

# A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF REFUSAL STRATEGIES IN YORÙBÁ CULTURE

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## Abstract

This study examines the sociolinguistic analysis of refusal strategies among the native speakers of Yorùbá. Refusal verbal acts portend failing to engage in the actions proposed by the speaker in a discussion, which could be an assistance, advice, gift, attending ceremonies among others. These strategies have both linguistic and cultural colourations and they linger between ancient and modern societies. This simply shows refusal strategies among the Yoruba people have evolved through generations. Thus, some borrowed cultures have been directly incorporated and integrated into the refusal acts through modernisation. Contextually, refusal strategies mediate between high-context culture and low-context culture. The data in this study were drawn from recorded utterances of some Yorùbá language speakers and Yorùbá films. Our analysis is predicated on the Dell Hymes (1972) *Ethnography of Communication*. Findings in this research reveal that the Yorùbá culture permits indirect refusal more than the direct ones. As a result, refusal demands courtesy and mutual respect. It is also noted in the study that direct refusal is a product of a borrowed culture and it is demonstrated that friendship or cordiality and equal or low status can influence the use of direct refusal. The study further establishes that indirect refusal can be used to show home training, courtesy to culture and avoidance of danger. This study contributes to the existing studies on the use of politeness principle on language verbal behaviour.

**Keywords:** *Refusal strategy, Yoruba culture, politeness theory, high- context culture, low-context culture.*

## I INTRODUCTION

Refusal is an act whereby a speaker refuses to engage in an action proposed by an interlocutor (Cheng, Ye & Zhang, 1995). Refusals can be direct or indirect, and they have a direct link with the people's culture, social life and their environments. Culture as a way of the people normally shapes their worldview and influences their reactions to issues in different context. Direct refusal entails conveying refusal message without any form of courtesy. This impolite refusal is directly linked to low-context culture where emphasis is placed solely on the content of the verbal message where the information is conveyed explicitly through words (Tak & Lyuh, 2024). Low-context culture is a linguistic and/or cultural setting where courtesy and politeness are not prioritised, words are used directly the way they occur and how they occur to the users in such settings. In low- context culture, indirect refusal may presuppose deceit and lack of trust, thus, issues are reported exactly the way they occur irrespective of the individuals involved. Falola (2018) asserts that colonial experience transformed African culture to the extent that many African became stranger to the tradition of old, suffering alienation in the process. In Yorùbá settings, low-context culture presupposes modernity and changes in the style of language use by the younger generation who lingers between foreign and indigenous cultures. Obono (2016) notes that in Yorùbá society, individual behaviour is guided by Yorùbá culture be it tangible or intangible, however, the intangible aspect brings out individual a perfect gentleman usually referred to as an *Omolúàbí*. Thus, in the Yorùbá culture direct refusal for elderly person is highly prohibited because it is believed that “*Ojú méjì ló ń bímọ̀ igba ojú ló ń wòó*” this literally means that a child is born by one woman but the training of the child is the ultimate duty of the entire community. Thus, every child belongs to the society or community irrespective of the parents but modern culture has erased this notion to a large extent, as a result, the culture of communal living has generally been affected and individualism has been embraced. Thus, direct refusal between a young person and an elder is noticeable in the modern era unlike the ancient period where excuses were not permitted for errands no matter the situation. Moreover, the alien culture which has been directly incorporated into Yoruba settings through western education has reduced respect on the account of advancement in age. In fact, there are cases where an uneducated elderly person works as a subordinate to a younger person, and the younger person addresses him with his name irrespective of the age.

Indirect refusal is a polite way of refusing to engage in an action. This is common in high-context culture where environment and context determine what should be said; thus, unspoken elements are more important than the verbal communication (Tak & Lyuh, 2024). In high-context culture, politeness and courtesy are emphasised based on cultural norms, societal patterning and hierarchical settings. The high-context culture in Yoruba settings is the ancient culture which has been passed down. In this

context, hierarchy is prioritised and courtesy flows based on set rules in the environment. In this context, apart from verbal expressions, courtesies such as prostration and kneeling are also used to show politeness and respect. It must be noted that both direct and indirect refusals are used in responding to offer. However, the culture and environment of the interlocutors will determine their choice of response.

Refusal verbal act is generally an undesired response from an interlocutor and it is capable of damaging the interpersonal relationship and societal peace if not well managed. To avoid social disorder that may likely emanate from an undesired response of refusal, the Yorùbá imbue dynamism in their use of language to prevent communication breakdown and misconceptions. As a consequence, people of different classes, status and prestige are addressed according to their status. Thus, in the day-to-day activities of Yorùbá social interactions, attention is given to high, equal and low status in response to issues.

