



***CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATICS OF REFUSAL SPEECH ACTS
BETWEEN MALAYS AND GERMANS***

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By

FARHANA MUSLIM BINTI MOHD JALIS

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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Doctor of Philosophy**

June 2020

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Abstract of this thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctoral of Philosophy

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June 2020

Chair: Associate Professor Mohd Azidan Bin Abd Jabar, PhD
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Language speakers are oftentimes caught in situations where they are unable to meet the expectations of another speaker in a certain communication situation such as requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions even if the situation is in their language. In such situations, it is somehow inevitable for them to say “no” but they may be hesitant to do so. A refusal is a speech act that is performed to convey reluctance and unwillingness to perform or agree. Successful communication requires a speaker to not only have adequate linguistic knowledge, but also a great level of understanding of how to use the language especially concerning cultural norms and how it is used in daily communication. The mutual acceptance between speakers oftentimes calls for specific strategies. This study aims to identify the refusal strategies preferred by Malay native speakers and German native speakers in situations that prompt them to refuse in their respective mother tongue. A total of 30 native Malays and native Germans working in various professional sectors participated in this study. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) per Beebe et al. (1990) was used to obtain the data for this study. The data gathered from the DCT was analysed and coded according to a combination of the taxonomy of refusal strategies proposed by Beebe et al. (1990) and Al-Issa (2003). The finding shows that Malay and German speakers of the same social class generally used similar strategies when performing refusals albeit with different frequencies and trends. This study also looked into the influence of social variables on the choice of refusal strategies. This study has implications on both learning and teaching German and Malay languages, especially in the field of foreign languages, as it provides explanations relating to cultural behaviour and acceptance. This study may serve as a guide for educators to educate new learners and society about the pragmatics of refusal-making and the underlying cultural reasoning for this speech act to ensure successful communication in future situations that may be encountered.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PRAGMATIK RENTAS BUDAYA LAKUAN BAHASA PENOLAKAN
ANTARA PENUTUR MELAYU DAN JERMAN**

Oleh

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Penutur bahasa acapkali menghadapi keterbatasan persekitaran apabila tidak dapat menjangkau komunikasi dengan penutur lain seperti dalam situasi membuat permintaan dan tawaran, menerima jemputan serta memberikan cadangan. Golongan ini tidak dapat menyatakan tidak sebagai alasan perbuatan untuk mengelak dan teragak-agak untuk berbuat demikian. Ini kerana, menolak adalah salah satu perbuatan yang membawa maksud keengganan dan tidak bersedia untuk melakukan sesuatu untuk menyatakan persetujuan. Komunikasi yang berjaya bukan sahaja memerlukan seseorang itu mempunyai pengetahuan linguistik yang baik, bahkan juga memerlukan pemahaman yang mendalam khususnya tentang perkaitan bahasa dan tingkahlaku budaya terutamanya apabila situasi penolakan berlaku dalam komunikasi harian. Terdapat beberapa strategi penolakan lazim yang dapat diaplikasikan bagi menyelesaikan permasalahan ini demi mencapai kata sepakat antara penutur. Justeru, objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti pemilihan strategi penolakan oleh penutur Melayu dan Jerman dalam pelbagai situasi yang sama dalam bahasa ibunda masing-masing. Kaedah Penyempurnaan Wacana (KPW) oleh Beebe et al. (1990) akan diaplikasikan untuk memperoleh data serta dianalisis dan dikodkan mengikut taksonomi gabungan strategi penolakan oleh Beebe et al. (1990) dan Al-Issa (2003). Seramai 30 orang responden yang bekerja di pelbagai sektor profesional dan terdiri daripada penutur bahasa Melayu dan Jerman, terlibat dalam kajian ini. Hasil dapatan menunjukkan bahawa penutur bahasa Melayu dan Jerman dari kelas sosial yang sama lazimnya menggunakan strategi yang hampir sama apabila melakukan penolakan tetapi berbeza dari aspek kekerapan dan jenis lakuan budaya. Kajian ini dapat dijadikan sebagai panduan kepada pendidik untuk mendidik pelajar baharu dan masyarakat tentang pragmatik lakuan penolakan dan cara sesuatu budaya itu melakukannya untuk mencapai komunikasi yang berjaya.

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Farhana Muslim Mohd Jalis.**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCC	Cross-cultural communication
CCP	Cross-cultural pragmatics
DaF	<i>Deutsch als Fremdsprache</i> (German as a Foreign Language)
DCT	Discourse Completion Test
DSKL	<i>Deutsche Schule</i> Kuala Lumpur
GNS	German native speaker
GSSKL	German Speaking Society Kuala Lumpur
ICP	Inter-cultural pragmatics
ILP	Inter-language pragmatics
G1	Group one
G2	Group two
G3	Group three
MNS	Malay native speaker
ODCT	Oral Discourse Completion Test

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

Briefly, chapter 1 discusses the background of this current study in relations to the analysis of cross-cultural pragmatics of the refusal speech act between Malay and German native speakers. This chapter also explains the basic terms and key points used in the study. Besides, this chapter also elucidates the statement of the problem, the objective of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the definition of terms used in the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

The communication between people is essentially the exchange of meaning. It is a person's attempt to let others know what he or she means. Communication includes any form of behaviour that other humans perceive and interpret. In other words, it is a way of understanding a person's intention or meaning. Communication also includes both verbal messages (words) and nonverbal messages (i.e. tone of voice, facial expression, behaviour, and physical setting). In the field of linguistics, pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning that occurs in the communication between speakers.

