectness such as hinting and implying, vagueness, omission of saying everything, hesitation, and so on. To understand these strategies, the Japanese cultural background must be understood. Culture plays an important role in shaping the style of communication. That is: how we speak is strongly connected to culture.

In this chapter I will present the cultural background in Japan, starting first with the basic concept of *uchi* and *soto*. I will explain how Japanese culture affects the use of the language. Furthermore, I will explain the concept of *honne* and *tatemaе* and also explicate hierarchy and power distance. Wakimae is also mentioned in relation to hierarchy and power distance. I will also describe the concept of high and low-context cultures in which different communication styles are mentioned. Finally, I will introduce do-and become language and talk about honorific verbs in this regard. All these concepts and factors are touched upon in this chapter in order to explain why the Japanese people prefer more indirect and more vague ways of communication than the other nationalities.

2.2 Cultural background in Japan

2.2.1 Uchi and Soto

The basic concept of *uchi* and *soto* is deeply rooted in the Japanese culture and society. *Uchi*’ (literally means inside) and *soto*’ (literally means outside) are considered as two opposed values, or categories in Japanese language and culture. The concept of *uchi* and *soto* centers around dividing people into in-groups and out groups. Thus, foreigners in Japan are called *gaijin* which literally means outside (*gai*) + people (*jin*).

Japanese people try to find out which social group they belong to when they meet someone for the first time, for example, they want to know if they belong to the similar schools or companies. This strong group perception has contributed to a feeling of existence, of ‘uchi’ where people feel that they are united emotionally inside the group (Davis & Ikeno 2011). According to Bachnik, (2019) ‘uchi’ is associated with expressions such as: inside, familiar, known, in control,
private or “us.” In the ‘uchi’ groups, the individuals belong to the same groups. They tend to speak more frankly and directly to each other. (Davis & Ikeno 2011)

On the other hand, in the ‘soto’ groups, the communication style tends to be more indirect (Maynard, 1997 among others). The meaning of ‘soto’ can be understood as following: outside, unfamiliar, unknown, out of control, public, or “them.”

Any society has in-groups and out-groups to a certain degree, but this basic concept has a great implication on the language practice in Japanese. For example, verbs may differ depending on whether the interlocutors belong to the same in-group or not. If the interlocutors are not from the same in-group, the out-group person must be honored. This is reflected in verbs, nouns and adjectives that are used. In the following examples, the president is from a out-group and is therefore honored in that the verb eat is in honorific verb meshiagaru instead of the regular verb taberu, the noun wife is in a polite expression with sama (oku-sama), and the adjective beautiful has a honorific prefix o (o-utsukushii)

(1) Shachoo-wa hirugohan-o meshiagaru.

president lunch-ACC eat (honorific verb)

The president eats lunch.

(2) Shachoo-no Oku-sama-wa o-utsukushii.

President-GEN wife (honorific)-TOP beautiful (honorific)

The president’s wife is beautiful.

Other examples of uchi/soto distinction in the language are kinship terms. One has to use one form for in-groups and another form in out-groups. Some of the examples are stated below.

(3) in-groups terms                      out-group terms
okaasan/kaachan/mama (mother)          haha
otoosan/toochan/papa (father)          chichi
oniichan (older brother)               ani
oneechan (older sister)                ane
Other nouns should also be changed according to the *uchi-soto* distinction. One uses honorific prefix *o* or *go* depending on the origin of nouns (e.g. Japanese origin vs Chinese origin) to out-group people.

(4)  
in-group nouns  out-group noun
nomimono (drink)  o-nomimono
hon (book)  go-hon

Thus, the *uchi/soto* distinction is immensely reflected in the language use, and one has to always figure this out before speaking. One thing we have to keep in mind in the concept of *uchi* and *soto* is that these in-groups and out-groups are not static. They change depending on the situations and interlocutors.

In the studies about Japanese refusals that will be described in the following chapters, I will mainly concentrate on the ‘*soto*’ communication since it is in the *soto*-communication that politeness strategies such as indirectness and vagueness appear most often, although they do occur also in *uchi*-communication.

### 2.2.2 Honne and Tatemae

According to Bachnik (2007), *tatemae* can be considered as the world of social relations - in other words it applies to formal principles or rules. On the other hand, *honne* is the world of feelings - this bring personal feelings or motives. Therefore, because of the *tatemae*, the *honne* feelings cannot be expressed freely. Furthermore, Bachnik claims that, the “truth” which is expected to be heard from others, might be different than the “truth” which is in our hearts. *Tatemae* is associated with: *public, official, social* while *honne* is considered as *personal, hidden or secret*. It could also be seen as something which is unacceptable or even illegal.

Bachnik explains that *tatemae* and *soto* are always connected together, just like *honne* and *uchi*. This is because *tatemae* shows the surface communication which is presented to *soto* outsiders. On the other hand, *honne* represent the feelings of *uchi* insiders. In the Japanese language the communication in *soto/tatemae* and *honne/uchi* is different. This difference in communication is characterized by using different formal forms in *soto/tatemae* and degrees of distance and polite forms of speech between individuals. Additionally, this difference emphasizes the distance between
the speaker and the listener. On the other hand, *honne/uchi* is characterized by plain forms of speech to emphasize the closeness or intimacy.

Bachnik also mentions that Japanese people tend to avoid problems, disagreements and “uncomfortable truths” in *tatemae*. Furthermore, she claims that Japanese people are skilled to sacrifice *honne* for *tatemae*, such that *honne* will not “leak” into *tatemae*. This could be considered as self-sacrifice of *honne* for the greater social good.

To conclude, *tatemae* is used when we are addressing out-group people. It is considered as something that we are supposed to say in public, what is expected by a society or required according to one’s position and circumstances. Sometimes it might not fit one’s *honne*. *Honne* is what we really want to say honestly, true feelings about a situation which is usually used only between in-groups such as close friends or family. In many cases, especially in refusal, *tatemae* leads to not being able to say *no* directly and sometimes outright lies. The following sentences are such examples. All these examples are refusals which means *no* in Japanese.

(5) a Kentoo shiteokimasu.
   I will think about it.

   b Kondo onegai shimasu
   I ask you (to invite me) next time.

   c Ima choodo totemo isogashii tokideshite
   I am extremely busy these days.

   d Kyoo kazewo hiite shimatte
   Unfortunately, I got a cold today.

### 2.2.3 Hierarchy/power distance

According to Geert, (1994), the level of power distance differs in different cultures. Geert defines power distance as following: “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.” (Geert, 1994 p.61)
Brockner (Brockner et al. 2001) explains power distance as an inequality between people in different positions, where the power is considered as a natural aspect of social order.

The countries which have a high power distance are for example: Malaysia, Philippines, Slovakia, Russia, Panama or Mexico. On the other hand, the countries with a low power distance are: Austria, Germany, Denmark, Norway or Sweden. (Geert, 1994)

For instance, in the countries with high power distance, children are expected to be obedient to their parents in a higher degree than low power distance countries. In high power distance cultures, the respect for parents and older relatives is seen as a fundamental virtue. On the other hand, in the countries with lower power distance, children are often treated equally. The parents aim is to teach them in the early stage to being able to say “no” and let the children to take control of their own issues. When the children become older, they begin to refer to their parents as friends, despite the age difference. Additionally, they tend not to ask the parents about the permission in important decisions.

In the workplace, in the high-power-distance societies where a hierarchical system exists, the superiors and subordinates are seen as unequal. Subordinates expect usually to be told from the boss what to do. On the other hand, in the low-power-distance societies, the hierarchical system is more flexible and can change. The subordinates and superiors are seeing each other as more equal than in the previously mentioned high-power-distance society.

Japanese society is said to be a high power-distance society. The power distance exists between parents and children, and superiors and subordinates where a hierarchical system exist. People are expected to follow the social norms which are considered as appropriate to your status in a hierarchy. In Japanese culture these social norms are called wakimae. (Ide, 1992) Wakimae means discretion and comes from the verb wakimaeru which means to discern.

According to Hill (as cited in Ide 1992 page 298) “Wakimae refers to the almost automatic observation of socially-agreed-upon rules and applies to both verbal and non-verbal behavior. A capsule definition would be ‘conforming to the expected norms.” Furthermore, Ide claims that wakimae are social norms people have to follow in the society in order to be recognized as a polite person. Therefore, speaking according to wakimae is not to express explicitly one’s true intention, but to speak according to one’s position or role in a hierarchy.

One’s position or role in a hierarchy determines matters such as what to say, when to say, how to say, and how much to say. An example is a situation where a subordinate does not agree with an idea presented by a superior, and the subordinate want to suggest counter ideas. It is
extremely impolite and rude to say that the idea by the superior is bad. Therefore, the subordinate must suggest other ideas using indirect communication styles showing that he/she understands *wakimae*. The followings are such examples from one of the web articles (Anonymous, October, 5, 2017) where the author tells what to say to superiors when people actually should say no:

(6) a X toittahookoode mooichido kentoosuruyochiga aruyooni omoimasuga
I think there is a room for re-considering this project from a different angle such as X

b. X toittaikenmo aruyooni kannjiraremasuga, ikagadeshooka
It seems that there are different opinions such X. What do you think?

Matsuhashi (2015) claims that Japanese choose the honorifics based on the power and distance. According to her, Japanese people use honorifics in order to be seen as a polite, well-mannered person to out-group people. Therefore, they usually have skills to switch from casual language to honorifics toward people whose status is higher in hierarchy than the speakers. In sum, Japan is a high power distance country, and people accept that power is distributed unequally among them. Power distance/hierarchy and *wakimae* (i.e knowing one’s position in hierarchy) determines how people speak. This means that subordinates must speak to superiors in polite, indirect, vague ways to avoid violating the social norms of *wakimae*.

### 2.2.4 High-context and Low-context

Hall - an American anthropologist, distinguishes the difference between high and low context culture. The “A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code.” (Hall, 1977 page 79)

Hall (1977) further mentions some of the typical traits for high context culture as follows:

- Most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while little is in the verbal message.
- People tend to communicate in indirect, implicit, reserved, and vague manner in order to maintain group harmony.
• The listener is expected to know what the speaker’s hidden message is so that the speaker doesn’t have to be specific.

The reason why people in high-context culture tend to speak in indirect, implicit, reserved, and vague manner is to maintain harmony which may involve not saying true feelings, as explained in the section of honne and tatemae. This means that people in high-context culture try to avoid saying things explicitly, but try to find ways to convey the message in other ways.

On the other hand, some typical traits of low-context communication are:

• The mass of information is embedded in the message.
• People tend to communicate in a direct manner.
• Speakers’ ability to express their intentions (not the listener’s) is emphasized.
• Being honest, sincere, direct, precise, frank and open with others is highly valued.

The examples of low context cultures are: Scandinavia, Germany or the USA (ibid.)

Hayashi (2014) claims that a society like Japan is a typical example of a high-context culture where things could be understood without saying much. The transmission of the messages depends heavily on the context in which the communication takes place. It does not need to rely heavily on language.

Japanese culture is considered as a high-context culture where the communication does not rely heavily on the verbal message, but on context and internalized common information of interlocutors. Additionally, the communication style in Japanese culture tends to be indirect, implicit, reserved, and vague in order to maintain group harmony. Thus, the concept of high-context culture may explain why the Japanese people prefer more indirect and more implicit communication style than people in low-context-cultures.

2.2.5 Do-language and Become language

Ikegami (1991) describes a distinction between co-called Do-languages and Become-languages. According to Ikegami, the typical traits of Do-languages are that they give prominence to the human being acting as an agent in an event and that it therefore tends to use more transitive verbs. In other words, it focuses more on someone who is “doing” something in an event. However, in the Becoming-languages, the human individual tends to be suppressed even if such a being is in-
volved in an event and events tends to be described as something that happens spontaneously. This leads to the use of more intransitive verbs. English is an example of a Do-language, but Japanese shows typical features of a Become-language.