There are instances or circumstances that demand courtesy irrespective of the person being addressed, one of such instances is refusal of gift, food or assistance from strangers, friends, family members and acquaintances. Refusal verbal acts in the Yorùbá culture are devoid of derogatory remarks in order to prevent grudges, enmity and malice. Thus, the speech act of offer and its refusal are managed with courtesy and mutual respect. According to Tak & Lyuh (2024) refusal requires a considerable degree of culture-specific knowledge and high level of pragmatic competence to maintain interpersonal relationship and social harmony. The import of this statement is that each language sets parameters for its usage within its culture, and the linguistic permissible conventions differ from one language setting to another. In the Yorùbá setting, the general norm is that acceptance and refusal are handled with courteous phrases to ensure peace, harmony and benevolence in the society. Thus, the indirect refusal approach is mostly adopted. However, modernity, cordial relationship and friendship have introduced a slight violation to the idea of indirect refusal approach.

### **1.1 ROLE RELATIONSHIP AMONG YORÙBÁ PEOPLE**

Yorùbá social setting is hierarchical in nature. The setting places a high premium on three things among others in their social and communal relationships. They are high, equal and low status. These three statuses play paramount role in the day -to-day activities or interaction among the Yorùbá people. First, people of the high status are opinion leaders, the elderly, kings or chiefs, wealthy persons, bosses at work, pastors, imams, priests, government representatives and so on. Apart from the elderly that are respected on account of age, all other people that belong to high status are respected based on their positions and attainments in life. Age has nothing to do in conferment of honour on these people (Fadipe 1970). For instance, a younger person that is enthroned as king automatically becomes the father of everybody in the community irrespective of their age. Moreover, a cleric in a congregation irrespective of age will be seen as the spiritual father of their group. In the Yorùbá cultural settings, the tone of discussion with elderly people, kings or chiefs, wealthy persons, bosses at work, pastors, imams, priests, government representatives are always respectful and formal, and the refusal pattern for this set of people is indirect. Moreover, there are ethical codes of discussion and gesture that one needs to exhibit in conversation with people who belong to this category. Secondly, people of equal status are usually age mates, classmates, colleagues of equal rank at work places. The tone of discussion among these calibres of people is normally cordial and it does not show any form respect or formality (Abiodun 1992). As a result, refusal may take indirect or direct approach based on the level of cordiality and closeness between them or because of the embraced foreign culture. The indirect refusal is a good choice for people of equal status who are not friends to avoid malice. However, direct refusal is used for people of equal rank who are friends because of their cordial relationship or modern world view. Finally, people of low status are people that are lower in age, or subordinates at work. The tone of discussion with people of low rank is always direct. The refusal strategy used for this set of people is direct because of their status.

## **II MATERIALS AND METHOD**

### **2.1 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON REFUSAL STRATEGY**

Some scholars have worked on verbal refusal strategy in many languages of the world. The scholars include Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz (1990), Allami & Naeimi (2011), Al-Shboul & Huwari (2016), Krulatz & Dixon (2020), and Tak & Lyuh (2024). For instance, Beebe et al. (1990) note that Japanese prefer the indirect refusal strategy in order to foster and maintain cordial relationships in their society. They explain further that deploying an indirect refusal strategy in American society will

lead to a pragmatic failure where the interlocutor will be presumed not to be speaking the truth. A similar situation is reported in Guo (2012); the study emphasizes that Chinese speakers deployed an indirect refusal strategy to soften the effect of the refusal to preserve face and avoid embarrassing the interlocutor. However, the scenario is different among Americans, as they prefer direct refusal. Allami and Naemi (2011) and Hassan et al. (2011) explain that to the Iranian native speakers, the social status of the interlocutor, such as high, equal, and low, is a critical factor, as it determines the refusal strategy to be used. Thus, they prefer to deploy more indirect refusal with high-status interlocutors when they refused. Krulatz and Dixon (2020) report that both Korean and Norwegian employed more indirect refusal strategies than the direct one. They explain further that Korean speaker deployed more indirect refusal than the Norwegians, while the Norwegians used more direct strategies than the Koreans. Tak and Lyuh (2024) examine refusal strategy in two constructed languages, Esperanto and Unish. They claim that the refusal strategies in the two constructed languages are similar to that of natural languages. They note that indirect refusal is used more frequently than the direct one. The study shows that Esperanto interlocutors use more direct strategies than Unish interlocutors, showing the low-context nature of Esperanto culture and the common value shared by its speakers.

Ikotun (2011) examines sociolinguistic criteria guiding invitation to meals among the Yoruba of south-western, Nigeria. He discusses rejection/ acceptance of meals and noted among other things that age, social status, politeness, familiarity, kinship, and love are considered in invitation to meals; and rejection and response to meals. He explains the ethical codes of rejection between young and old people, and claims some verbal rejection utterances have age restrictions, and notes further that some non-linguistic factors can lead to food rejection an instance is the use of left hand or single hand to present food to an elderly person. He also claims that in polygamous settings rejection of meal is caused by instructions/warnings given to children by their mothers not to take food from co-wives to prevent food poisoning. Note that Ikotun's (2011) study dwells on rejection and response to meal offer. This present study has a wider scope beyond this, as it looks at other scenarios of refusal strategy in Yoruba social interactions. Having examined the various refusal strategies in related works, the remaining part of this work is devoted to the examination of refusal strategies among the Yoruba.