In recent years, linguists and researchers have increasingly focused on the study of pragmatics. Although it is not so easy to define the scope of pragmatics, the variety of research interest and developments in this field share the same concern, which is the need to account for the rules that govern the use of language in a specific context (Levinson, 1989). One of the basic challenges in pragmatics research faces is the issue of universality. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) questioned the possibility of determining the rules that govern the use of language-in-context because it varies from culture to culture and from language to language. Hence, the answers to this question can only be sought through cross-cultural pragmatics research.

The term pragmatics was coined by Morris (1938), a language philosopher, who was concerned with defining semiotics as the general shape of signs, thereby positioning this new field of linguistic analysis within semiotics. Ferrara (1985, p.138) defined pragmatics as "the systematic study of the relationship between the linguistic properties of utterances and their properties as social action." Social action refers to the actions that human beings engage in whenever they use language. Fasold (1990, p.119), also, defined pragmatics as 'the study of the use of context to make inference about meaning'. Altogether, it can be said that pragmatics is concerned with people's intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions (for example refusal or request) that they perform when speaking (Yule 1996, p.4). Wittgenstein (1958) opined that there was a good reason to separate the theory of linguistic meaning

(semantics) from the theory of language use (pragmatics), not that they are not connected. He believed that sentences could be distinguished, based on the abstraction of their use and the actions of the speaker (or writers) when using them. In other words, by using pragmatics, how a speaker conveys meaning can differ from what his words mean.

Given that pragmatics is interested in how human beings communicate in their daily lives, the range of topics and core areas in this field has also touched on the analysis of mono-cultural or cross-cultural communication. In the case of this study, the main focus is on a sub-branch of these topics called cross-cultural pragmatics. Cross-cultural pragmatics (henceforth CCP) is a subfield of pragmatics that is mainly concerned with the effect of sociocultural background on the comprehension and production of pragmatic meaning. CCP has attracted much attention in the modern world because participants can now interact even if they do not share the same native or primary language of communication. Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) defined CCP as the study of linguistic acts employed by language users from different cultural backgrounds. Wierzbicka (1991) claimed that CCP could be discussed from three perspectives. The first is in different contexts, which mean that people interact differently. The second perspective is that these differences reflect various cultural values, ideas, and perspectives. The third perspective is the various ways of talking and the diverse styles of communication that could be explained. Furthermore, Yule (1996:87) also viewed CCP as “the study of different expectations among different communities regarding how meaning is constructed”. In other words, CCP compares and contrasts the native discourse and communication behaviour (or styles) of different cultures; it typically investigates how human behaviour is influenced by the participants’ underlying values and beliefs, which are then translated into the language instance used.

Within this small category of study, contrastive pragmatics has been a useful descriptive term for studies on specific speech acts (such as to request, refusal, and compliments) across languages and cultures. Contrastive pragmatics studies tend to target one feature or a group of features of one (or multiple) speech acts. LoCastro (2012, p.80) stated that contrastive pragmatics shares an ambiguous boundary with interlanguage pragmatics (or inter-cultural pragmatics). Interlanguage pragmatics is the study of the development of pragmatic competence among second and foreign language learners, with a focus on the non-native speakers’ use of acquired pragmatic competence in a second or foreign language. Another term that also frequently relates to interlanguage pragmatics is intercultural pragmatics (henceforth ICP). ICP refers to the study on the language use of groups of individuals resulting from the phenomenon of the transnational movement of people of various languages and backgrounds. Participants usually interact with one another in schools, health clinics, universities, and international forums regularly. In contrast to interlanguage pragmatics and ICP, CCP discusses issues outside classrooms and focuses on environments where participants are not explicitly learners, but rather full members of the target community.

One area of research that has contributed the most to CCP is the speech act. The early studies of famous linguists such as Austin (1962), Grice (1975), Habermas (1979; 1991), and Searle (1969; 1975; 1979; 1983; 1986; 1991) assumed that a speech act, that is, the performance of a certain act through words (for example, requesting, greeting, thanking, complimenting, complaining), is fundamental to human communication. A difference

lies not only in the linguistic realisation of the same speech act but also in the force of the speech act. According to Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985), an empirical investigation of speech acts can provide a better understanding of how to achieve good communication among people through linguistic behaviour. Besides, the similarities and differences in human interaction among various cultures and languages can also be analysed under similar circumstances.

Oftentimes, people get caught in various situations where they are reluctant to fulfil an interlocutor's request, invitation, and so on. Hence, in this case, they will opt to perform an act of declining or refusing the request. Refusal is a negative willingness that can be very frustrating and could be heavy to perform for some people. Given the linguistic complexity and the great impact a refusal may cause on the refuser's face and the interlocutor's face, this particular speech act has been the subject of numerous mono-cultural comparative works and cross-cultural communication studies. To delve deeper into this subject, this study compares the refusal strategies between Malay and German, a language pair that has not yet received much attention in the CCP field.

1.3 The Speech Act of Refusal

Speech acts are used to describe a speaker's actions such as "requesting", "commanding", refusing" or apologising" and are known as "basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" (Searle: 1969, p.16). One of the frequently researched speech acts is the act of refusal. A refusal is a speech act that represents one type of dispreferred response (Félix-Brasdefer 2008, p.42). A refusal is an act involving a negative response towards a given offer, request, invitation, or suggestion (Sattar et al., 2011, p.70). Searle and Vanderveken (1985, p.195). Searle and Vanderveken (1985:195) besides defined refusal as the negative counterparts to acceptance and consent.