The following is the example of a Japanese sentence taken from a Yukiguni (Snow Country) novel written by Yasunari Kawabata. The first sentence of the novel is as following:

*Kunizakai no nagai tonneru o nukeru to, yukiguni de atta.*

border of long tunnel ACC pass when snow-country was

In this sentence, the literal translation is: “On passing the long tunnel at the border, was a snow country.” This sentence according to Ikegami, impresses the Japanese readers. However, for a western readers, it can be confusing. Since the sentence doesn't explicitly mention the subject, western readers would most probably ask “what is it that passed (the tunnel)?”

This sentence was also translated by American Japanologist, Seidensticker (as cited in Ikegami, 1991): “The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country.” In this English translation, it is clear that the train is the subject of the sentence even if it was not explicitly mentioned in the original Japanese text. The Japanese readers of this sentence will most probably imagine it as a sudden change of scene, from dark tunnel to a white perspective of snow-covered country without thinking what/who passed the tunnel. However, the translation of this sentence in English focused more on the specific agent which is a train in motion. The focus in English is therefore on an individual - the train in motion. However, in original Japanese text the focus is on the whole scene as a continuum without a focus on particular individualum.

Other examples of Japanese as a Become-languages using intransitive verbs are the following sentences in which the English translation uses transitive verbs with human agent as a subject.

a. *John-niwa kodomo-ga futari iru (intr)*
   John-LOC-TOP child-NOM two persons exists
   (Lit) At John, two children exists.
   John has two children.
b. Shigoto-ga owaranai-to (intr) kaeremasenyo.
   Work-NOM not finish-if cannot go home.
   (Lit) if the work is not finished, you cannot go home.
   If you don’t finish the work, you cannot go home.

c. Kooto-ni shimi-ga tsuiteiru (intr).
   Coat-LOC stain-NOM is attached
   (Lit) On the coat, the stain is attached.
   You have stains on your coat.

Ikegami’s theory of Do-languages and Become-languages is widely accepted although there are some researchers who do not entirely agree with him. For example, according to Nariyama (2003), Japanese do use transitive verbs often. When they do, focus is on the acting animate agent and the will and responsibility of the acting animate agent is essential. This is why an inanimate entity cannot be a subject of a transitive sentence in Japanese. The following English sentence is perfectly acceptable, but the Japanese sentence with an inanimate subject ‘a cup of coffee’ is anomalous.

• A cup of coffee will refresh you.
  *Ippai-no-koohii-ga anata-wo sawayakani suru.

Nevertheless, it is true that Japanese often suppresses the agent and describes an event as if it is happening on its own accord instead of describing that the agent does something. This de-agantivization strategy is the one that is used in honorific verbs. This is a way of being polite by not attributing the responsibility of an event to the agent. This is the topic of the last section in this chapter.

2.2.6 Honorific verbs

According to Jacobsen (1992), the purpose of using Japanese honorifics, is to avoid to refer directly to the person. This is considered as more polite. Jacobsen claims that: “In Japanese, there is a tendency to avoid intentional predicates in referring to the actions of an individual to whom defer-
ence is accorded.” (Jacobsen, 1992 page 126). Those “honorific” constructions have a function of pointing out the deference to the subject.

The standard honorific form is made by changing the verb into its infinitive form, adding the honorific prefix o- before the infinitive verb form, and adding the ni naru (become NP) pattern.

Mori sensei ga kuni ni okaeri ni narimashita.
Mori professor NOM country LOC return-INF DAT become(=HON)-POL-PAST
“Professor Mori has returned to his country.”

As the example shows, these forms make the transitive verbs into intransitive and describes a situation as a one which occurs without a subject even if the subject is in the sentence. The principle of Japanese honorifics is to avoid to refer to a person, instead referring to the actions of that person, which is seen as more polite.

Additionally, according to Jacobsen, one of the functions of (r)are, also is used in order to show deference to the subject of the sentence.

Sensei-ga hon-o yom-areru
Professor-NOM book-ACC read-PASS

This according to Jacobsen indicates that the purpose of using the (r)are function as honorific is to present an event as a one which occurred spontaneously by changing the transitive verb yomu into a passive, intransitive verb yom-areru, instead of an event happening intentionally by the subject (Jacobsen, 1992). This de-agentivization is the strategy which is used in honorific verbs. The reason why Japanese people use these forms is to not attribute the responsibility of an event to the agent.

2.2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the Japanese cultural background which may explain why the Japanese people prefer more indirect and more vague ways of communication than the other nationalities. The first concept was of uchi and soto which is considered as two opposed values in Japanese language by dividing people into in-groups and out groups. Furthermore, I talked about
honne and tatemae, where tatemae is used when we are addressing out-group people, while honne is what we really want to say honestly. Additionally, I discussed the hierarchy and power distance, explaining how the high-power-distance society (such as Japan) influence the use of the language. I pointed out also how the concept of high-context culture may explain why the Japanese people prefer more indirect communication style. Moreover, I mentioned the difference between do-language and become language. Japanese often suppresses the agent and describe an event as something that happens spontaneously rather than describing that the agent does something. Finally, I explained the de-agentivization functions of honorific forms, in which transitive verbs become intransitive verbs.

The previously mentioned factors may contribute to how Japanese people talk in a more indirect and vague communication style. In the next chapter different strategies of politeness are discussed.
3. Theoretical framework of politeness

3.1 Introduction

One of the main reasons for the Japanese to avoid saying no in refusal is politeness. They want to be polite and respectful and therefore rephrase the direct refusal in more mannerly way. For this reason, general politeness theories and concrete politeness strategies are in order in this chapter. In the first part of this chapter, I will present Brown and Levinson’s positive and negative politeness theory and their theory of Face threatening act (FTA). The theory by Brown and Levinson is one of the most acknowledged theories in politeness and many of their politeness strategies are useful for this thesis despite some criticisms. In addition I will present the works of Tannen and Lakoff who also propose politeness theories and some concrete strategies. In the second part of this chapter, I will specifically touch on Japanese politeness, including Japanese honorifics and different politeness strategies. Not all the strategies mentioned in this chapter are relevant in refusals. Nevertheless, this chapter can show that the overall strategies of indirectness and vagueness are pervasive in every day conversations in Japanese, and this explains why the Japanese prefer similarly indirect communication styles in refusals.

3.2 General politeness

It is a problematic task to clearly define what a politeness is. Nonetheless during the last decades, some scholars have tried to define it. Naturally, there have been a great deal of disagreements about what it really means to be polite. According to Watts (2003), polite behavior is when someone is considered as socially ‘correct’ or appropriate. Some people even classify polite behavior as ‘standoffish’ ‘haughty’ or ‘insincere’. (Watts, 2003)

According to Ide (1989), linguistic politeness is the ‘language usage associated with smooth communication, realized 1) through the speaker’s use of intentional strategies to allow his or her message to be received favorably by the addressee, and 2) through the speaker’s choice of expressions to conform to the expected and/or prescribed norms of speech appropriate to the contextual situation in individual speech communities.’ (ibid., page 52)

Among the theories of politeness, Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory has probably been one of the most influential one, and that is introduced first in the following section.
3.2.1 Brown and Levinson

Brown and Levinson define politeness ‘as a complex system for softening face-threatening acts.’ (Brown & Levinson, 1978 page 70) A face threatening act (FTA) is an act which would make someone possibly lose face, or damage it in some way.

Brown and Levinson distinguish two parts of the face: the positive and the negative face. Positive face is the desire to be liked, appreciated, or approved. Negative face is the desire not to be imposed upon or intruded. The “Positive face needs” are considered those where we want to be respected. Brown and Levinson define positive politeness as following: ‘Positive politeness is redress directed to the addressee’s positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable.’ (Brown & Levinson 1987, page 101)

Furthermore, by using the positive politeness, we are showing respect to others, such as building up a person as much as possible by giving the hearer a compliment before we ask a request. The speaker in the conversation is thus trying to minimize the FTA. Positive politeness strategies are for example:

- exaggerate
- give compliment, show interest
- establish common ground,
- saying jokes
- seek agreement
- avoid disagreement
- use honorifics, tag questions, discourse markers (e.g. please)
- show solidarity in-groups
- Offering and promising reciprocity
- Be optimistic
- Giving and asking reasons
- Giving gifts to hearer
- others

An example of giving compliment when we make a request is:

“You are great expert in that field, I’m wondering if you could help me to do my homework?”
Another example is using offer or promise of reciprocity by saying:

“If you help me with math homework, I can help you with your English homework.”

Using honorifics in Japanese can therefore be a positive politeness strategy:

Sensei, suisenjo-o kaite-itadake-masenka
Professor, would you please write a recommendation letter for me?

On the other hand, the “negative face needs” are those where the speaker is not pushing the listener by not imposing (Ito, 2006). Brown and Levinson define the negative politeness as following: “The negative politeness is redressive action addressed to the addressee’s negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded.” (Brown&Levinson 1987 page 129) Furthermore, they claim that the negative face can be characterized as ‘the want of every “competent adult member” that his action be unimpeded by others’. (Brown&Levinson 1987, page 62) By using the negative politeness strategies we are showing that we respect the other person’s freedom. Additionally, we also respect the other person’s privacy. (ibid.)

Negative politeness strategies are for example:

• question instead of orders,
• use hedging such as maybe, personally, sort of, a little to downplay statement (I wonder if I could just sort of ask you a little question.)
• use hedging such as maybe, personally to downplay statement
• indirectness (representing disagreements as opinions and giving hints)
• intentional vagueness (sort of, a little, something like that.)
• be apologetic (I am sorry to bother you, but…)
• minimizing the imposition (I wonder if…)
• using passives (This work should be done by tomorrow.)
• using impersonalizing speaker and hearer (Do this by next week)
• being pessimistic (If you had a little time to spare for me,…) 
• giving deference (Mr. president, could you …)
• minimizing the impingement (I am sure you must be busy, but…)
• Indicating reluctance (I have probably come to the wrong person, but…)
• Giving overwhelming reason (I am not familiar with this area at all. Do you know where the post office is?)
Examples of negative politeness could be:

“If you don’t mind...” “If it isn’t too much trouble.” - in these situations we are minimizing the imposition and the listener has a right to choose to say yes or no. In the following example:

‘Would you please close the window, if that’s ok for you?’,

the use of ‘if’ indicate that the person we talk to has a freedom of action. (ibid.)

Another example is using indirectness as a strategy instead of asking where Oxford street is:

Would you know where Oxford street is?

An example of intentional vagueness is: John is sort of sick.

Different cultures have different preferences for positive or negative politeness strategies. However, indirectness and vagueness seem to be strategies that are used in politeness in many languages. A great deal of studies use the Brown and Levinson's theory. On the other hand, this theory has been questioned by many scholars, including some Japanese scholars. For example, rather than the negative face, Japanese tend to be more interested about their “place” (ba) inside groups in addition to their particular statuses or roles. In other words, according to Hasegawa (2018), the use of honorifics in Japanese language is treated to be socio-pragmatically obligatory. A similar criticism is proposed by Nariyama (2003) based on the fact that honorifics are grammaticalized politeness forms and the use of it is determined by social norms rather than individual choices.

Furthermore Haugh (2018 page 1) claims that “the Japanese honorific system is more complex than Brown and Levinson’s model claims, as the use of such forms is governed not only by the (perceived) relationship of the speaker with the addressee but with the referent as well.”