## **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Ethnography of communication was advanced by Dell Hymes (1972). The theory lends credence to communicative competence of the native speaker of language in relation to his/her language, that is, the conventional rules guiding the use of linguistic utterance. The communicative competence as stipulated by the theory entails the requisite knowledge which includes not only rules for communication and shared rules for interaction but also the cultural rules and knowledge that are the basis for context and content of communicative events and interaction process (Savile-Troike, 1989). Thus, communicative competence guides the speakers on the understanding of what to say, when to say it, how to say it, and where to say it. This portends that linguistic competence is not enough but the understanding of the socio-cultural norms and ethics of communication within the ambit of culture rules and the culturally shared knowledge as the basis for effective communication process in the society. Saville- Troike (1989:15) states that many of the functions of language are universal but the manner in which communication operates in languages or society differs. The immediate or context of situation is the specific circumstance in which communication occurs in relation to time, place, events and other conditions. The components of situation by Dell Hymes (1972) include: setting/scene, participants, ends, act/sequence, key, instrumentalities, norm and genre. These components determine context of situation and the way utterances are used in conversation.

## **2.3 METHODOLOGY**

The data used in this study were collected from eight (8) informants who are native speakers of Yorùbá from Òşogbo, Ìbàdàn, Òyó, and Ògbómòşò. The selection of eight informants allows for detailed observation and analysis of authentic Yorùbá interactional data while ensuring manageability in transcription, coding, and pragmatic interpretation. This sample size is adequate for identifying recurrent patterns of refusal strategies across different social contexts, such as age, status, familiarity, and communicative setting. The towns selected are representative of the Yoruba people of southwest Nigeria, given their shared language and cultural values and heritage. The informants were purposively selected based on their extensive knowledge of Yoruba language and culture. They were drawn from high, middle and low status groups. The ages of the language helpers range from 40-60 years. The informants were pre-informed about the project but were recorded unaware. This was done so that the true speech act of the participants was not influenced. After the recording, (the utterances were recorded with my phone recorder) their utterances were replayed to the informant and they approved the use of

the content for this research. Home videos where refusal statements are made were also used as data. There were also recorded oral interviews conducted by the researcher where instances and validity of some refusal strategies were confirmed. The recorded utterances from both participants observation, utterances from Home videos and interview were subjected to pragmatic analysis.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the pragmatic acts of refusal strategies in Yoruba culture. Eight informants were purposively selected from four Yoruba towns: Òṣogbo, Ìbàdàn, Òyó, and Ògbómòṣò. Data gathered through participant observation and structured interviews were recorded in audio format. The recordings were transcribed and analysed using ethnography of communication theory to identify and interpret refusal strategies. Ethical approval was obtained, and the informant consent were duly sought.

Two research instruments were deployed in this study, namely observation checklist and interviews. The observation checklist involves the structured recording of the informant speech to capture their systematic use of language. Face to face interviews were also conducted to validate some of the responses and to obtain additional information from the informants

### III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the assembled data systematically based on their classification, feature and functions. Moreover, the following are also put into consideration: settings/scene, participants, ends, act/sequence, key, instrumentalities, norm and genre. Refusal speech acts basically indicate ways of denying to participate in the action stated by an interlocutor due to certain circumstances. In the next paragraphs the various refusal strategies among the Yoruba are examined.

#### 3.1 REFUSAL OF INVITATION TO CEREMONIES (SOCIAL EVENT, FUN OR CELEBRATION)

One key factor that causes students to lose focus and engage in off-task behaviors in Yorùbá settings, it is not all ceremonies (marriage, burial-outing, birthday) that one is allowed to attend from the cultural stand point. More so, financial or health challenges may prevent one from attending a party or social event. The example below depicts polite refusal for attending ceremonies.

Excerpt 1

A : Òrẹ mi, jẹ ká lọ sí òde àrìyá ‘My friend, let us go clubbing’

B: È maa ni sò maa ba yin ‘You can proceed, I will join you’

In the data above, the response in B literally suggests that something delayed the speaker that prevented him from catching up with other companions to the ceremonies they were invited to, but will join them there later. However, in the typical Yoruba setting, the statement in B is an indirect refusal that can only be deciphered through the shared mutual contextual knowledge of the participants in the context of the discussion. The statement in B, is laced with meaning beyond the surface meaning, it can only be understood by the people who share contextual knowledge of the situation preceding the utterance. This statement is a kind of face-saving approach; it is used to depict a positive public self-image for the speaker and sustain continued interaction with his/her friends (see Levinson 1978 and Leech 1983). The speaker here is indirectly avoiding a negative public image from the peers as a result of the inability to attend the ceremony with them. Thus, the employment of the statement to avoid malice. In the Yoruba setting, friendship is not about age, rank, and status; there could be friends of equal age, rank, and status, while others could be older or have higher status. As a result, using direct refusal may convey affront and lack of mutual respect, if one is addressing a group of people. The Yoruba prefer the indirect approach such that explanations can be provided afterwards so that the friendship and cordiality among participants would not be severed or disrupted. The excerpt reflects a high context cultural setting in which refusal is conveyed indirectly and politely, prioritizing interpersonal relationship and social context over direct expression. Using Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: An informal social setting in which a friend invites another to a ceremony or social outing.