According to Ramos (1991), non-native speakers of a language find it difficult to say 'no'. In various cultures, the manner of saying 'no' is probably more significant than the answer itself. Therefore, sending and receiving a message with a 'no' in it is a task that requires special strategy or skill. Within the Malay Culture, it is not an easy task to simply refuse someone or something by responding with a straight 'no' alone, especially when the interlocutor is someone who has a huge connection or relationship with the refuser. Following the Malay long practiced culture, it is very often found that Malaysians practice indirect and vague utterances when making refusal as a method to be polite and perpetuate good relationship or to 'save face' of both interlocutor and refuser. (Ali, 1995; Sattar, et al., 2011; Kathir, 2015). During a conversation, in order to maintain a good future relationship, the refuser needs to know proper form of refusal strategy and how to utter it. A great knowledge of semantic competence are required to escape discomfort responses between interlocutors to achieve mutual leniency. Such skills are crucial since the "inability to say no has caused many non-native speakers to offend their interlocutors" (Ramos, 1991).

Goffman (1955) defined 'face' as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the *line* others assume he has taken during a particular contact. The face is an image that is self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes..." The line a

person assumes during social interaction refers to the pattern of verbal and nonverbal behaviour by which interlocutors negotiate their views of the situation as well as how they evaluate the participants' point of view. Goffman (1955) referred to 'face' as being in line with the social behaviour of the situation; a person is said to be in the wrong face "when information is brought forth in some way about his social worth, which cannot be integrated". In other words, a person may be considered to be out of face when he/she falls out of line during social interaction and does not follow the social behaviour expected in a specific situation. Thus, 'face' is the conceptualisation that one makes of one's 'self' during interaction with others through verbal or nonverbal interaction in a conversation scene. The face is manifested in the evaluation one makes of oneself through social interaction.

Refusals are described as a Face-Threatening Act (FTA) (Brown and Levinson, 1987) and belong to the category of commissives due to the action of the refuser to (not) act (Searle, 1977). Expressing a refusal may be seen as 'destroying' the hope of an interlocutor. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the concept of "face" was introduced to carry the meaning of "shame" or "water-drop interface". Brown and Levinson (1987) categorised the face into two—positive and negative. A positive face refers to the desire of an individual to be accepted or appreciated by others while a negative face refers to the individual's will to not be forced or imposed by another person. Brown and Levinson (1987) further mentioned that, face-threatening acts such as refusals are definitely at risk of causing both interlocutors to either gain a positive or negative face. Overall, refusals are a rather complex type of speech act because refusing requires not only adequate level of pragmatic competence, as well as a long sequence of negotiation and cooperative achievements, but also face-saving manoeuvres to accommodate the noncompliant nature of the act (Gass & Houck, 1999:2; Fèlix-Brasdefer, 2006, p.2160).

1.4 Model of Culture

In this present study, the definition of cultural dimensions, as suggested by the social anthropologist, Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov (2010) was used to systematically describe cultural behaviour. To understand CCP, one must realise that cultural behaviour plays a crucial role in realising cultural patterns, as sometimes one's actions may rely on cultural norms. Hofstede et al. (2010) viewed culture as "the software of the mind", or the collective mental programming of the human mind. According to him, this programming is formed under the influence of a person's social environment and life experience. It starts in the family and continues at school, at the workplace, in the community, and then continues. Culture is a mental program that affects all aspects of human activity including verbal communication. In order to see a clear comparison between Malaysian and German cultural dimension, an online tool for the dimensions of culture developed by Hofstede et al. (2010) was used to systematically describe Malay and German culture-specific behaviours.

Hofstede's et al. (2010) Cultural Dimensions

Power Distance Index (PDI): A dimension that can be low or high. This dimension measures the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.

Collectivism vs. Individualism (IDV): This is a dimension that measures the degree of relatedness (interdependence) of a person to a group. Hofstede et al. (2010) described this dimension as follows: individualistic societies have loose ties between individuals. Everyone is expected to look after themselves and his or her immediate family. Collectivism, however, applies to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive groups, which, throughout their lifetime, continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioned loyalty (Hofstede, 2010, p.91).

Femininity (FEM) vs. Masculinity (MAS): Masculinity refers to a society in which social gender roles are distinct; men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, while women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. Femininity, however, is associated with societies in which gender roles overlap; both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. In masculine societies, the dominant values are a success, competition, money, and material things. In contrast, feminine societies emphasise values such as caring about others and quality of life.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UA): This dimension measures the degree to which people across societies feel threatened by ambiguities and uncertainties and hence seek to set rules and institutions for the sake of eliminating these ambiguities and uncertainties.

Long-Term Orientation (LTO) vs. Short-Term Orientation (STO): this dimension defines how societies are restricted from undertaking drastic changes. Societies that score low in this dimension are called normative societies. They prefer to preserve norms and traditions while observing the tenets of society. In contrast, societies who score high in this dimension prefer a more pragmatic approach. They encourage economical living and spearhead efforts to incorporate modern education to prepare for the future.

Indulgence (I) vs. Restraint (R): This dimension measures the degree of socialisation to which people across society control their desire and impulses depending on the way they were raised. A high score relates to an "Indulgent" society while lower scores typify "Restrained" societies.