In spite of the criticism of Brown and Levinson’s theory by some Japanese scholars, they offer many useful strategies that can be used to explain the refusals in Japanese in this thesis.

3.2.2 Lakoff

Lakoff (1973) is said to be one of the first linguists who developed the “Politeness Principles” where she concluded that there are three rules which we should follow in order to provide a successful conversation. The proposed rules are:
1. Don’t impose (Distance)
2. Give options (Deference)
3. Make audience feel good (Camaraderie)

Lakoff claimed that these Rules of Politeness were established in order to reduce the friction in interpersonal communication. The three mentioned rules can be explained as following:

1. Don’t impose:
The first rule is that we don’t impose by keeping a distance from others. The distance in this situation means how close we are to the person we are talking to. In order to do so, we use the formal language to eliminate the personal emotions. This first rule would be comparable with Brown & Levinson’s negative politeness strategy. Examples of using this rule could be: “I’m sorry to bother you, but may I come in to ask some questions about my paper?” This example shows a clear apology for imposing. (Margetan, Ratih, Ratri, 2014)

   Another example of using this rule is: “I apologize that this is such short notice, but could I perhaps ask you to write a recommendation letter for me?”

2. Give options
The second rule - deference (give options) is defined by saying things carefully or hesitantly and to not express one’s will clearly. Here, the speaker gives the options of decision to the hearer. This principle is again related to the negative face in Brown and Levinson’s theory and also include the indirectness.

   A good example of using this rule is: “I wonder if you could possibly lend me Lakoff’s book?” This statement indicates that the listener has an option of refusal. (ibid.) Other examples are the following: “It’s up to you” or “Do you want to go first?” or “What would you rather do?” These types of expressions make the other person think that their opinion have also a value.

3. Make audience feel good
This rule points out the equality between the speaker and the listener and also strengthen the closeness among them. This strategy reinforces the positive face of the hearer and speaker, thus the listener feels appreciated and the conversation is balanced. Unlike the previously mentioned principles, this rule is considered as Brown and Levinson’s positive politeness. An example of this
rule is: “I would really appreciate your opinion, could you please tell me what you think about this outfit?” By expressing that we appreciate someone’s opinion we are indicating the person that his/her opinion is valued. (ibid.)

Lakoff (2004) in her book Language and Woman’s Place, analyzed the way of using politeness between men and women and came to a conclusion that women are perceived linguistically as more polite than man. The following are some of the politeness strategies which according to Lakoff are used in “woman’s language.” These strategies are however useful in polite refusals irrespective of gender.

1. **Hedges:** The use of hedges in woman’s speech is common by using phrases such as: “sort of” “it seems like” “kind of” etc. These forms express the uncertainty, lack of power and authority. An example is: “John is sorta tall.” Lakoff points out that the expressions such as: “I guess” or “I think” in other words means “I would like to say... to you, but I’m not sure I can because I don’t know if it’s right” (Lakoff, 2004 page 79). These expressions can be considered as placing a suggestion instead of direct statement. The use of hedges is therefore one of the examples of politeness strategies.

2. **Super polite forms:**
   As mentioned earlier, Lakoff (2004) claims that women tend to use more polite expressions than man and also use polite forms such as "Would you mind..." "...if it's not too much to ask" "Is it okay if...?" more often. (ibid.) This is also another way of expressing politeness.

3. **Tag questions:**
   Tag questions, which is a negative politeness strategy, such as for example: “isn’t it?” or “aren’t you?” “You don’t mind eating this, do you?” are also another example of politeness strategies. In request, one can say: “You couldn’t help me with my homework, could you?” what is a more friendly and therefore more polite way to ask.
4. Speak in italics:
A way to emphasize or strengthen the utterance by using for example words such as: “so,” “very,” “quite.” The use of the following expressions can exaggerate an utterance and a positive politeness strategy.

5. Indirect requests:
Woman use often indirect requests and commands such as for example: “I am so thirsty.” which indicate that someone is really asking for a drink. (ibid.)

6. Apologize more:
Women apologize more frequently than men do, by using expressions such as for example: "I'm sorry, but I think that...” However, the apologizing elements can also be found in men’s speech such as “excuse me” which is often used. (ibid.)

Some of the mentioned strategies that women tend to use more often than men could be also relevant to the refusal strategies in Japanese language irrespective of gender.

3.2.3 Tannen
Tannen (1991) in her book “You just don’t understand” explores the different ways of communicating between men and women. She claims that women in general tends to speak more indirectly and politely than men. She claims that since woman tend to have a lower status in the society than men, they are perceived as “powerless,” something which is reflected in the differences of language use between man and woman. In other words, the women feel that they should not ask for things directly in the same way as men can do. Note, however, that indirectness doesn't universally reflect powerlessness. In some cultures, such as Malagasy-speaking village in Madagascar, the women tend to speak more directly than men. In this culture it is considered that indirectness shows a higher status, therefore indirectness doesn’t mean the lower status in every society. Tannen claims that directness shows higher status in Western cultures. Furthermore, Tannen explains that “Far more cultures in the world use elaborate systems of indirectness than value directness.” (Tannen, 1991 page 112) In Japanese culture, for instance, the indirectness seems to be preferred over directness. Tannen explains that “Japanese culture has developed indirectness to a fine art” (Tannen, 1991 page 112)
3.2.4 Haugh

Haugh (2015) mainly talks about indirectness and vagueness. He states that indirectness and vagueness are known as negative politeness strategies, already suggested by Brown and Levinson. However, John Searle, - an American language philosopher, is considered as the first who actually “linked” indirectness to politeness. Searle claims that in the case of directives (i.e. requests, commands etc.), “politeness is the chief motivation for indirectness” (Searle, 1975, as cited in Haugh 1979 page 36). For example, the English sentence “pass me the salt” would be considered as a direct order since the verb is in imperative form. However, if it’s expressed as “Can you pass me the salt?” it would be indirect (i.e. interrogatives). If we express the same sentence as “this could do with a little more salt,” it would be declarative. According to Searle, these two last examples would be considered as more “polite” than the previous one (as cited in Haugh, 2015 chapter 1). Furthermore, Searle claims that: “Politeness is the most prominent motivation for indirectness in requests.” He points out that the expression “can you...?” in English is considered as polite because it gives the opportunity for a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ option. Vagueness is the way of expressing things not explicitly. Both indirectness and vagueness are two polite strategies which are used often in Japanese communication. Haugh (2003) claims that many of Japanese and non-Japanese linguists consider Japanese speakers as more vague and indirect than English speakers.

3.3 Politeness strategies in Japanese

In this section I will introduce some strategies which are used in order to show the politeness in Japanese. Firstly, I will briefly introduce the honorifics in Japanese, and explain that even in grammaticalized honorific expressions, the indirectness strategy is used. I will then explain other strategies such as interrogative, negation, past tense and “if” conditional clause. Not all strategies can be used in refusals, but they all show that strategies of indirectness and vagueness are the underlying driving force for conventionalized polite expressions. Note, however, that the strategies mentioned here are not exhaustive.

3.3.1 Polite requests and honorifics in Japanese language

The honorific language (keigo) is divided into three forms: polite, humble, and respectful. Therefore, for example, the English word “to eat,” would have three different forms in Japanese language depending on context: the polite form would be: tabemasu, the humble form: itadaku, the respectful form: meshiagaru.
It is interesting to see how a Japanese speaker requests the listener to hold something, depending on the context (Matsumoto 1988, page 420)

1. *Mote* (Hold this!)
2. *Motte-kure* (Hold this for me)
3. *Motte-kudasai* (Please hold this for me)
4. *Motte-kudasai-masu* (Will you hold this for me?)
5. *Motte-mora-e-masu* (Can I receive the favor of your holding this for me?)
6. *Motte-itadak-e-masu* (Could I receive the favor of your holding this for me?)

The first example is the one which would be only used in emergency situations or in the military. This is an imperative form. Second example consists of the auxiliary verb *kureru*, which means ‘give (a favor to me)’ although it is in an imperative form. The third and fourth examples have the word *kudasaru* (*kudasai*) which literally means to lower something/to send down/to give to me, but used when someone higher in status gives a favor to the speaker. Last two (five and six) examples consists of the auxiliary verb *morau* and *itadaku*, which means ‘to receive (a favor from someone)’.

Thus, Matsumoto points out that the verbs of giving and receiving play a very important role in making polite requests in Japanese language.

Furthermore, Matsumoto explains that, the Japanese sentences: *Mot-imasu ka* which can be translated in English: ‘will you hold this?’ or *mot-e-masu ka* - ‘can you hold this?’, which are considered as polite expressions in English, due to their indirectness, are not considered as polite requests in Japanese. These English phrases are not comparable with those in Japanese. Matsumoto explains that ‘the Japanese politeness system places a higher value on recognition of the interpersonal relation than on mitigating impositions on freedom of action’. (Matsumoto, 1988 page 421) That is because, in Japanese, it is possible to explicit the polite requests even in imperative forms, due to honorific auxiliary verbs.

Another important point is honorific verbs. In addition to some lexical honorific verbs such as *meshiagaru* (to eat), *irassharu* (to go, come), one can create a honorific verb by adding *o* before the verb stem and *ninaru* after the verb stem, or by creating a passive verb by adding *(r)areru* after the verb stem. For example, for the verb *yomu* (to read), one can make the following two types of honorific verbs.
This derivation creates intransitive verbs o-yomi-ninaru and yom-areru from transitive verb yomu, and express events, not as ‘someone does something’ but as ‘something happens spontaneously’. Jacobsen explains this as follows: “transitive modes of expression, and indeed intentional modes of expression in general, attribute responsibility to a person for his or her action in a way which could be construed as accusatory. On the contrary, spontaneous modes of expression avoid any reference to the intentionality, and therefore responsibility of a person for his or her actions.” (Jacobsen 1992 page 127) Thus spontaneous meaning with intransitive verbs has been a way to show deference in the Japanese language for a very long time.

3.3.1.1 Intransitive verbs

Passive is a universally used politeness strategy in many languages. Instead of saying you have to do this work, you can say this work has to be done. The latter sentence is more indirect and therefore more polite than the first in many languages. Japanese, however, tend to use some intransitive verbs to describe events in order to be indirect and therefore polite. A verb mieru (be visible) is used instead of kuru (come) as a polite expression. For example:

Fujisan ga mieru (Mt. Fuji is visible).
Shachoo ga miemasu. (The president is coming)

The mechanism for this use is the same as honorific verbs which are intransitive verbs derived from transitive verbs (e.g. o-yomi-ninaru, yom-areru). ¹ This operation changes the meaning from ‘someone does something (and this someone has a responsibility) to ‘something happens spontaneously (and therefore this someone does not have a responsibility).’ Ikegami (1991, page 317) explains that something takes place without deliberate involvement on the part of the person (i.e. without the agentivity from a human being) gives the implication that the event in question is a natural (and almost inevitable) consequences beyond the control of the persons involved. And this is a sign of modesty and humbleness.

Another example of polite intransitive verb is an expression such as:

¹ There are also some honorific verbs which are originally derived from intransitive verbs such as o-hashiri ni naru, hashira reru.
Naru (to become) is an intransitive verb, and this is a more humble way to say that one is getting married. As Ikegami explains this is because the Japanese verb *naru* is more appropriate to use “because it can leave inexplicit who or what becomes something.” (Ikegami, 1991 page 319)

### 3.3.1.2 Interrogative

One of the polite strategies in Japanese language as well as in other languages is the interrogative. As mentioned before, by asking the question we give the options to the listener, rather than imposing. By making the sentence interrogative, we are making the request milder. This is one of the strategies of how to show the politeness when asking for a request.