Participants: Friends who share mutual social and cultural understanding.

Ends: The inviter desires the participation and companionship of friends at the event.

Act Sequence: The invitation is presented as a polite request, while the response functions as an indirect refusal.

Key: The tone is casual and perfunctory due to the shared contextual knowledge between participants.

Instrumentalities: Communication occurs through spoken oral interaction.

Norms: Indirect refusal is employed as a face-saving strategy to sustain friendship and social harmony.

However, there are instances where direct refusal may be used. This violates the general principle but certain social factors are the determinants of this response. See the examples below:

Excerpt 2

A (i): Òjọ́ n ẹ̀ ọ̀kú iyá rẹ̀ lóla                    ‘Òjọ́ will be burying his mum tomorrow

A (ii): Ẹ̀ ọ̀ máá tẹ̀lé wa lọ ?                    ‘Will you follow us’ ?

A (iii) Ẹ̀ ẹ̀ máá tẹ̀lé wa lọ ?                    ‘Will you follow us’?

B: Rára o, mi ò lọ                    ‘No, I am not going’

Note that the use of o ‘you sg’ and ẹ̀ ‘you pl’ as shown in A(ii) & A(iii) play significant roles in Yoruba social interactions. O ‘you sg’ is used when a younger person or age mates are addressing each other while ẹ̀ ‘you pl’ is used when the addressee is older or have superior status. The excerpt above is a communication between two friends who are of the same age and status or an older individual who is superior. This is emphasised by the use of o ‘you sg’ and ẹ̀ ‘you pl’. The invitation statement in A(ii) clearly shows that the addressee and the addressed are of the same age or equal status. However, the invitation statement in A(iii) depicts that the person being addressed is older in age. Note that, the direct refusal observed in the conversation in B above is triggered by equal age and rank for A(ii) while is because of advanced age and superiority for A(iii). Moreover, the cordial relationship between people of the same age, rank and status can convert direct refusal to mere joke without any grave consequence of portraying the person involved in a bad light. It must be noted that jokes among friends is another way of making severe cases trivial by turning it to humour. However, the direct refusal to someone who is lower in age and prestige is triggered by superiority or advancement in age. The situation here portrays a low context culture in which refusal is expressed directly and this response is influenced by factors such as increased age and equal social status. Using Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: An informal social setting in which individuals are invited to attend a burial ceremony.

Participants: Friends or acquaintances of equal status, or individuals in a hierarchical age relationship.

Ends: The inviter seeks the participation of others in the social event.

Act Sequence: The invitation is presented politely, followed by a direct refusal.

Key: The tone of the interaction is casual and perfunctory because of the shared understanding between participants.

Instrumentalities: The interaction occurs through spoken oral communication.

Norms: Direct refusal is considered acceptable because of equal social status, intimacy, or superiority in age and rank.

### 3.2 REFUSAL OF INVITATION TO MEAL

There is a cultural obligation among the Yoruba that demands that anyone who meets a Yoruba person on a meal/or when they are about to start eating should be invited to join the meal. According to Ikotun (2011:21) it is customary in Yorùbá community to invite people while eating and failure to do so is a violation of an important social etiquette in the area of human relation or a violation of the formal rules of correct or polite behaviour in the Yorùbá society. Thus, the ancient Yorùbá people in their meal arrangements normally make food in excess in case strangers or visitors arrive during meals. The excerpt below depicts a typical invitation to meal and polite refusal in the Yorùbá settings.

Excerpt 3-1

A: Olú, mo ti se óúnjẹ tan                    ‘Olú, I am through with cooking’

B(i): Ẹ̀ jẹ́ kó ẹ̀ diẹ                    ‘Give me some times’

A: Ẹ̀ ọ̀ ọ̀ níí jẹun ni                    ‘Wont you eat’

B(ii): Mo fẹ́ jẹ́ ká parí ọ̀rọ̀ yí ni                    ‘I want us to be through with this discussion’

B(iii): Mámá, ẹ̀ má ẹ̀ iyọnu, mo gba                    ‘Mummy, don’t bother yourself, I just  
ipè kan bá yíí,                    received a call now

B(iv): Mámá ma jẹun lójọ́ miràn                    ‘I will eat when next I visited’

## Excerpt 3-2

A:	O bá mi ire	‘You meet me well’
B (i):	Á gba ibi ire	‘The food will take the right course’
B (ii):	Ọmọ á bá ẹ jẹ	‘Children will eat with you’
B(iii):	E/ O ẹun	‘Thank you’
B(iv):	Mo ti jẹun kí n tó máa bọ	‘I had eaten before I came to your house’
B (iv)	Mo ti yó	‘I am filled’