1.4.1 Malaysian Cultural Dimension

To visualise comparison between two cultures, this study referred to the cultural dimension ranking list for European nations constructed by Hofstede et al. (2010). According to Hofstede's (2010) cultural dimension website in 2018, Malaysia scores very high (a score of 100) on the power distance dimension, which means that people accept a hierarchical order where everybody has a place and require no further justification. Hierarchy in an organisation is seen to reflect inherent inequalities, where centralisation is popular, subordinates expect to be told what to do and the ideal boss is

a benevolent autocrat. Challenges to the leadership are not well received. For the individualism dimension, Malaysia scored 26, indicating that it is a Collectivist society, manifested by a close long-term commitment to the “member” group—be it family, extended family, or extended relationships.

Loyalty in a collectivist culture is paramount and overrides most other societal rules and regulations. Such a society fosters strong relationships, where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group. In Collectivist societies, an offence leads to shame and the loss of face. Employer/employee relationships are perceived in moral terms (like a family link), and hiring and promotion take account of the employee status in a group. Management involves the management of groups. Moreover, Malaysia scored an intermediate score of 50 in the Masculinity dimension. According to Hofstede’s (2010) cultural model, Malaysia’s preference for this dimension cannot be determined.

Malaysia scored 36 for the Uncertainty Avoidance (henceforth UA) dimension and thus has a low preference for avoiding uncertainty. Low UA societies maintain a more relaxed attitude. Practice counts more than principles and deviance from the norm is more easily tolerated. In societies exhibiting low UA, people believe there should be no more rules than are necessary and if they are ambiguous or do not work; they should be abolished or changed. Schedules are flexible, hard work is undertaken when necessary but not for its own sake. Precision and punctuality do not come naturally; innovation is not seen as threatening. For Long-Term Orientation, Malaysia scored a low score of 41. This low score means that Malaysia has a normative culture. People in such societies have a strong concern with establishing the absolute Truth; they are normative in their thinking. They also exhibit great respect for traditions, a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results. Finally, Malaysia’s high score of 57 in the Indulgence dimension indicates that its culture is one of Indulgence. People in societies classified by a high Indulgence score generally exhibit a willingness to realise their impulses and desires concerning enjoying life and having fun. They possess a positive attitude and tend towards optimism. Besides, they place a higher degree of importance on leisure time. They also act as they please and spend money as they wish.

1.4.2 German Cultural Dimension

Highly decentralised and supported by a strong middle class, Germany is, not surprisingly, one of the lower power distance countries (with a score of 35). Co-determination rights are comparatively extensive and have to be taken into account by the management. A direct and participative communication and meeting style are common, control is disliked, and the leadership is challenged to prove their expertise and are best accepted when they do have the expertise. German society is a truly Individualist one (with a score of 67). They most commonly have small families and focus on the parent-child relationship rather than aunts and uncles. There is a strong belief in the idea of self-actualisation. Loyalty is based on personal preferences for people, as well as a sense of duty and responsibility. This is defined by the contract between the employer and the employee.

The German way of communicating is among the most direct in the world and follows the ideal of "being honest, even if it hurts" and hence giving their counterparts a fair chance to learn from mistakes. With a score of 66, Germany is considered a Masculine society. Performance is highly valued and required early on, as the school system separates children into different types of schools from the age of ten. People would rather "live to work" and draw a lot of self-esteem from their tasks. Managers are expected to be decisive and assertive. Status is often shown, especially from the cars, watches, and technical devices that they use. Germany is among the uncertainty-avoidant countries, with a score on the high end (65), so Germans have a slight preference for Uncertainty Avoidance. In line with the philosophical heritage of Kant (1996; 1998; 200; &2002), Hegel (1971; 1977; 1985; 1988; 1989; & 2000), and Fichte (1982; 1988: 2000; & 2005), Germans have a strong preference for deductive rather than inductive approaches, be it in thinking, presenting, or planning: a systematic overview has to be given to proceed. This is also reflected in the country's legal system. Details are equally important to create certainty that a certain topic or project is well thought out. In combination with their low Power Distance score, where the certainty of one's own decisions is not covered by the larger responsibility of the boss, Germans prefer to compensate for their higher uncertainty by strongly relying on expertise.

In the Long-Term Orientation dimension, Germany scored highly (83), indicating that it is a pragmatic country. In societies with a pragmatic orientation, people believe that truth depends very much on situation, context, and time. They show an ability to adapt to traditions and easily weather changing conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, thriftiness, and perseverance in achieving results. A low score of 40 in the Indulgence dimension indicates that the German culture is restrained in nature. Societies with a low score in this dimension tend towards cynicism and pessimism. Also, in contrast to Indulgent societies, Restrained societies do not put much emphasis on leisure time and tend to delay/control gratifying their desires. People with this orientation have the perception that their actions are restrained by social norms and feel that indulging themselves is somewhat wrong.