Matsuhashi (2015) gives an example of interrogative sentence in Japanese: *tsukawasete itadakemasuka?* ‘I’m wondering if you can let me use it’. Here, the Japanese people tend to add a humble auxiliary verb *itadaku* to *tsukawaseru* in addition to the question mark *ka* which made the sentence interrogative. But more interestingly, the Japanese tend to add the causative morpheme *(a)-seru* to the verb *tsukau* to show that the power lies with the listener. It is the listener that decides if he/she let the speaker use it.

In sum, there are additional strategies used in interrogative sentences in Japanese. The humble auxiliary verb *itadaku* (*morau, kudasaru* can also be used) and the causative morpheme *(a)seru* to give the decision making power to the listener. Nevertheless, interrogative itself is a very valuable strategy for politeness.

### 3.3.1.3 Negation

Matsuhashi (2015) claims that native Japanese speakers have a tendency to use the negation form of verbs in order to express the indirectness and thus politeness. The sentence mentioned in the previous section would be more polite if one negates the sentence as in *tsukawasete itadakemasen-ka*. (Can’t I get the favor of you letting me use it?) An invitation such as V-*masenka* also involves negation. *Ashita tenisu wo shimasenka* literally means ‘Shall we not play tennis tomorrow?’ This is far more appropriate than *Ashita tenisu wo shimasuka*. (Shall we play tennis tomorrow?). Another example of negation as politeness is the extensive use of double negative in Japanese.
The use of double negative in Japanese is a strategy which is used to show the indirectness to the listener and it’s also considered as another way of showing politeness.

3.3.1.4 Past tense

Another polite strategy in Japanese language as well as in other languages is the use of past tense form of the verb. For example, “I wanted to ask you” in English. The use of word “could” instead of “can” in requests is also considered as more polite.

In Japanese examples of use of past tense form is the clause: \( V\text{-}ta/da\ hooga\ iidesuyo \) as in \( kusuri\ wo\ nonda\ hoo\ ga\ iidesuyo \) (It is better (for you) to take medicine). This form is used as a suggestion in Japanese. It’s made out of the past tense form of a verb \( Nonda \) instead of the present tense form \( nomu \). This is to say an option or an alternative to indicate or to suggest something. Thus, past tense is also another strategy of showing politeness in Japanese.

3.3.1.5 Conditional

Another polite strategy in Japanese is the use of conditional form. An example in English is:

‘I would appreciate it if you give me a chance’.

Japanese also tend to use expressions such as \( dekimashitara \) ‘if it is possible’ or \( moshi\ ojikan\ arimashitara \) ‘If there is time (for you)’ Matsuhashi (2015) claims that it is clear that Japanese tend to use these expressions (such as for example \( dekireba \) ‘if possible’ or \( moshi\ yoroshikereba \) ‘if it’s fine with you’) before they actually ask for request in order to protect the other’s person face.

By using this ‘if’ clause the speaker is not imposing the listener in requests and therefore it is considered as polite. Another example is \( kusuri\ wo\ nondara\ doodesuka \) (How about taking medicine?) in which \( nondara \) is a conditional form of the verb \( nomu \) (to drink, to take medicine).

More indirect expressions as politeness;

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2 tara /dara is an conditional form of the perfect tense auxiliary verb tari.

3 This is also a past tense form of conditional nondara. The present tense is nomunara.
Expressions such as V-temoi, V-tewaikenai, and V-nakereba naranai/ikenai are also indirect but conventionalized ways to say that one may/can do something, one may not/cannot do something, and one has to do something. The literal meanings of those expressions are:

V-temoi: it is OK even if one does V
V-te wa ikenai: It does not go (well) in doing V
V-nakereba ikenai/naranai: It does not go for you not to V/It is not becoming for you not to V

These are conventionalized and more indirect ways of expressing modality in Japanese than the English modal verbs such as may, can and must. Expressions such as V-tai to omoimasu and V-yoo to omoimasu are also indirect ways to express one’s own wishes and plans. Without to omoimasu (I think) these expressions would be too direct and thus not polite. These fixed expressions also show that Japanese favors indirectness and vagueness rather than directness and forcefulness.

### 3.3.2 Omission

Omission is considered as a negative politeness strategy. According to Matsuhashi (2015), many Japanese speakers tend to not complete the sentence by adding the word keredomo or ga (but) at the end of sentences.

Example:

*kaite itadaki tai ndesu keredomo*

‘(I) want to receive (your) writing, but…’

This, according to Matsuhashi, make the sentence more polite in Japanese. Furthermore, Matsuhashi suggests that the reason why some speakers choose it is because they rather want to slow down the sentence and choose to not finish it by waiting for the reply from the listener.

Another example is saying *sorosoro jikandesukara*...(It is about time, so…) when one wants to end a visit. It is considered more polite than saying the whole sentence *sorosoro kaeru jikan desukara, korede shiturei shimasu* (It is about time for me to go home, so good bye.)

### 3.3.3 Vagueness

Vagueness expressions are hedges such as *a kind of* to soften the statements and therefore more polite. Examples of hedges of this sort in Japanese are N-demo, N-noyoona (something like...
N), N- hodo, isshuno (a sort of), aruimi (in a sense), and many more. By offering a milder and less sharp variant, one tries to be polite.

Ocha demo nomimasen ka.
‘Would you like to drink a tea or something?’

Anata no yōna hito ga son’na koto wo itte wa ikemasen.
‘People like you must not say such a thing.’

Kitte wo 2-mai hodo kudasai.
‘Please give me about two stamps.’

Kare wa isshu aru imi no otakuda ne.
‘He is kind of otaku (geek) in a sense.’

The recent years expressions such as -poi or -kei seem to be popular to express vagueness.

Ano ko, kekkō majime-keida yo.
‘That person is rather on the serious side.’

Kyō wa, nanka muri ppoi.
‘It’s kind of impossible today.’

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the general theories of politeness presented by Brown and Levinson, Lakoff, Tannen and Haugh. This is because one of the biggest reasons for Japanese to avoid saying no in refusal is politeness. In introducing the politeness theories, concrete politeness strategies are also presented and explained. Not all the strategies can be used in refusal. However, this chapter has shown that Japanese speakers use strategies of indirectness and vagueness to be polite considerably. The same strategies are most likely used in refusals for avoiding to say no. In the next chapter, I will talk about earlier research on refusals in general and previous studies in the Japanese language.
4. Literature review

4.1 Introduction

In communication among people it is crucial to avoid hurting others' feelings in the situation of refusing a request or an offer. In the situation of refusals, people in general tend to use various strategies in order to minimize the FTA (face threatening act).

In this chapter I will introduce the previous research on refusals by first presenting Beebe's classification of refusal strategies followed by positive and negative politeness strategies in refusal by Brown and Levinson. Furthermore, I will talk about comparative study between Japanese speakers and American speakers and finally, I will introduce the concrete strategies for saying 'no' without actually saying no specifically in the Japanese language.

4.2 Three important factors in refusal

Before we look into refusal strategies, it is important to mention that there are three essential factors about the refusals. Those three are crucial in order to analyze my data and findings which will be presented in the next chapter.

4.2.1 Refusal is considered to be a speech act

Refusals are considered to be a speech act by which a speaker “fails to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor.” (Chen et al 1995 p. 121) A speech act is an act that a speaker performs when making an utterance. For example, saying I apologize, one is saying it and apologizing at the same time. In the same way, I refuse or I decline are speech acts. Obviously, answers such as no or I can't are not speech acts.

4.2.2 Refusal is a FTA (face threatening act)

In human relations in the situation of refusals of offers, suggestions or requests, the acceptance is usually preferred while on the other hand the refusal is dispreferred. The actions of refusal are therefore often indirect, complex and include hesitations and apologies. Because the failure of refusing in an appropriate way can negatively affect relations among humans, the refusals contain different strategies in order to avoid hurting other person.

The reason why refusals are typical face threatening acts (FTA) is because they contradict with the expectation of the listener. Refusals are thus typically accomplished with various strategies
that minimize the face-threatening between the interlocutors. However, these strategies may be different across the cultures, and various cultures might consider proper refusal behavior differently. (Eslami, 2010)

4.2.3 Relevant social factors for politeness of refusal by Brown and Levinson

Refusals are influenced by many social factors such as age, gender, level of education, social distance, and power:

1. Social distance
The social distance can be described as a relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Factors such as age, gender and intimacy can also contribute to determine the social distance. For example, if the speaker and listener are in the same age, the use of politeness strategies between them might be less formal than if the age gap was larger. (Brown and Levinson, 1978)

2. Relative power
This factor also affects which polite strategies are used between the speaker and the listener. The power of the person can be determined as the role of a person in society. It can be based on person’s material control and metaphysical control. For example, the relative power between the boss and the employee in the company can affect the choosing of politeness strategies.

3. Rank of imposition
The rank of imposition is also one of the factors which influence the politeness strategies. The large rank of imposition is when we ask for a big favor, but small rank of imposition when we request small favors. (Brown and Levinson 1978) For example, the situation when someone asks about lending a huge amount of money is a larger rank of imposition than in the situation where someone ask to come to a party.

4.3 Beebe
Beebe et al.’s (1990) classified refusal strategies into three major groups: ‘direct’, ‘indirect’ and ‘adjuncts to refusals’. In the direct section there are two formulas: ‘performative’ for example “I refuse you” and non-performative such as for example “I can’t.” The indirect section includes eleven formulas. Furthermore, in the ‘adjuncts to refusals’ section four types of additions are pre-
sented which include the ‘statement of positive opinion’, ‘statement of empathy’, ‘pause fillers’ and ‘gratitude/appreciation’. Beebe’s classification of refusals is presented in table 1:

Table 1. Direct and indirect strategies by Beebe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. DIRECT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Performative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Nonperformative statement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. “No”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Negative willingness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I refuse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I can’t; I won’t; I don’t think so.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. INDIRECT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Statement of regret</td>
<td><em>I’m sorry...; I feel terrible...</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Wish</td>
<td><em>I wish I could help you.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Excuse, reason, explanation</td>
<td><em>My children will be home that night; I have a headache.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Statement of alternative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. I can do X instead of Y</td>
<td><em>I’d rather...; I’d prefer...</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Why don’t you do X instead of Y</td>
<td><em>Why don’t you ask someone else?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Set condition for future or past acceptance</td>
<td><em>If you had asked me earlier, I would have...</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Promise of future acceptance</td>
<td><em>I’ll do it next time; I promise I’ll... or Next time I’ll...</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Statement of principle</td>
<td><em>I never do business with friends</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Statement of philosophy</td>
<td><em>One can’t be too careful.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 3. ADJUNCTS TO REFUSALS                      |                                               |
| a. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement | *That’s a good idea; I’d love to* |
| b. Statement of empathy                       | *I realize you are in a difficult situation*  |
| c. Pause fillers                              | *Uhh; well; oh; uhm*                         |
| d. Gratitude/appreciation                      | *Thank you for the invitation*               |

The presented classification of refusals strategies can also be used in different speech acts such as for example requests, offers, or invitations. (Eslami, 2010) This classification will be important in order to analyze my data and findings which will be discussed in the next chapter.
4.4 Refusal strategies by Brown and Levinson

Brown and Levinson offer a large number of politeness strategies. Not all the strategies can be used in refusal. The following are some of the strategies which can be used in refusals.

The positive politeness refusal strategies:

- Using in-group identity markers.
  Example:
  
  A: Can you take care of my dog when I go traveling?
  B: nah., dude, I’m quite busy, you know me bro.

- Joking.
  Example:
  
  A: Can I borrow money from you?
  B: Do I look like Bill Gates?