Excerpt 3-1 for instance, is a typical scenario of a groom who visited the mother-in-law's home for a purposeful discussion. He was invited to a meal but used the statement in B(i) as delay tactics. In the Yorùbá culture, refusal of food in the in-law's home is a sign of disrespect and lack of trust. Thus, to avoid this situation, he emphasised the importance of the discussion before them, and subsequently used the urgent call received that needed prompt attention as an excuse to indirectly refuse the meal he had been invited to earlier. As a thorough-bred Yorùbá son, he takes into consideration the energy used while cooking by informing the mother -in-law that he would eat when he visits them another time. This statement is used as an assurance of goodwill and strategy to sustain continued cordiality between them. In the circumstance above, direct refusal will have a grave consequence and it may disrupt the peace and cordiality between the two parties. Thus, the indirect refusal is preferred. It must be noted that if parties in the marriage are divorced, direct refusal has no effect because the relationship had been severed already. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: An invitation to a meal within an in-law's family setting.

Participants: The addresser and addressee are in-laws engaged in social interaction.

Ends: The host desires the in-law to partake in the meal as a sign of acceptance and cordiality.

Act Sequence: The invitation is expressed politely, while the refusal is communicated indirectly through excuses, delays, and assurances.

Key: The tone of the interaction is cordial and perfunctory because the participants share cultural and contextual knowledge.

Instrumentalities: Spoken oral communication is employed.

Norms: Indirect refusal is used to respect cultural expectations, preserve interpersonal harmony, and prevent suspicion or hostility.

The invitation in excerpt 3-2, may come from any Yorùbá person who understands the culture, as cultural norms make it obligatory to invite others to eat as a way of showing honour. It is typical among the Yoruba to invite anybody who encounters them while eating to come and dine with them. However, the person invited may decide to eat or refuse politely to avoid ill-will. Thus, in this instance, the polite phrases such as B (i), (ii) and (iii) are used to refuse the meal offer. Note that, in the Yorùbá culture age and class (high, low and equal) are taken into consideration in response to issues. B (i) will be a flawless response among contemporaries but sometimes an elderly person may use the phrase too. B(ii), is the more appropriate phrase used by an elderly person invited to meal by a younger person. B(iii) response can be used for an elderly person or a superior who has invited someone to meal.

From the two excerpts, it is discovered that Yorùbá verbal behaviour adequately captures the politeness definition of Lakoff (1990). The typical Yorùbá setting abhors confrontation, conflict and ill-will. Thus, any behaviour from the host or the stranger that can lead to conflict are avoided as much as possible.

The indirect refusal, as used in the excerpt above, can give room for further explanation. In Yoruba culture, saying thank you to gift, offer or assistance is very important, as it shows appreciation and respect for the individual's good will. Thus, phrases or words like E ẹ́ ‘thank you’ E ẹ́ gan-an ‘thank you very much’ and E ẹ́ gan-an ni mo dúpé ‘thank you very much I really appreciate are used to appreciate people for their kindness. For instance, having said ‘thank you’, just as in the examples 2B (i), (ii) and (iii), one can extrapolate that he has just eaten or my wife is preparing a meal at home when I was coming to your house. These statements will further strengthen the refusal because, the Yorùbá believe that you cannot eat when the belly is full ‘a kií jẹun lékè ayo’. Moreover, in the Yorùbá culture,

telling one's wife that he had eating outside is frowned at, so, my wife is cooking when I was coming is an ideal strategy for refusing invitation to meal. However, B(iv) which is direct refusal can be a response to friends of the same age or status. This response is premised on friendship and cordial relationship that exist between them. In other words, one cannot use the response for a stranger or acquaintance that one does not share cordial relationship with. Age and status may trigger direct refusal among the Yorùbá people. Inviting an elderly person to meal is a way of fulfilling the cultural norm. The elder may not condescend to eat such food. So, directly refusing such invitation to meal may not constitute any problem. The situations cited here are reflection of a high context culture, as they show respect for kind gestures regardless of age, status and class. Such goodwill must be acknowledged, and indirectly refusal is used to avoid acrimony or suspicion. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: An informal setting in which either a younger or older person is invited to partake in a meal.

Participants: The addresser and addressee may be younger or elderly individuals interacting within different relational contexts.

Ends: The host intends for the invitee to participate in the meal as a sign of hospitality and communal solidarity.

Act Sequence: The invitation is expressed politely, while the response may involve either indirect or direct refusal depending on age and status relations.

Key: The tone of the interaction is cordial and perfunctory because of the shared sociocultural understanding between participants.

Instrumentalities: Spoken oral communication is employed.

Norms: Indirect refusal is commonly used by younger persons to show respect and avoid offence, whereas direct refusal may be acceptable for elderly persons or among close equals because of age, familiarity, or social status.