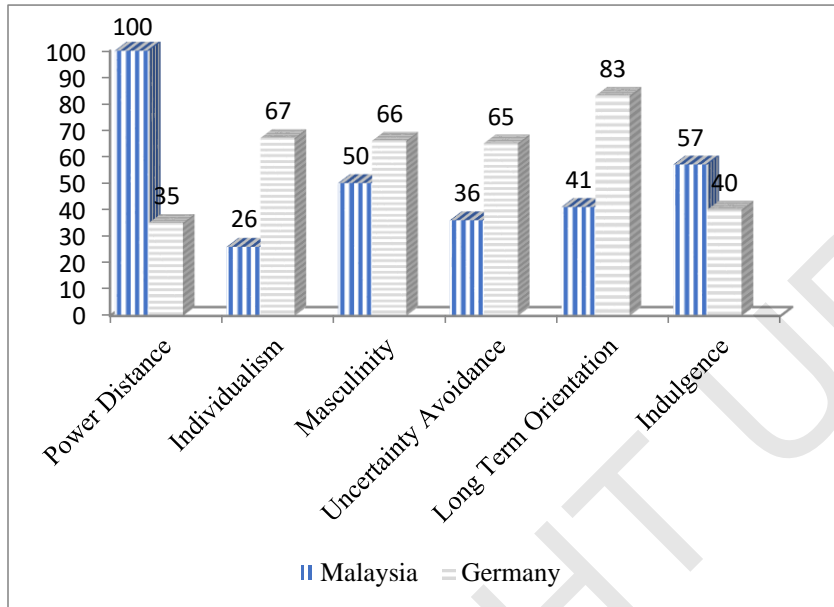


Figure 1.1: Hofstede's Value Dimensions for Malaysia and Germany

Figure 1.1 presents a summary of the Cultural Dimension Values of Malaysia and Germany according to Hofstede et al. (2010). The figure exhibits the cultural values dimension comparison between Malaysia and Germany.

1.5 Problem Statement

Cultural differences in terms of norms, values, and apparent behaviour are widely acknowledged (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007; Wyer, Chiu, & Hong, 2009). The differences range from self-construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), to nonverbal perception (Ambady, Koo, Lee, & Rosenthal, 1996; Ambady & Weisbuch, in press), to the language and speech acts used to communicate social behaviour (Semin, 2009), thinking style (Nisbett, 2003), and intergroup negotiation (Leung, 1997). These differences can represent different cultural backgrounds and could result in misinterpretation of the intended implication of one another's behaviour especially when a negative response is involved.

It is understandable that people generally do not speak other languages and that they often fail to recognise that other people from other cultural backgrounds may have different customs, thoughts patterns, goals, values, and beliefs. When one fails to understand these differences, one tends to be judgmental, even committing stereotyping allegations. In the case of a multicultural and multi-ethnic society such as Malaysia, Raslie and Azizan (2018) opined that many types and frequencies of refusal strategies are augmented just for refusal. These strategies are regarded as relevant because refusal is subject to and realised across various ethnic groups differently. Such acts are oftentimes caused by misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation. To

understand cultural differences when making a refusal, until recent years, numerous studies on CCP was done across various languages to identify the cultural behaviour of native and non-native speakers to explain the phenomenon of what is culturally accepted when making refusals. Lim (2017) and Shamsudeen and Moris (2013) argued that being polite is an essential cultural value in the Malay community where expressions are expressed via non-confrontational speech and behaviour. Hence, Malay culture has long been claimed to be a culture that practices indirectness and vague communication speech act strategies (Sattar, Lah & Suleiman, 2012).

Germans, on the other hand, have also long been stereotyped as direct, analogue thinkers and are thought to have a serious type of culture (Nikitina, Don, & Loh 2014). Germans favour direct and explicit answers that convey a great level of clarity and regard these as appropriate for making refusals. Besides, Chavez (2009, p.8) noted that the stereotypical perceptions of German as ‘a harsh, throaty, or ‘phlegmy’ language” are plentiful and such images are promoted widely. The stereotypes have caused problems to arise because the perceived harshness of the German language is extrapolated to German native speakers who are viewed as “aggressive” people Chavez (2009, p.17). Given the arguments of Sattar, et al., (2012) in their contrastive study on Malay cultural behaviour and Nikitina et al.’s (2014) contrastive study on German cultural behaviour, this study hopes to serve as a bridge to contrast Malay and German cultural behaviour, especially in contrasting the refusal strategy preferences of both. This study contrasted the speech behaviour of Malay native speakers and German native speakers, so that the differences in Malay and German culture may be better understood and accepted and stereotypes avoided. This study, therefore, firstly aims to elucidate contemporary Malaysian and German culture refusal behaviour to fill the large gap in the refusal speech act CCP research, in addition to educating the young generation about social values and the importance of cultural pragmatics.

Secondly, refusal is a frustrating and painful response regardless of the language it is delivered in due to the nature of refusal being an unexpected or unanticipated response, which often becomes a source of conflict (Ismail 2017). In the Malaysian society, the power of social hierarchy plays a large role, where oftentimes, a person who wants to refuse or make complaints, especially to a superior social interlocutor, will feel that the very act is impolite because it contrasts with their cultural beliefs. German society, on the other hand, according to Siebold and Busch’s (2015) cross-cultural study on German and Spanish speakers found that both cultures accepted expressing something with a great deal of clarity. German speakers appreciate an unequivocal end to a conversation and are not comfortable with outcomes that lead to ambiguous interpretation. Hence, giving direct and short responses are one way to realise clarity. Although Ismail (2017) contrasted Malay and Spanish refusals while Siebold and Busch (2015) contrasted German and Spanish refusals, a physical study is still needed to explain this phenomenon while not relying on assumptions made as a result of contrasting other language cultures. Ismail (2017) and Siebold and Busch (2015) used Spanish to compare different languages, while the current study directly contrasted Malay and German. Additionally, Ismail (2017) and Siebold and Busch (2015) only employed general social power (low, equal, and high) as a variable in their analysis. Meanwhile, the present study also added the ‘age’ factor to strengthen the social power status variable based on Nguyen (2010), who claimed that age is also a factor that influences a speaker’s directness or indirectness. In Malay society, the elderly are highly respected. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate

how age influences a person's speech in a scenario of unequal social power and then contrasting this culture with a culture that has a lower power gap such as that of the Germans. Therefore, secondly, this study aims to explain the manner of refusal between Malays and Germans, especially when the refusal is uttered in three situations of differing social power statuses, while also considering the age difference factor. Up until now, no empirical study has contrasted the Malay and German refusal strategy preferences using the above variables. The present study is the first to do so.