- Being optimistic.
  Example:
  
  A: Can you help me with my homework? If I fail this, I will fail this semester.
  B: Come on, you won’t fail.

- Including both speaker and hearer in the activity.
  Example:
  
  A: Can you do my homework for me?
  B: Come on, let’s do it together!

- Giving or asking for reasons.
  Example:
  
  A: Can you help us with moving?
  B: Why are we doing this?

- Avoiding Disagreement (for example white lies)
  Example:
A: Would you like to come to a meeting today?
B: I'm sorry, I don't feel good today..

- Offering and Promising

Example:
A: Can you help me with moving?
B: If I help me with moving, you can help me to fix the car.

The negative politeness refusal strategies:

- Being Conventionally indirect.

Example:
A: Let's eat sushi for dinner today!
B: I already ate sushi for lunch...

- Questioning and Hedging.

Example:
A: Can you lend me 100 dollars?
B: I hate to say this, but you can't keep asking me to lend you money. I don't have much money myself.

- Minimizing the imposition.

Example:
A: Could you stop playing here?
B: Just a minute.

- Apologizing:

1) Admitting the impingement.

Example:
A: Can I borrow some money from you?
B: I know it's been a tough situation for you, otherwise you would not come to me, but I'm sorry I don't have that much money.
2) Indicating reluctance.
Example:
   A: Can you help me with the homework?
   B: I usually don’t say this, but you should do that yourself.

3) Giving Overwhelming Reason.
Example:
   A: Come to my party tonight.
   B: My job finishes at 19:00 today, and I don’t think I can manage the party tonight.

4) Begging for forgiveness.
Example:
   A: Can you lend me 100 dollars?
   B: I am so sorry, but I can’t. I am broke, too.

- Stating the face threatening act as a general rule.
Example:
   A: Can you lend me money?
   B: I never lend money to my friends.

- Off Record Strategies:
1) giving hints.
Example:
   A: Shall we take a walk today?
   B: It is going to rain later today.

2) Being ironic.
Example:
   A: Can you lend me 100,000 yen?
   B: That’s such a little amount to ask for.

3) Being Incomplete and using ellipsis.
Example:
A: *Can you lend me 100 000 yen?*

B: *Well, hmm... I am not sure...*

In general, the positive politeness is considered as familiar, friendly and mostly used in the situation when the relationship is closer between speakers. These strategies are used where there is not much difference in social status, age and power. On the other hand, the negative politeness is formal, specific and socially distancing. It is usually used when the relationship among speakers is not that close. (Pratiknyo, et al.’s 2016)

### 4.5 Previous research on Japanese refusals

In this part I will present a previous research on Japanese refusals by analyzing the comparative studies between Japanese and American students conducted by Takahashi and Beebe (1987), and a similar study by Kinjo (1987). Furthermore, I will introduce the study about sixteen ways of avoiding saying *no* by Ueda (1974).

#### 4.5.1 Comparative studies between Japanese and American students

Takahashi and Beebe (1987) conducted a study of investigating refusals among Japanese learners of English, comparing with native English speakers. The data for this study was collected from 80 participants, among them: 20 native Japanese speakers, 20 native English speakers and 40 Japanese students who speak English.

**Participants:**

- 20 Japanese people who spoke Japanese in Japan (JJJ)
- 20 Japanese people who were learning English in Japan (JEJ)
- 20 Japanese people who spoke English in the U.S. (JEA)
- 20 native English speakers of English (AEA)

In their study, however, the focus was mostly on JEA and JEJ participants who were learning the English language. The JEA participants, (Japanese people who spoke English in the U.S.) were living in New York, and had less academic training in English than the JEJ group. None of these participants had English as a major before they came to the U.S. In average they spend 4 years in the U.S. and were mostly fluent in English. The JEJ participants however, (Japanese who were learning English in Japan) learned English in Japan in average 11 years.
Takahashi and Beebe (1987) introduced a few different situations where the participants were trying to refuse an invitation by using different strategies. The material for this research was collected through a questionnaire.

In the first situation, the participant had to refuse an employee’s request for a pay raise. In this scenario, the native speakers of Japanese (JJJ) started expressing the refusal with showing the empathy by saying for instance: “I would like to help you” or “I understand your situation.” Additionally, the other two groups of Japanese speakers (JEJ and JEA) also showed the empathy at the beginning of their utterance. However, the native American speakers (AEA) didn’t express any empathy at the beginning of their statements. This implies that the Japanese speakers started a refusal with an adjunct to refusal - the ‘statement of empathy’ - suggested by Beebe (1990), when they are higher in power, while the American speakers showed no empathy when they are higher in power.

In the second situation, the participant had to refuse an invitation to a friend’s house for dinner. The native Japanese speakers (JJJ) usually started the statement with an apology, which is an indirect strategy of the ‘statement of regret’. However, nearly all of the Japanese people who spoke English in the US (JEA), also begin the statement with an expression of regret, except of a few JEA students who expressed the refusal with gratitude. On the contrary, the native English speakers (AEA) expressed their statements firstly with positive opinions such as “I would like to,” proceed by a regret and excuse at the end. (Takahashi&Beebe, 1987).

Based on classification of refusals suggested by Beebe (1990) it seems that the American students often use a ‘statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement’ before expressing the ‘statement of regret’ and ‘excuse, reason, explanation’ when there is no power distance between the speakers. On the contrary in this situation the Japanese students usually only used the ‘statement of regret’.

In the third situation the participants were asked to refuse a boss’s invitation to a party. This is a situation when the student is in lower power relationship. Based on Beebe’s classification of refusals (1990), some of the native Japanese participants (JJJ) started the refusal with expressing the ‘statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement’ or ‘statement of regret’. Also, both JEJ and JEA usually began stating their utterance with expression of apology. However, the native English speakers tend to start expressing the refusal also with a positive opinion such as : “That sounds wonderful,” and then express regret and an excuse. According to Takahashi&Beebe (1987) starting a sentence with regret sounded a little too abrupt to Americans. This, in turn, means that the Ameri-
can students use ‘statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement’ first when the other interlocutor is higher in status, while the Japanese students use mostly the ‘statement of regret’ - suggested by Beebe (1990).

Furthermore, Takahashi&Beebe (1987) discovered that in the situation of refusing a boss’s party, the JEA speakers who had lower English proficiency said for example: “I’m very, very sorry, I can’t go.” However, in the same situation, the JEA speakers with high English proficiency tend to say more as following: “I’m terribly sorry, but we made up another plan for next Sunday a long time ago. So I feel awfully sorry to say no to your wonderful invitation.”

Takahashi&Beebe (1987) point out that Japanese people having higher English proficiency tend to use more qualifying words such as: “awfully,” “terribly,” and “truly,” with the intention to soften their apology. However, the Americans had a tendency to express the refusals by using positive phrases such as: ‘I’d love to...’ (ibid.) first. Again, this difference shows that the American students start refusal with a ‘statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement’ while the Japanese students both with lower and higher English proficiency prefer the ‘statement of regret’.

In sum, there are few differences among the refusals between Japanese and Americans. Japanese people had a tendency to start their utterance of the refusal with a negative strategy of apology, followed by stating an excuse. They rarely use a positive strategy of saying positive opinion. However, the Americans usually started the refusal with a positive strategy of expressing a positive opinion or ‘statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement’ in Beebe’s term such as “I would like to.” Then, they continue with a regret and finish with an excuse.

Kinjo (1987) conducted a similar study on invitations and requests both in Japanese and English. The data was collected from 30 native American speakers and 30 native Japanese participants who answered to 20 invitations and requests. Even though there were some similarities among the answers, there were also key differences among the two groups of participants depending on the situation. The research showed that American females had a tendency to express “I’m sorry” more frequently than American males. On the other hand, Japanese females and males used the term “I’m sorry” with comparable frequencies. Additionally, the research showed that Americans had a tendency to use the intensifiers such as really, and truly when they apologized to anyone, however Japanese used the intensifiers less frequently.
4.5.2 A study about not saying ‘no’ in refusal in the Japanese language

Ueda presented an article in 1974: ‘sixteen ways to avoid saying ‘no’ in Japan’ which showed as the title says, sixteen various ways of how to say ‘no’ without saying ‘no’ in Japanese language although it is actually fifteen ways because no.1 is a direct no:

1. The equivalent of the English ‘no’ (However, this is not used that often in conversation, but mostly in written language, especially when filling out forms.)
2. Vague ‘no’ (‘I think not’)
3. Vague and ambiguous ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (Using the expression which could mean either yes or no)
4. Silence (saying nothing)
5. Counter question. (‘Why do you ask?’)
6. Tangential responses (changing the subject)
7. Exiting (leaving the room)
8. Lying, equivocation, etc. (making an excuse because of sickness)
9. Criticizing the question itself. (claiming that the question is ambiguous or not worth answering)
10. Refusing the question (Claiming to be forced to refuse to answer the question)
11. Conditional ‘no’
12. ‘Yes, but only if…..’
13. Delaying answers (For example: ‘We will write you a letter’, ‘I’ll think about it’ or ‘I’ll let you know tomorrow’)
15. Internally ‘no’, externally ‘yes’ (Saying yes, but showing the uncertainty that the request can be achieved.)
16. Apology

Unfortunately, Ueda does not mention where she found these 16 refusal strategies. However, since this is the only research I found on concrete refusal strategies in Japanese, I decided to include Ueda’s study in this chapter.

Nevertheless, many of Ueda’s proposed strategies, except the first example, seem to be indirect refusals or negative politeness strategies and off-record strategies. There are also strategies, such as those from 4 to 15, that are not mentioned neither by Brown and Levinson nor by Beebe. It is uncertain where Ueda discovered these refusal strategies and how frequently these are used.
4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced the previous research on refusals. Firstly, I described refusal strategies by Beebe and Brown and Levinson and presented these strategies regardless of languages. Furthermore, I presented the comparative studies between Japanese and English conducted by Takahashi&Beebe. Their study showed the different strategies in refusing a request especially between native Japanese and native American speakers. Additionally, I introduced a similar study conducted by Kinjo in the refusal of invitations and requests, both in Japanese and English. Kinjo’s study showed that American females have a tendency to show regret more often than American males do. However Japanese males and females used words of regret with similar frequencies. Based on Beebe’s classification of refusals, Japanese seem to prefer ‘statement of regret’ while Americans often prefer to start a refusal with ‘statements of positive opinion/feeling or agreement’ or ‘gratitude/appreciation’. This was rarely seen in Japanese refusal. I introduced also a study conducted by Ueda on sixteen ways of avoiding saying ‘no’ in Japan. Ueda included many strategies that were not mentioned by Beebe or Brown and Levinson, and it was uncertain if the strategies were often used in Japan. In the following chapters, I will present the methodology and analyses of my data to examine how Japanese people actually refuse by using the refusal strategies by Beebe and Brown and Levinson.
5. Findings and discussion

5.1 Methodology

In this chapter I will describe research method and provide the analysis and discussion of the data collected in my research. First, I will introduce the research design and explain the method that was used for this study. This section will cover a detailed description how the data was collected, and what questions were asked during the interview. The ethical issues regarding the participants will be also discussed. Second, I will analyze participant’s responses and explain discovered refusal strategies. This will be clarified in two parts. The first part will summarize the answers resulted from the open questions and the second part will examine the responses to the questions connected with four different refusal situations. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I will discuss the results of my study and compare with the previous studies, covered in Chapter 4.

5.1.1 Research design

The study which was conducted for this paper is a qualitative research. The quantitative research would also be good to conduct in this study, however, it would be difficult due to the limited number of interviewee. According to Bryman (2016), the interview is the most common method used in qualitative research. The qualitative interview can be considered as more flexible method for data collection. Therefore, if the study is conducted by interview, the interviewees can express themselves more freely than, when using for example questionnaire.