### 3.3 REFUSAL OF ERRANDS

In Yorùbá culture, respect for elderly people, irrespective of the tribe and kin, is sacrosanct, honour and respect are given to elders whether known or unknown. It is common in the Yoruba setting for elders to send younger ones on errands. However, there are cases where a younger person may indirectly refuse errands from an elderly person. It must emphasise that this type of refusal is not native to Yorùbá culture, it is ushered into the culture through modernity and influence of foreign culture. However, despite the influence of this new culture, Yorùbá settings still retain the use of courteous words in addressing issues to prevent affront or disrespect. However, there are instances where one can refuse an errand with concrete reasons. For instance: sickness, infirmity and lack of strength. The data below portray indirect refusal of errands from an elderly person:

Excerpt 4

A: *Ọmọ mi, bá mi gbé ẹru yìi délé* 'My child, help me carry this load home'

B: *Ẹma binu Iya, ara mi o ya* 'Don't be annoyed ma, I am not feeling fine'

The scenario in the excerpt above depicts where an elderly person has a load to carry from one place to another but could not proceed with it due to weakness or fatigue. In cases like this, help may be sought from any younger person that is available as shown in the statement in A. From the response of B, the younger person has concrete reason to directly refuse the errand, but the response in B depicts the act of a thorough bred Yorùbá person who has respect for elders and tradition. The indirect refusal is deployed by starting with a plea to demonstrate empathy with the elderly person before telling the elderly person the inability due to sickness to assist the elderly woman. Note that the refusal is not stated promptly but after an excuse has been established and the statement is made with polite words and courtesy. In this case, the elderly would realise that the refusal is not deliberate. Thus, a word of prayer for quick recovery may be offered despite the fact that assistance has been politely refused. However, direct refusal of errands for an elderly person in the Yoruba culture is frowned at, as it is considered to depict lack of home training or courtesy for culture. This is simply a high culture situation in which refusal must indirect in order to avoid portraying the younger person as someone who lacks proper home training. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: An informal setting in which an elderly person requests assistance from a younger individual.

Participants: The addresser is an elderly person, while the addressee is a younger person.

Ends: The elder seeks assistance in carrying a load home.

Act Sequence: The interaction begins with a polite request, followed by an indirect refusal supported with an explanation.

Key: The tone of the conversation is respectful and perfunctory because the purpose of the interaction is clearly understood by both participants.

Instrumentalities: Spoken oral communication is employed.

Norms: Indirect refusal is used as a face-saving strategy and as a means of upholding Yorùbá cultural values of respect, courtesy, and deference toward elders.

### 3.4 REFUSAL IN THE MARKET

In the market square, sellers normally eulogise, cajole and even play with customers to persuade them to buy goods from them. Thus, words like *ṣnkú* ‘uncle’, *bòdá*, ‘brother’ *mà má* ‘mummy’ *dadi* ‘daddy’ are used for young and old based on their ages and outlook to plead for patronage. However, in the market, not every offer for sale can be accepted. Thus, refusal will set in to dismiss the sellers of what is not needed. The examples below depict refusal from buyer to seller.

Excerpt 5-1

- A: *Ọkọ mi, ẹ bá mi rajà* ‘My husband, buy goods from me’  
 B: *Ajé á wá mà má, ẹ ẹ tà* ‘Luck will locate you mama, you will sell’

Excerpt 5-2

- A: *Èlẹja yín tidé o* ‘Your fish monger has come’  
 A: *È reja ẹ sebè o* ‘Buy fish and prepare your meal’  
 A: *Iya Ojo, ẹ ẹ reja ?* ‘Iya Ojo, are you not purchasing fish?’  
 B(i) *Tomato ni mo fe ra* It is tomatoes I want to buy  
 B(ii) *È se, ponmo ni mo fe ra* Thank you, it is ‘*ponmo*’ I want to buy  
 B(iii): *Ajé á wá mà má, ẹ ẹ tà* ‘Luck will locate you mama, you will sell’  
 B(iv): *Mo ti ra lánà* ‘I purchased yesterday’  
 B(v): *Mi ò rà lonii* ‘I am not buying today’  
 B(vi) *Mi o ra, o maa ta* ‘I am not buying, you will sell’

In excerpt 5-1 the response in B, is a typical indirect refusal from a potential buyer in the market environment or where goods are sold. The immediate response *Ajé á wá* ‘you will make good sales’ sends a signal to the seller of the unwillingness of the buyer to purchase from him through an indirect means. In the Yoruba setting, the prayer *ẹ ẹ tà* ‘you will sell’ is offered to suppress the bad mood that such refusal may generate and also assure the seller that the person that will make a purchase will come. Using Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: A marketplace where sellers persuade buyers to purchase goods.

Participants: The addresser and addressee are sellers and potential buyers.

Ends: The sellers seek patronage and successful sales from buyers.

Act Sequence: The interaction begins with persuasive advertising and invitation to buy, followed by indirect or mitigated refusal from the buyer.