Finally, Saad et al., (2018) mentioned that the ability to refuse could oftentimes be difficult to manifest due to several factors that need to be considered by the refuser, especially in Malay culture. Factors such as power, familiarity, age, gender, and the social relationship between interlocutors are often taken as variables that influence the refuser's preferences of refusal utterances. Bulaeva (2016) investigated how social variables influenced refusals and how the refuser would oftentimes use multiple strategies in hopes of saving the face of both the refuser and the interlocutor. Eslami (2010) in addition suggested that refusal strategies must be developed appropriately to avoid offending one's interlocutor. Malay and German are two language pairs that, in general, reflect total cultural differences. Hofstede et al.'s (2010) model of culture between Malaysia and Germany showed significant differences in power distance, so the author considers power distance as a reasonable factor that should be focused on when making refusals. Moreover, according to Félix-Brasdefer (2008), refusals are also influenced by power and social distance, among other social factors. Therefore, this study aims to investigate power, age, and social distance as variables influencing the manner of refusal among Malays and Germans. In addition, this study aims to elucidate the contemporary Malaysian and German culture to educate society about social values and the importance of cultural pragmatics. This study is hoped to fill the void by providing pragmatic explanations on why such strategy is opt by Malay and Germans. In future, it is hoped that the stereotypical and misunderstanding allegations about Malaysians and Germans will also be mitigated through this study.

1.6 Research Objectives

This study was conducted to investigate the patterns of refusal and complaint produced by Malaysian and German speakers in a given situation or particular context. Using CCP approaches, this study focuses on the pragmatic behaviour of the speaker as a basis for comparison. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- 1) To classify the refusal strategy used by Malay and German speakers when making refusal utterances according to the taxonomy of refusal.
- 2) To describe how Malay and German speakers realise refusals with lower-, equal-, and higher-social status interlocutors.
- 3) To analyse the influence of power distance as variable in the refusal utterances used by Malay and German native speakers.

The initial step in this study is to list out all the refusal strategies that Malays Native Speakers (MNS) and German Native Speakers (GNS) employ in this scope of the study. From there, the manner of refusal realisation can be elucidated. Finally, this study analyses the elements that influence the refusal utterances used by the participants of the

study. Taking into consideration the problem statements pointed out in Section 1.4, the study objectives may contribute to a better understanding of cultural diversity by providing evidence to support Malay-German pragmatics in the field of CCP.

1.7 Research Questions

This study used CCP approaches, which attempt to elucidate how a selected group of people might respond when refusing to certain stimulus situations. Taking into consideration the current globalisation and the complex cultural and social situation in Malaysia and contrasting these with the German culture of today, this study aims to investigate the choices of refusal utterances preferred by Malaysians and Germans in common daily situations. This study, therefore, aims to answer the three research questions below:

- 1) What are the refusal strategies preferred by Malay and German native speakers when making refusal utterances according to the taxonomy of refusal?
- 2) How do Malays and Germans realise their manner of refusals towards lower, equal, and higher-social status interlocutors?
- 3) How do power distance influence the refusal utterances opted by Malay and German native speakers?

1.8 Significance of the Study

The present study is significant because it contrasts the pragmatic behaviour of two different cultures, Malaysian and German. Most contrastive studies on speech acts have been conducted with other major Asian cultures such as Chinese and Japanese but no research to date has addressed Malaysian and German societies. Allegations of stereotypes, communication breakdowns or failure, and inappropriate pragmatics across cultures may occur when two interlocutors interact with each other, especially when the interlocutors come from two different cultural backgrounds. Specifically, this study on CCP investigates the differences in pragmatics based on the first-language background, whereas ILP or ICP investigates how the knowledge and ability of second language learners can be used to target language pragmatics development (Roever, 2015, p.387).

Since CCP compares and contrasts native discourses and communication behaviours (or styles) in different cultures with a focus on investigating how humans behave, contrastive CCP has been a useful descriptive term for studies on specific speech acts (such as to request, refusal, and compliment) across languages and cultures. This study is significant because it addresses contemporary issues by developing a better understanding of language and the people who use it, especially in cross-cultural communication (henceforth CCC). CCC provides insights and awareness, as well as socially-situated knowledge necessary for interpreting the common meaningfulness of utterances for its participants (Ali, 2000). Tennen (1984) opined that one way of interpreting the common meaningfulness of participant utterances is to analyse the range of pragmatic and discourse features in a discussion interaction. Tennen (1984, p.4) added that, by analysing communication interaction, the semantic process of interlocutors' habits and expectations on how intention is manifest can be seen even when what needs to be said

is not uttered by the speaker. In other words, through a pragmatic analysis of CCC, the language itself can be analysed and cultural values can also be translated.