5.1.2 Data collection

The interviews for this study were conducted by face-to-face interview with eight participants and through Skype with two participants. I reached the interviewees through my Japanese contacts who voluntarily agreed in participation. The face-to-face interviews (with 8 participants) took place in cafes in Tokyo. All interviews were conducted in Japanese language and recorded on voice recording device. Many of the participants at the beginning of the interview felt quite nervous. Therefore it was important to break the ice by asking participants warming up questions such as asking them how they were recently so that it would not have a negative affect on the results of my interviews.
I began my interview asking the personal questions about participant’s hometown and age and continued with seven open questions about an invitation’s issues, which are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. The open questions in the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JAPANESE</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dare ka ni sasoi shōtai o ukete kotowatta koto ga arimasu ka.</td>
<td>1. Have you ever refused someone's invitation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dare kara donna sasoi shōtai o ukemashita ka. (Jōshi, dōryō, shitashī yūjin, kazoku, koibito nado)</td>
<td>2. From whom did you get this kind of invitation? (Boss, colleague, close friend, family, girlfriend/boyfriend etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sono hito no sasoi wo kotowatta riyū wa nanidesu ka</td>
<td>3. Why did you refuse that person’s invitation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sonotoki jissai ni nan to itte kotowarimashita ka.</td>
<td>4. What did you actually say then?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dareka kara no sasoi shōtai wo kotowaranakereba naranai toki, dono yōni kanjimasu ka?</td>
<td>5. How do you feel when you have to refuse an invitation from someone?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Donna hito ni kotowaru no ichiban muzukashīdesu ka? (Jōshi dōryō shitashī yūjin kazoku koibito nado)</td>
<td>7. Who is the hardest to refuse? (Boss, colleague, close friend, family, girlfriend/boyfriend, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second part of the interview, the participants were asked, how they would refuse an invitation in four different situations. As mentioned in previous chapters, Japanese people can be very direct in *uchi*-communication with family members and close friends and can say no in refusals. But the first and third situation include a refusal to a boss, the second situation is a refusal to a colleague or not-so-close friend and the fourth situation is a refusal to a not-so-close friend, all of these situations require some level of politeness. The following four situations are presented in table 2:
Table 2. Description of the interview’s refusal situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tsugi no yōna jōkyō de dono yō ni sasoi wo kotowarimasu ka?</th>
<th>How do you refuse an invitation in the following situations?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Atarashī kaisha ni nyūsha shita bakari de, shigoto no ato, jōshi ni nomini sasowareta ga, yūjin to no jūyōna yotei ga sudeni arukara sasoi wo kotowaranakereba ikemasu ka.</td>
<td>1. You just joined a new company and after work, your boss invited you to drink. You have to refuse the invitation because you already have an important plan with your close friend. What do you say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dōryō toka amari shitashikunai no yūjin kara pātī ni shōtai sa rete ite, ikitaku nai baai, nanto itte kotowarimasu ka.</td>
<td>2. You are invited to a party by a colleague and you don't want to go. How do you refuse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anata no jōshi wa ofisu no zen'in ni shigoto no ato no hikkoshi o tetsudatte kureru yō ni tanonde ima su ga, sonohi wa anata no koibito to no jūyōna kinenbi ga arimasu. Ofisu no zen'in ga jōshi wo tetsuda u sōdesu. Nanto itte kotowarimasu ka.</td>
<td>3. Your boss is asking everyone in the office to help to move out after work. However, that day is an important anniversary with your boyfriend/girlfriend. Everyone in the office is helping the boss. How do you refuse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tokuni shitashikunai yūjin ga, haha ga jūbyō ni natta tame, bokoku ni kaeranakya ikemasen. Demo kono yūjin ni wa hikōki no chiketto wo kau okane ga naku anata ni genkin de 130 000-en wo kashite hoshī to tanomimasu. 130 000-en wa taikin'nanode kashitaku arimasen. Nanto itte kotowarimasu ka.</td>
<td>4. One of your not close friends has to go back to his home country because of his serious ill mom. However, this friend doesn’t have enough money to buy an airplane ticket and ask you to lend him/her 130,000 yen in cash. 130,000 yen it’s a huge sum and you don’t want to lend. How do you refuse?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview consisted total of 11 questions and it took approximately 40 minutes. All of the participants were interviewed individually. For some of the participants the answering questions was quite effortless, and they replied without any problems. However, a few of the interviewees struggled with their responses to some questions. Nevertheless, none of the participants refused to answer any of interview’s questions. Even if some of the questions were difficult, they still were able to provide the answer. Based on that, I could assume that the collected data are reliable.

5.1.3 Sampling of participants

As mentioned above, this study was conducted on 10 native Japanese participants, where five of them were men and five were women. The age of chosen participants was in the group between 18 to 30 years. At the time of interview all participants resided in Tokyo but they came originally from different cities in Japan. They also had a different academic background. In order to pro-
tect the identities of the participants, their real names were not displayed in this paper, but coded instead. The table 3 shows the personal characteristic and coded participant’s names.

**Table 3. Coding key and characteristics of participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male interviewee</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Chiba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Osaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Hyogo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Saitama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Kochi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female interviewee</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Hokkaido</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Akita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Kanagawa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Osaka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.1.4 Data analysis

The collected data were organized into group and categorized based on the classification of refusals conducted by Beebe (1990) (which was introduced in chapter 4) and based on strategies developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The categorized results of this study will help to compare the data (find differences and similarities in the answers). This will be discussed more in details in next sections.

### 5.1.5 Ethical concerns

For this study it was important to avoid violating the ethical issues, involved with conducting recorded interview among the participants. In order to do so, as mentioned earlier, the real names of the participants were coded, so the personal information, such as age and origin would not directly tie to their names. Also, any other information about their privacy was not included in this paper. The participants were also informed beforehand that the interviews would be conducted only by voice recording (without video) and it would be anonymous. Also, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from interview any time they felt uncomfortable.
5.2 Findings

The main research question for this paper is: “How Japanese people say ‘no’ without saying ‘no’?” In order to answer this question, in this section I will analyze and examine the data which were collected from the participants. This section includes two parts. In the first part I analyze the answers of the questions which were presented in table 1. In the second part of this section I analyze and discuss the refusal strategies from four different situations which were previously presented in table 2.

5.2.1 Interview’s open questions

At the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked seven open questions which were presented in table 1. I organized their answers into following groups: refusing a boss, refusing friends, feeling of being guilty/sorry. Also, I have examined their responses, using the Beebe’s classification of refusals (1990). All of the ten participants claimed that they have an experience of refusing someone in the past. Six of participants refused an invitation from a friend, three of interviewees refused an invitation from a boss and one refused an invitation from senpai (member of higher experience, senior).

Refusing a boss:

All of the three participants who had experience of refusing a boss, used refusal strategies, described in Beebe’s classification as ‘excuse, reason, explanation’. The examples of using this strategy are:

“I have an appointment and I can’t go.” - participant M5

“I don’t feel good, I can’t go.” - participant F5

Eight of the participants claimed that the person who is hardest to refuse is boss. However, two of the interviewees (F1 and M3) claimed that the hardest to refuse is senpai. Both of them were still university students and had no full-time working experience yet. Therefore, this might be the reason why they provided that answer. Participant M5 was the only one who claimed that the hardest to refuse is his private life partner and the boss. In general, however, all participants agreed that the person with a higher status in society is hardest to refuse. For example F2 claimed that:
“If it is a boss I have a feeling that I can’t refuse him or her and I have to accommodate his or her request, however if it’s a co-worker, he is just like me and I can be more direct because he will understand my feeling.”

F4 had also a similar point of view:

“Hardest to refuse is a boss, because he is not involved in your private life. Refusing a boss can make a bad atmosphere in a company. On the other hand, friends can understand your feelings.”

However, the participant M1 indicated that the way of refusing can vary depending on the topic. He claimed that:

“If there is a private invitation from a boss I can refuse, but if there is an invitation related to job, it’s hard to refuse.”

M5 also added that the way of refusing depends on the nature of the boss and his/her personality:

“I feel sorry when I have to refuse a boss, but it depends on the boss, because there are kind and strict bosses.”

In general, for many of the participants a boss’s request is difficult to refuse, especially if the request is related to the job. However, some of the interviewee claimed that it is not hard to refuse a boss if the request is about private matters.

**Refusing friends:**

Six of the participants, three males and three females, refused friends invitation in the past. All of the males expressed the refusal more directly, by using Beebe’s ‘non-performative statement’ as a strategy such as for example: “I can’t come” or “I am not coming.” Additionally, two of them used ‘excuse, reason, explanation’ as a strategy:

“I want to study today, and I don’t feel like drinking.” - M3
“I am not coming this time.” - M4
“I already have an appointment with a friend. I am sorry but I can’t go today.” - M2

On the other hand, the strategies used by the females were: ‘excuse, reason, explanation’, ‘promise of future acceptance’ and ‘statement of regret’. For example:

“I’m busy that day, let’s meet another day” - F3
“I am sorry, something came up today, Let’s do it next time” - F4
“I don’t feel good today” - F2

**Feeling of being guilty/sorry**
All of the participants claimed that they felt sorry and guilty when they had to refuse someone:

“I feel guilty when I have to refuse because the other person wants me to come but I don’t want to, and I feel sad and guilty because the other person is sad too.” - M5

M2 and F4 added:

“I feel bad because I’m thinking what the other person is thinking about this.” - M2

“In the Japanese company, for example, you have to obey your boss. We have this kind of culture. If I refuse an invitation, I will feel anxiety. I’m afraid that they might not invite me again.” - F4

F5 also agreed and had a similar point of view:

“When I refuse someone, I feel guilty. The relationship with the boss is important, especially for my future. If you don’t do it well now, you can have problems in the future.”

**5.2.2 Interviews with four refusal situations**
In this section I will analyze the collected statements used by interviewees as the responses to four different refusal situations (previously-presented in table 2). These statements documented
as refusal strategies will be classified based on the Beebe’s classification of refusals (1990) but also according to the Brown and Levinson’s negative and positive politeness strategies.

5.2.2.1 The first situation

The first situation is described as a situation where one has to refuse an invitation from a boss because one has already an appointment. In this scenario the status difference (i.e. boss-subordinate) is an issue.

Table 4. Refusal strategies in the first situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beebe’s strategies</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse, reason, explanation (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of regret (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise of future acceptance (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonperformative statement - negative willingness (direct strategy)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wish (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude/appreciation (adjuncts to refusals)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement (adjuncts to refusals)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 indicate that in the first situation all of the participants used ‘excuse, reason, explanation’ as a refusal strategy. Most of the interviewees were using Japanese words “yoteiga aru” which means “(I) have a plan” as an excuse why they cannot attend the meeting.

For example, F1 said:

*Kyō wa motomoto yotei ga haitte itanode(…)*

(I already have a plan for today, so…)
Some of the other participants used the word “important appointment” as an excuse. For example, M4 said:

Saki ni daijina yotei ga haitte itanode (…)
(I have already an important plan, so …)

Thus, it’s important to notice that none of the participants used only one refusal strategy, but rather a combination of three or four strategies in one sentence. Seven out of ten participants used the ‘statement of regret’ as a refusal strategy. The most common phrases which were used at the beginning of the sentences were apologies as the followings:

Hontō ni mōshiwakenai ndesuga, (I am really sorry..)
Sumimasen, (I’m sorry)
Gomennasai (I’m sorry)

For example, interviewees F2 said:

Sumimasen, mōshiwakenai nodesuga, hontō ikitai ndesuga, kyō wa daijina yotei ga aru tame, kyō wa chotto ikemasen.
(I’m sorry, I am really sorry. I really want to go, but I can't go there today because I have an important plan today.)