Key: The tone of the conversation is persuasive and painstaking because sellers actively promote their goods to attract customers.

Instrumentalities: Spoken oral communication is employed.

Norms: Indirect refusal and softened direct refusal are used to avoid hurting the seller’s feelings or damaging interpersonal harmony.

Excerpt 5-2, depicts the interaction between a fish hawker and buyers. This instance is distinct from the market scene; it is the seller that is moving around to advertise products. Both direct and indirect refusal may be used as responses to the seller. A hawker that is unknown to the buyer deserves some respect and dignity because Yoruba abhors injuring people's ego. As such, the responses in 5-2 B (i & ii) are polite ways of telling the hawkers that what is being offered for sale is not needed by the buyer at that point in time indicating the buyer prefers to buy other things instead. Moreover, the response in 5-2 B(iii) is a general way of polite refusal in the market and outside it. It entails praying for the seller to meet luck elsewhere since the present buyer is not willing to buy what is advertised. However, the responses in 5-2 B (iv, v & vi) are used for a known hawker who has enjoyed patronage from the buyer over a period of time and have developed a cordial relationship with each other. The direct responses exhibited in 5-2 B (iv, v & vi) may be used without causing malice or showing indifference to the seller. The situations in the excerpts reflect both high and low context cultures, a seller who respectfully address a buyer to buy goods from them in the market a courteous response; therefore, indirect refusal is used to reciprocate the gesture. However, in street hawking, factors such as age and level of familiarity determine whether a direct or indirect refusal is more appropriate. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: A street-hawking environment where hawkers move around advertising goods to known and unknown individuals.

Participants: The addresser and addressee consist of hawkers and potential buyers.

Ends: The hawker seeks to persuade buyers to purchase the advertised goods.

Act Sequence: The interaction begins with persuasive advertising and solicitation, followed by either indirect or direct refusal from the buyer depending on the degree of familiarity.

Key: The tone of the interaction is persuasive and painstaking because the hawker attempts to convince potential buyers to patronise the goods.

Instrumentalities: Spoken oral communication is employed.

Norms: Indirect refusal is commonly used when the hawker is unfamiliar to the buyer in order to maintain politeness and respect, whereas direct refusal may occur where the hawker and buyer share familiarity and cordial relations.

### 3.5 REFUSAL OF ASSISTANCE

In Yoruba settings, not all gestures are permitted. Some gestures may be refused if the person offering it is a total stranger and there is no need for such assistance. Assistance may also be refused from friends and families if such will be used against the receiver in the future. Thus, refusal of assistance can be for safety purposes, to protect one's integrity, to show decency or showcase home training. See the examples below:

Excerpt 6

A: Jẹ́ kí ń gba owó yẹn fún ẹ                    'Let me collect the money for you'

B: (Ẹ) má ẹ̀ ṣe iyọnu                                'Don't bother'

The example in excerpt 6 (A & B) depicts the relationship between two people who are friends or share a cordial relationship with each other. The response in 6 (B) might come as a joke to tell a friend not to bother to assist. However, in a transaction situation where buying or trading is taking place, collecting money on behalf of somebody else may cause confusion in reconciling the transaction. Thus, the indirect refusal is a purposeful answer to the person who is willing to help where the help is not necessary. This response can also be used for an elderly person not to bother. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: A business or transactional setting where one friend intends to assist another.

Participants: The addresser and addressee are friends or acquaintances.

Ends: The helper intends to assist, while the receiver considers the help unnecessary.

Act Sequence: The interaction begins with an offer of assistance, followed by an indirect refusal expressed politely and humorously.

Key: The tone of the interaction is perfunctory and light-hearted because of the shared understanding between participants.

Instrumentalities: Spoken oral communication is employed.

Norms: Indirect refusal is used as a polite and joking strategy to decline unnecessary assistance without causing offence.

Excerpt 7

- A: (E) jẹ kín báa yín/ẹ wa mótò yìi ‘Let me assist you to drive your car’  
 B: Èyin lẹ ti ñ rànmi lówó láti ojú yìi ‘You have been assisting me for a long time’  
 C: Ẹ má ẹe iyọnu lónií ‘Don’t bother today’  
 D: Á máa di gbogbo igbà ‘It will become too often’

The excerpt in 7 (A, B, C & D) shows a typical example of someone who has been rendering help to someone all the time to the extent that the help has become an embarrassment. Thus, the answers in 7 (C & D) are an indirect refusal of the help. This subtle refusal is a way of saying thank you. Using Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: An informal setting in which assistance is repeatedly offered between acquaintances.

Participants: The addresser and addressee are acquaintances or cordial associates.

Ends: One participant intends to continue offering assistance to another.

Act Sequence: The interaction begins with an offer of help, followed by appreciation and indirect refusal.

Key: The tone of the interaction is polite, careful, and considerate because of the existing relationship between both parties.

Instrumentalities: Spoken oral communication is employed.

Norms: Indirect refusal is used to prevent the helper from feeling slighted or unappreciated.