CCP is significant to second language learners because it provides not only the opportunity to learn and discover how native speakers of the Malay or German language behave and act when making a refusal and complaining about a situation, but also enables both speakers to understand each other's cultural behaviour and to avoid cross-cultural breakdowns in CCC. More importantly, second language learners should not only focus on linguistic knowledge alone while ignoring pragmatics and communication. Besides, this study aims to educate people about the value of cultural pragmatics and to be lenient or tolerant when communicating with people from various social backgrounds and society levels. It is important to understand a person and the culture that the person comes from. To this end, one has to take into consideration the person's cultural background and reactions. Some values and thoughts are deeply embedded and have moulded and shaped a person's behaviour. Hall (1976, p.61) mentioned that in cross-cultural communication, there are "two things [that] get in the way of understanding: the linearity of language and the deep biases and built-in binders that every culture provides".

Furthermore, this study is significant to foreign expatriates who wish to communicate with Malaysians or Germans, as this study helps raise their pragmatic awareness whilst making them successful cross-cultural communicators. Pragmatics awareness is the conscious, thoughtful, and obvious knowledge concerning pragmatics rules and conventions that direct the appropriate use of language in different communicative situations. Refusal and complaints are face-threatening acts. Expatriates must understand and produce appropriate words for a situation in which they communicate to avoid communication failure, which could result in stereotyping allegations or misunderstanding. Besides, this study is also significant for those who wish to improve their communication effectiveness in both academic and business settings especially when dealing with Malaysians or Germans.

Additionally, this study is significant for language instructors who wish to educate students in the field of pragmatics, especially CCP. Language instructors in graduate communication courses who wish to incorporate the knowledge of cross-cultural and intercultural communication into their syllabus need to have a high pragmatic competence to educate new learners, especially in foreign languages. Through teaching the importance of pragmatics, pragmatic reasoning could be better understood, as meaning cannot be conveyed with words in isolation, but requires words that can relate to the socio-cultural context in which they are uttered.

With the chosen speech act, refusal and complaints are a set of speech acts that represent negative speech acts. When interacting, this speech act becomes a rather complex type of speech because the speaker must not only have a high level of pragmatic competence, but also a long sequence of negotiation and cooperative achievements plus 'face-saving' manoeuvres to accommodate the noncompliant nature of the act (Gass and Houck, 1999:2; Fèlix-Brasdefer, 2006, p.2160). When a speaker emphasises a social conflict in his/her utterance, it may result in the utterance of dissatisfaction or disagreement, which is less likely to occur to the listener. This study, therefore, also aims to elucidate positive

pragmatic utterances, which can be used as a strategy in communication, to achieve mutual communication goals and successful communication, as well as to ensure the continuation of intercultural relationships.

Besides, with the subjects representing two very different cultures, it is hoped that the outcome will provide a wider comprehension of existing cultural stereotyping via the analysis of the refusals and complaints in speech act productions. This analysis of the differences in the general patterns of pragmatics produced by groups of subjects with two different language backgrounds could be useful to educators of German as a Yanforeign language (*DaF*) in Malaysia, as they have to interact or communicate with Malaysian learners. Besides, German expatriates who work in Malaysia or intend to make contact with Malaysians can also benefit from this study. The results should also provide examples that German lecturers would be able to use to clarify situations in which Malaysian students may fail pragmatically, and in the future, to develop curricula to address these problem areas.

Finally, this study also hopes to increase the volume of intercultural studies that contrast the cultures of Malays and Germans. With today's advancement in technology, globalisation, digitisation, and advanced mobilisation, communication across cultures has become much easier and more effectively accessible and, therefore, knowledge sharing can be done in better ways. The lack of Malay-German studies can be improved with the results of contemporary Malaysian and German culture provided by this study. This study has allowed another Asian language to take centre stage in academic discussions, cementing its importance, and at the same time promoting Malaysia and its unique culture to the world.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations faced in this study. These limitations are listed below:

I. Sample size

Firstly, the finding of this study might not represent the Malay and German culture as a whole because of the variables used. The study was made to a small group of 30 participants. The results might differ if the study were conducted specifically for one stimulus with a larger scale of respondents.

II. Sample background

Another factor that limited this study is the societal class of the participants. This study focused on adolescence working in professional sectors. Different people from different social classes and educational backgrounds may respond differently (Hofstede 2010:64). Therefore, future researchers should consider this factor. This study also had a limited sample, consisting only of Malays and Germans currently working and living in Malaysia during the period of study. However, after a certain period, people may sometimes adapt to their surroundings and may react to the customs around them. Nonetheless, native speakers were enlisted as interlocutors to ensure that the speakers would be in as close a natural setting as possible when responding to the instrument used

in this study. In addition, this study also excluded the sample's actual occupation by ensuring that they all are working in a professional fields and their ages are according to the scope of the study.

III. Variables

Hofstede's (2018) model of culture showed the most significant difference in the index of power distance (PDI) between Malaysia and Germany. This study, therefore, places greater focus on power distance as an influencing factor in the refusal utterances chosen by the Malay and German participants in this study. The power distance variable focused in this study is limited to:

- a. The three social classes mentioned by Hofstede (2010), namely upper, middle, and lower. This study, however, also used the terms higher, equal, and lower suggested by Beebe et al. (1990) to refer to the same terms used by Hofstede (2010).
- b. The definition and terms of social power and distance coined by Weber (1968) and Bogaña et al. (2004) (refer to Section 1.9).