Additionally, 7 out of 10 interviewees used ‘promise of future acceptance’ as a strategy by promising a future meeting instead. This strategy is underlined.

Hontō ni mōshiwakenai ndesuga, kyō wa daijina yōji ga aru node, matakondo zehi one-gaishimasu.
(I’m really sorry, I have an important business today, but please ask me again.) - F3

Half of the participants used also the direct ‘Nonperformatve statement’ (direct strategy of saying I can’t) such as for example:
Sumimasen, chotto tomodachi to yotei ga aru node, ikenaidesu.
(I’m sorry, I can't go because I have some plans with friends.) - M5

The least popular strategies (offered by 20% of participants) were: ‘wish, gratitude/appreciation’ and ‘statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement’. For example:

*Osasoi arigatōgozaimasu.* (Thank you for the invitation.) - F4
*Nomi ni sasotte itadaite, arigatōgozaimasu.* (Thank you for inviting me to go out and drink.) - M2

All of the participants used the honorific forms and polite forms such as *masu*-forms. This is of course expected since one is talking to one’s boss.

### 5.2.2.2 The second situation

The second situation is a scenario where one has to refuse an invitation to a party, proposed by a colleague or not-so-close friend, because one does not want to accept an invitation. In this scenario, there is no status difference between the interlocutors.

**Table 5. Refusal strategies in the second situation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beebe’s strategy:</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse, reason, explanation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(indirect strategy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of regret (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonperformative statement - negative willingness (direct strategy)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise of future acceptance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(indirect strategy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second situation of refusing colleague’s invitation as shown in table 5, all of the participants used also ‘excuse, reason, explanation’ as a refusal strategy such as:
Gomen, mō yotei ga haitte, ikennai.
(I’m sorry I can't go because I already have a plan.) - M5

8 out of 10 interviewees apologized by not being able to go to the party such as :

Gomen'nasai, kyō wa chotto mo yotei ga haitterunode (…)
(I’m sorry, I have already a plan for today…) - M1

6 of the interviewees used also ‘nonperformative statement’ as a strategy. For example:

Gomen ne, sonohi yotei arukara, ikennai.
(I’m sorry, I can't go because I have a plan for that day.) - F5

4 of the interviewees used the ‘promise of future acceptance’ as a strategy. For example:

Gomen'nasai, kyō wa chotto mo yotei ga haitterunode, mata kikai ga areba, sasotte kudasai.
(I’m sorry, I have already a plan for today, but please invite me if you have the opportunity again.) - M1

In the second situation almost all participants used short-form verbs without any honorific forms, except participant F3 who used a very polite expression such as: Mōshiwakearimasen (I am sorry). This was expected since a conversation was between colleagues or a not-so-close friend.

5.2.2.3 The third situation

The third situation is where one is asked by a boss to help him or her with moving, but one has an important appointment at the same time. Again, the status difference is an issue.
Table 6. Refusal strategies in the third situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beebe’s strategy:</th>
<th>3. situation - participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse, reason, explanation (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of regret (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonperformative statement - negative willingness (direct strategy)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise of future acceptance (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wish (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the third situation, as it’s shown in table 6 all of the interviewees used the ‘excuse, reason, explanation’ as a refusal strategy. Nine of the participants used ‘statement of regret’ as a strategy. The relative power between the boss and employee can explain, why 90 % of participants felt obligated to choose statement of regret as a strategy in this situation, compared to 70% and 80% in the first and second situation. ‘Non performative statement’ (e.g. I can’t) constitutes 70% . For example:

*Sumimasen, kanojo to no kinenbi ga atte, ikenaidesu.*
(I'm sorry, I have an anniversary with my girlfriend, so I can't go.) - M5

However, ‘promise of future acceptance’ constitute 30% and ‘wish’ constitute only 20%. This is understandable since moving to a new house or apartment does not occur very often. The following is one of the participants who nevertheless choose ‘promise of future acceptance’ as a strategy:

*Kyō wa kanojo to tsukiatte san-nen no kinenbinanode, totemo mōshiwakenaidesuga, hikkoshi no tetsudai wa dekimasen. Mata nani ka tetsuaderu kikai ga attara, sonotoki wa tetsudaitaidesu.*
(I’m sorry to say that I cannot help you with moving since this is my 3rd year anniversary since I dated my partner. If I have another chance to help, then I would like to help.) - M3
5.2.2.4 The fourth situation

The fourth strategy is about lending a money, where one is asked by his/her not-so-close friend to lend him/her 130 000yen, which is a huge amount of money and he/she therefore does not want to lend that much even though it is an emergency situation. In this scenario, there is no status differences between the interlocutors, but the degree of imposition is high.

Table 7. Refusal strategies in fourth situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beebe’s strategy:</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse, reason, explanation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(indirect strategy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonperformative statement -</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative willingness (direct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of alternative</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(indirect strategy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of regret (indirect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of empathy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(adjuncts to refusals)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise of future acceptance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(indirect strategy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of positive opinion/</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feeling or agreement (adjuncts to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refusals)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the fourth situation as it’s shown in table 7, eight of interviewees used ‘excuse, reason, explanation’ as a refusal strategy. Six of participants used also non performative statement as a strategy. For example:

*Mōshiwakenai kedo, watashi wa okanegai kara, son'nani wa kasenai.*

(I’m sorry, but I can't lend you so much, because I don’t have money.) - F3

Statement of alternative and statement of regret constitute 40%. One of the examples of suggesting another alternative is as follows:
Chotto kongetsu okane naikara, chotto shika kasenai. *1 Man-en ka 2man'en gurainara kaseru yo.*
(I don’t have money this month, so I can’t lend you, but I could lend you 10,000 or 20,000 yen instead.) - M5

Furthermore, the ‘*statement of empathy*’ constitute 30%. For example:

*Okāsan ga taihen'na no wa wakaru keredomo, 130000-en wa watashi ni totte, takaishi, watashi mo ima motteinai kara kasemasen. Gomen.*
(I understand that situation with your mom is tough, but 130 000 yen is too much for me and I can’t lend it because I don't have it now either. I’m sorry.) - F2

The ‘*statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement*’ and ‘*promise of future acceptance*’ constituted 10%. For example:

*Okāsan no byōki de,-kuni ni kaeranaito ikenai no sugoi wakarushi, tetsudaitai kimochi mo sugoi aru ndakedo, chotto watashi ni mō okane no wa soko made naikara, chotto 130000-en kasu no wa muzukashī ndakedo, mōshi hoka ni onegai koto de, tetsudaeru koto attara, itte ne.*
(I understand that you have to go back to your country because of your mother's illness, and I really want to help you, but it's difficult for me to lend 130 000 yen because I don’t have enough money. If you have any other requests for help, please let me know.) - F4

‘*Statement of regret*’ constituted only 40% in this situation. For example:

*Mōshiwakenai kedo, chotto jibun mo gakuseinanode, okane mo nainode, tasukete agetai kimochi ga arukedomo, chotto sono 130000 wa o kasu koto wa chotto boku karawa muzukashī nā to omou. Sumimasen.*
(I’m so sorry, I'm a student so I don't have money. I would like to help you, but I think it's a bit difficult for me to lend 130,000 yen. Excuse me.)

The factors such as lack of a relative power might be the reason why there was a lower number of participants who choose this strategy in this situation. Additionally, many of the interviewees
claimed that it was inappropriate to ask for such a huge amount of money as 130 000yen. Therefore, this might be the reason, why they didn’t have the need to apologize as in the previous situation. Also, just as in the second situation, mostly short-forms were used without any honorific verbs since, both of them are friends though not-so-close friends.

The following table 8 shows the sums of all the strategies in the four situations.

Table 8. Overview of all four situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beebe’s strategy:</th>
<th>Situation 1 From boss</th>
<th>Situation 2 From a colleague</th>
<th>Situation 3 From boss</th>
<th>Situation 4 From a not-so-close friend</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse, reason, explanation (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of regret (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonperformative statement - negative willingness (direct strategy)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise of future acceptance (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of alternative (indirect strategy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wish (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement (adjuncts to refusals)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of empathy (adjuncts to refusals)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude/appreciation (adjuncts to refusals)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, in all four situations as presented in table 8, the most used strategy was ‘excuse, reason, explanation’, which constituted 95% of the cases. Furthermore, the ‘statement of regret’ was also commonly used and constituted 70% of cases. An interesting point is that more strategies are used
with a boss or a not-so-close friend (situation 1 and 4) while only 4 strategies are used for a colleague (situation 2).

The refusal strategies which were used in all four situations based on Brown and Levinson’s theory of positive and negative politeness are presented in table 9.

Table 9. Refusal strategies in all situations based on Brown and Levinson’s positive and negative politeness strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory</th>
<th>In total - all four situations 71 answers</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEGATIVE POLITENESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apologizing:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- admitting the impingement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- indicating reluctance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- giving overwhelming reason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- begging forgiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimizing the imposition</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POSITIVE POLITENESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering and Promising (for example promise of future acceptance)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding Disagreement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all four situations, the negative politeness strategies were used 55 times out of 71 answers, which constitute 77.5% in total. Among that there were 38 cases where ‘apologizing’ was used. ‘Minimizing the imposition’ strategy such as frequently used word “chotto” were used 17 times which constitute 42.5%. On the other hand, the positive politeness strategies were used only 16 times which constitute 22.5% of all the cases. Among that ‘offering and promising’ strategy such as suggesting an alternative option were used 15 times.

4 This could be not because of the relationship but because of the degree of imposition. Lending 130.000 yen is a difficult task for any young person. For this reason the interviewees may have used many strategies to avoid the request.
For example:

Chotto kongetsu okane naikara, chotto shika kasenai. 1 Man-en ka 2man'en gurainara kaseru yo.

(I don’t have money this month, so I can’t lend you. But I can lend you 10,000 or 20,000 yen.) - M5

However, the strategy of avoiding disagreement such as white lies as excuses was used only once by one of the interviewees. There were no examples on off record strategies such as, giving hints and clues or being vague.

The table 10 illustrates the results referred to the situation number 1 and 3 (refusing a boss) and situation number 2 and 4 (refusing a not-close friend/colleague) in order to see if there were any differences in strategies, specifically when there is a status difference.

Table 10. Comparing situation 1/3 and 2/4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beebe’s strategy:</th>
<th>Situation 1 and 3 (Refusing a boss)</th>
<th>Situation 2 and 4 (Refusing a not-so close friend, colleague)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuse, reason, explanation (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of regret (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonperformative statement - negative willingness (direct strategy)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise of future acceptance (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wish (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement (adjuncts to refusals)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude/appreciation (adjuncts to refusals)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of alternative (indirect strategy)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of empathy (adjuncts to refusals)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The excuse, reason, explanation strategy has been used 20 times in situation 1 and 3 and 18 times in the situation 2 and 4. Statement of regret was also used slightly more frequently than in the situation 2 and 4. However, the Non-performative statements were used 12 times in both situation 1 and 3 and 2 and 4. The promise of future acceptance was used almost twice more in situation refusing a boss than in the situation “refusing a not-so-close friend/colleague”. This might be because in Japanese social hierarchy the power distance between employee and the boss is much higher than the distance between a not-so close friend or a colleague. Therefore more of the participants felt obligated to offer a promise of help to the boss in the future.

Furthermore, the wish strategy (such as for example: “I wish I could help you”) was used four times in situation 1 and 3, but it was not present in the situations of refusing a not-so close friend/colleague in situation 2 and 4. This again might also suggest that more of the interviewees feel obligated to express their willingness of help in front of the boss rather than in front of their not-so close friends or colleagues.