Excerpt 8

- A: Gba owó yìi kí o fi ra bọ̀lù ‘Take this money to buy ball’  
 B: Ìyá mi máa nà mí ‘My mother will beat me’

In excerpt 8 (A & B), the elder person sometimes may want to show a gesture to children on the street without knowing them. A thoroughbred child will use the indirect refusal in 3(B) to tactically refuse the gift to show home training and contentment. This refusal may also go for other acts or gestures too. The situations in the excerpts reflect both high and low context cultures. Thus, social status such as high, equal, low as well level of cordial relationship determines whether a direct or indirect refusal is appropriate. Using Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: An informal setting in which an elderly person offers assistance or a gift to a younger individual.

Participants: The addresser is an elderly person, while the addressee is a younger person or child.

Ends: The elder intends to extend kindness or assistance to the younger individual.

Act Sequence: The interaction begins with a friendly offer or gesture, followed by an indirect refusal from the younger person.

Key: The tone of the interaction is cordial and perfunctory.

Instrumentalities: Spoken oral communication is employed.

Norms: Indirect refusal is used to show respect for the elder, appreciate the gesture, and demonstrate proper upbringing and cultural values.

### 3.6 REFUSAL OF ADVICE

Advice can be positive or negative, and it can have either good or bad effects on the life of the person being advised. The Yorùbá understand that not all advice is necessary, and some may even have negative consequence. When Yorùbá notice that advice from an individual is unnecessary or could bring harm, they usually refuse it in a stylish and polite way, without insulting the person who offered it. See the examples below:

Expert 9

- A: Mo fẹ́ kí o lọ kí àwọn ẹbí yín ‘I want you to go and greet your extended family’  
 A: Lẹ́yin igbà tí bàbá ẹ́ ti kú ‘After the demise of your father’

B(i): E ṣe mo ti gbó 'Thank you very much'  
B(ii): Maa ma ronú si 'I will be think about it'

The excerpt above depicts indirect refusal of a piece of advice from a friend or an elderly person who admonishes one to do something. The response in (B(i)) is a typical way of reciprocating the time and the energy of the adviser. A typical Yorùbá would thank the adviser with appreciation for the advice. After this, the response in B(ii) follows. The response has two readings: it could be a tactical response to dismiss the adviser, or it could also mean that the advisee would give the advice a second thought. This excerpt depicts a high context culture in which advice given may or may not be well received by the advisee, but they are expected to show appreciation and respect social norms by expressing refusal indirectly. It must be noted that advice is often given to younger individuals by older members of the society. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model (1972), the communicative situation may be summarised as follows:

Setting/Scene: An informal setting where advice is offered to a younger person.

Participants: The interaction involves an elderly or experienced adviser and a younger recipient.

Ends: The adviser intends to guide the younger person toward appropriate action regarding a personal or family issue.

Act Sequence: The interaction begins with advice or admonition, followed by appreciation and indirect refusal or non-committal acceptance.

Key: The tone of the interaction is respectful and thoughtful, reflecting shared cultural expectations and sensitivity to age hierarchy.

Instrumentalities: Spoken oral communication is employed.

Norms: Indirect refusal is used to maintain respect for the elder, preserve social harmony, and avoid overt disagreement or confrontation.

### 3.7 SOCIOLINGUISTIC OVERVIEW OF REFUSAL STRATEGY IN YORÙBÁ CULTURE

Culture, as a way of life of a group of people, includes their acquired behaviour, attitudes, and material things. It plays a significant role in their communication behaviour and norm of the society because it functions on the subconscious level, serving as an unseen influence that shapes thoughts (Hall,1959). The concept of high-context and low-context cultures, has significant influence in determining how people behave and communicate. The Yorùbá culture lies in-between the high and low cultures enumerated in respect of refusal strategies. However, emphasis is also placed on high, equal and low status in response to offers. Although, the collective culture in Yoruba settings prioritises group harmony and social cohesion, refusal is characterised by indirect communication. It must also be noted that the choice of refusal a strategy is highly dependent on context, setting, situation and the relationship between interlocutors. In recent times, modernity and cordiality have introduced individualistic culture into some aspects of refusal verbal act among the Yorùbá. In certain contexts - especially among people of equal rank and those of lower social status - direct refusal strategies are increasingly developed. The development reflects a shift toward low-context communication, where information is conveyed explicitly through words rather than through situation or cultural cues (Hofstede,1980). It must be noted settings/scene, participants, ends, acts/sequence, key, instrumentalities and norms play vital roles in the high- and low- context communication of refusals.

## IV CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined the refusal strategy among the Yorùbá. It was observed that the general norms among the Yorùbá people is the indirect refusal verbal act where polite phrases are used to refuse a verbal act from an interlocutor. However, the study also shows that high, low or equal status plays a role in refusal strategy because they determine the direction of the refusal. It is also demonstrated that direct refusal is either a product of borrowed culture, cordiality or low and equal status syndrome.

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