Statement of positive opinion strategy was used two times in the situation 1 and 3 and only one time in the situation 2 and 4. Additionally, the gratitude/appreciation strategy was used two times in the situation of refusing a boss but not used at all in the situation of refusing a colleague. The statement of alternative strategy was only used in the situation 2 and 4. Finally, the statement of empathy strategy was used three times in the situation of refusing a non-close friend and colleague and was not used in the situation of refusing a boss.

Therefore when refusing a boss, Japanese seem to use more of Excuse, reason, explanation, Statement of regret, and Promise of future acceptance. On the other hand, when refusing a colleague/not-so-close friend, Statement of alternative and Statement of Empathy are used more.

5.3 Discussion

In the following discussion, I intended to find an answer for my two major research questions;

1. Which refusal strategies do the Japanese use in refusal?
2. Are strategies different in different situations?

The result of the study showed that there were small differences in using polite strategies between situations of refusing a boss and situations of refusing a not-close friend or colleague. For example, the statement of regret strategy was used slightly more frequently in the situation of refusing a boss than in the situation of refusing a colleague. Another strategy which was almost used twice as many
in the situation of refusing a boss, was the *promise of future acceptance*. Additionally, in the first and third situation where interviewee was supposed to refuse a boss invitation or request, the participants felt obligated to use very well-mannered expressions in order to be more polite. For example, Situation 1:

*Hontōni mōshiwakenai ndesuga, kyō wa daijina yōji ga aru node, matakondo zehi one-gaishimasu.*

(I’m really sorry, but I have an important appointment today, but please ask me again another time.) - F3

However, in the second and fourth situations where the participant was refusing a not-so-close friend or a colleague, short forms were preferred. For example,

*Gomen ne, sonohi yotei arukara, ikenai.*

(I’m sorry, I can't go because I have plans for that day.) - F5

Furthermore, the study has also shown that in all of the situations, the participants tend to use negative politeness strategies more frequently than positive politeness strategies. This has been shown in the table 9 in the previous section. This result can suggest that the negative politeness strategies seem to be preferred in the case of refusals in Japan. However, this study has been conducted only on the limited number of people. Therefore the result cannot be generalized for a larger population in Japan.

The results are also consistent with the study of Takahashi&Beebe (1987) who claimed that there is a difference in utterance between Japanese and Americans. As mentioned before, they found that Japanese had a tendency to use the negative strategy of apology and stating an excuse and that the strategy of expressing positive opinion was rarely used by them. My findings show that ‘*statement of regret*’ was used as a strategy in 70% of cases. On the other hand, ‘*the statement of positive opinion*’ constituted only 12,5% in all of the cases.

My findings however, contradicts with the study proposed by Lakoff (2004), that women tend to apologize more than men. According to my results, there was not a significant difference between men and women when it comes to apologizing. In total, there were 14 cases where men used the apology as a strategy, while there were 15 cases where women used the apology as a strategy in all four situations. This result is shown in table 11.
The limitation of my study is the small number of interviewed participants. The differences in their responses might be also influenced by interviewees personality or background etc. Another limitation is that this study was conducted only among young people in the age range between 18-30. In order to get a wider perspective and avoid possible idiosyncrasy, it would be important to include other age groups. Future study should also consider the larger number of samples, in order to understand better the refusal strategies among Japanese people.

Another limitation is that it was not possible to investigate all possible situations. As mentioned in chapter 4, there were at least three factors that can influence refusal strategies: 1) social distance, 2) relative power, and 3) rank of imposition. Thus, ideally, all possible situations in which these variables differ must be tested. However, due to the time and cost limitation of the interviews in Tokyo, I was able to test only four situations.

The third limitation is that the presented four situations are fictional situations, and the data which was collected in this study revealed not the actual real conversations. Based on this, it is hard to make a conclusion on, what exactly the participants would answer in the actual situations. In the real situation, especially when refusing a boss, the participants could feel more nervous, and the answers could be slightly different than the one which was presented in this study. In most of the cases the participants would probably refuse an invitation by using omission/ellipsis (e.g. yotei ga aru no desuga…) or using other expressions such as muzukashii (It is difficult) instead of using the non-performative statements (“I can’t come”). In this study 14% used omission/ellipsis and 10% used phrases such as muzukashii. However, in real refusal situations, more people would use omission/ellipsis strategy. This is because the interviewees would try to be polite especially in soto-communication by avoiding the direct non-performative forms such as for example “I can’t.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Situation 1</td>
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6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out how Japanese people say no without directly saying no in different situations and towards different interlocutors. The research questions to attain this purpose was:

1) Which refusal strategies do Japanese use in refusal?
2) Are strategies different in different situations?

In order to find answers to these questions, I conducted interviews with 10 Japanese speakers in Tokyo and presented four different fictive situations. I used a qualitative interview for this study in order to let the participants express more freely than for example answering a questionnaire. The participants were interviewed individually.

In Chapter 2, I presented the cultural background in Japan. I explained the basic concept of uchi and soto in Japanese culture where in uchi-communication the individuals tend to speak more frankly and directly, however, in soto-communication the communication style tends to be more indirect. I described also the difference between honne and tatemae by explaining that honne is what people really want to say honestly and tatemae is opinions socially expected when addressing out-group people. Furthermore, I discussed the hierarchy and power distance where I point out that Japan is a high-power society. This means that the power distance exists among superiors and subordinates, and among parents and children. I explained also how the notion of high-context culture may clarify why Japanese people prefer the indirect communication style. Moreover, I explained the difference between do-language and become-language. Japanese is a become-language and prefers to describe event by saying that something happens spontaneously rather than the agent does something. This is a way of showing politeness in Japanese by not connect the responsibility of an event to the agent. All these concepts are presented in order to explicate that Japanese people prefer an indirect communication style.

In the theoretical part of this thesis in Chapter 3, I introduced the general politeness theories presented by Brown and Levinson, Lakoff, Tannen, and Haugh. This is because the reason for the Japanese to avoid saying no directly is due to politeness. Brown and Levinson defined politeness as a system which is made in order to soft the face-threatening acts. Lakoff established the “Politeness Principles”: ‘don’t impose’, ‘give options’ and ‘make audience feel good’ and concluded that these rules are established in order to reduce the friction in communication. Haugh claims that indirect-
ness and vagueness are prime strategies for politeness. Additionally, I also introduced politeness
strategies in Japanese in addition to the mechanism behind the honorific verbs such as *o-V-naru* and
*V-rareru*. This is how the intransitive verbs are created from transitive verbs and express the event
as ‘something happens spontaneously’. Avoiding reference to the agency of a person is a less direct
and therefore more polite way of referring to the actions of that person. I explained also two other
strategies which are specific for Japanese: omission and ellipsis and vagueness to make expressions
more milder, indirect, and therefore more polite. Thus the fact that the Japanese want to avoid say-
ing no directly in refusals is naturally expected.

In Chapter 4, I introduced the refusal strategies presented by Beebe and Brown and Levin-
son. I described Beebe’s refusal strategy classifications which are: ‘direct’, ‘indirect’, and ‘adjuncts
to refusals’. These are used to analyze the findings of my interviews. Furthermore, I explained
Brown and Levinson’s positive and negative politeness strategies in refusals, which I also used for
the analysis of my findings. Comparative studies of American refusal strategies and Japanese
strategies are also touched upon, and these studies show that American and Japanese often use dif-
ferent refusal strategies.

In Chapter 5, I presented the results of my interview of Japanese speakers and the analysis of
the refusals in terms of refusal strategies by Beebe and Brown and Levinson. The participants were
asked to refuse four imaginary situations. The first and third included a refusal to a boss and the
second and fourth included a refusal to a colleague or a not-so-close friend. I found some differ-
ences in refusal strategies between variety situations. In the situation of refusing a boss the *state-
ment of regret* strategy was used more frequently than in the situation of refusing a colleague. Addi-
tionally, the *promise of future acceptance* strategy was used almost two times more often in the si-
tuation of refusing a boss than refusing a colleague. Despite these differences, in general, my find-
ings show that the Japanese participants tend to use mostly *excuse, reason, explanation* and *state-
ment of regret* as a strategy. These results were consistent with the study of Takahashi&Beebe who
claimed that the Japanese had a tendency to use *statement of regret* strategies. Furthermore, the
*statement of positive opinion* was rarely expressed, contrary to the Americans.

The limitation of the study however was firstly the small number of the participants who
were interviewed. In order to understand better the refusal strategies among Japanese people, fur-
ther study will be needed in other age groups and conducted on the larger population. Another set-
back was the fact that I could not present (due to the time and economic limitations) many different
situations to the interviewees in terms of social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition.
The last shortcoming of this study is that the situations presented were not authentic but fictional. It is possible that Japanese in real refusal situations may use the strategy of omission and ellipsis or using other expressions such as *muzukashii* (*It is difficult*) instead of using the non-performative statements (e.g. *I can’t come*) more frequently than my findings show.

It is therefore difficult to make a definite conclusion on which refusal strategies the participants would have used in the actual situations. For this reason, it is not appropriate to generalize my findings to a wider population in Japan. Nevertheless, my findings could confirm in large part the results of Takahashi and Beebe. I thus hope that this research can contribute to the study of refusals and politeness in Japanese.
Bibliography


Hayashi shin'ichi. (2014). 'Shōryaku suru bunka' to 'meiji suru bunka': Nihon jijō-ron to shite no kōsatsu. Yamaguchidaigaku bungaku-kai kokorozashi, 64, 123 - 136


## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interviewee’s code

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Appendix 2. Interview guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tsugi no yōna jōkyō de dono yō ni sasoi wo kotowarimasu ka?</th>
<th>How do you refuse an invitation in the following situations?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Atarashī kaisha ni nyūsha shita bakari de, shigoto no ato, jōshi ni nomini sasowareta ga, yūjin to no jūyōna yotei ga sudeni arukara sasoi wo kotowaranakereba ikemasen. Nanto īmasu ka.</td>
<td>1. You just joined a new company and after work, your boss invited you to drink. You have to refuse the invitation because you already have an important plan with your close friend. What do you say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dōryō toka amari shitashikunai no yūjin kara pātī ni shōtai sa rete ite, ikitaku nai baai, nanto itte kotowarimasu ka.</td>
<td>2. You are invited to a party by a colleague and you don't want to go. How do you refuse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anata no jōshi wa ofīsu no zen'in ni shigoto no ato no hikkoshi o tetsudatte kureru yō ni tanonde ima su ga, sonohi wa anata no koibito to no jūyōna kinenbi ga arimasu. Ofīsu no zen'in ga jōshi wo tetsuda u sōdesu. Nanto itte kotowarimasu ka.</td>
<td>3. Your boss is asking everyone in the office to help to move out after work. However, that day is an important anniversary with your boyfriend/girlfriend. Everyone in the office is helping the boss. How do you refuse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tokuni shitashikunai yūjin ga, haha ga jūbyō ni natta tame, bokoku ni kaeranakya ikemasen. Demo kono yūjin ni wa hikōki no chiketto wo kau okane ga naku anata ni genkin de 130 000-en wo kashite hoshī to tanomimasu. 130 000-en wa taikin'nanode kashitaku arimasu. Nanto itte kotowarimasu ka.</td>
<td>4. One of your not close friends has to go back to his home country because of his serious ill mom. However, this friend doesn’t have enough money to buy an airplane ticket and ask you to lend him/her 130,000 yen in cash. 130, 000 yen it’s a huge sum and you don’t want to lend. How do you refuse?</td>
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