Hofstede (2010, p.66) highlighted five elements associated with power distance scores, namely the family, the school, the workplace, the state, and the ideas prevailing within a country. In this particular study, only interlocutors related to family and workplace elements were given greater focus, as these elements were also used in Beebe et al.'s (1990) study. When extending the power distance theory, Hofstede et al. (2010) mentioned that the level of respect a society member expresses towards another member significantly contributes to the power distance score. Hence, in addition to the power distance factor, this study also added two more variables—age distance and relation distance—as possible factors influencing Malay and German refusal utterances. The age distance and relation distance variables are deemed important because Hofstede et al. (2010, p.67) extensively discussed both variables in their study. Therefore, both factors are considered crucial in the current analysis on power distance.

Félix-Brasdefer (2008, p.1) mentioned that within the sociolinguistic perspective, refusals are significant because they are sensitive to social factors such as gender, age, level of education, power, social distance, and what is considered appropriate refusal behaviour that differs across cultures. In addition to the factors mentioned above, other supporting demographic data mentioned in this study, such as gender, educational background, and respondent occupation, were not discussed. The demographic data distribution was generalised mainly to achieve the target of purposive sampling, i.e., to reach the targeted data.

1.10 Definition of Terms

1.10.1 Pragmatics

Ferrara (1985, p.138) defined pragmatics as “the systematic study of the relationship between the linguistics properties of utterances and their properties as social action.” Social action refers to the premise that human beings engage in action whenever they use language. In general, pragmatics is concerned with people's intended meanings, their

assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions (for example refusal or request) that they perform when they speak (Yule 1996, p.4).

1.10.2 Culture

Hall (1959) defined culture as a people's way of life i.e. the sum of their learned behaviour patterns, attitudes, and material things. Culture is often subconscious; it is an invisible control mechanism operating in our thoughts (Hall, 1983). Hall (1983) also viewed that people would become more culturally aware when they are exposed to a different culture.

1.10.3 Cross-Culture

Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) defined CCP as the study of linguistic acts by language users from different cultural backgrounds. In other words, CCP compares and contrasts the native discourse and communication behaviours (or styles) of different cultures. Cross-cultural research involves an investigation into the type of human behaviour across two or more cultures (Matsumoto, 1996, p.5).

1.10.4 Speech Act

Austin (1962) defined speech acts as the action one performs when saying something. A speech act is a functional unit in communication.

1.10.5 Refusal

A refusal is an act of negative response towards a given offer, request, invitation, or suggestion (Sattar et al., 2011, p.70). Searle and Vanderveken (1985, p.195) besides defined refusal as the negative counterparts to acceptance and consent.

1.10.6 Social Power Classification

Weber (1968) introduced three types of independent factors in his Social Class and Stratification Hierarchy Theory, namely power, status, and class. He addressed these factors separately but acknowledged that the factors are interrelated sources of power, with each affecting social action. In terms of power, Weber (1968) suggested that the first type of power could emerge based on unequal access to material resources, in which one can exercise his or her power what that person has something that the other person requires. Second type of power is the social power which one could exercise it in status group as opposed to classes. According to Weber (1968), this power functions as social status or esteem, in which one can exercise his or her power when he or she are seen superior that their wishes and command are likely to be defer. Finally, the third type of power is political power. This form of power is related to how a state or government is managed in a modern social system. Weber (1968) added that one might gain a potentially powerful position if the person can influence the process of law creation.

1.10.7 Social Status

Weber (1968) defined social status as a person's social position within a society that can be categorised according to non-economic qualities, such as wealth, honour, prestige, popularity, ethnicity, race, and religion. Additionally, Weber (1968) also described social status as a social resource that one may possess while others may not. When a person respects another person and views him or her as a social superior, then, that person could be influenced by the status of the respected or superior person.

1.10.8 Social Classes

Weber (1968) defined social class as a person's economic status or position in society based on his or her birth and individual achievement, such as wealth, property, income, education, occupation, social network, etc. Within the social class hierarchy, there are three social classes related to both birth and individual achievement, namely lower, middle, and higher. Hence, social class can be seen as property cases that positively and negatively contrast the privileged occupational or commercial classes from the other classes. Weber (1968) defined the lower class as 'negatively privileged'. The 'lower class' is also defined to neither own resources that could generate revenue nor having the education that could earn them a high income. The second class is the middle class. Weber (1968) defined the middle class (this term was changed to equal class in the present study) as a class of people who own an amount of property but have little education or people who own not much property but can command high wages by virtue of their education and qualification. The final class in the hierarchy is the upper class. Weber (1968) defined the upper class (this term was changed to higher class in the present study) as people who live off property income and have education privilege.

1.10.9 Social Distance

Boguñá et al. (2004) described social distance as the distance between different groups of individuals in a societal class or ethnicity—a definition that is widely accepted in the field of sociology. Social distance measures intuitive concepts within the degree of closeness or acceptance that an individual or group feels towards another individual or group in a social network. Park (1924) also explained that the concept of distance as applied to humans is different than special relations. The term has been used by sociologist to measure grades and degrees for comprehending the intimacy that generally characterises personal relations.

1.11 Chapters Organisation

In Chapter 1, an introduction to the background of the study is given, mainly concerning the context of the study such as the objective of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the purpose of the study, and the definition of terms. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature related to this study. The chosen topics such as the theory of speech acts and its relation to pragmatics, the speech act theory of refusal itself, and previous studies on cross-cultural refusal are reviewed, with more focus on Malay and German refusals. Besides, the missing gap in previous studies is also mentioned and identified in this chapter. Next, Chapter 3 discusses explicitly and in-depth the research methodology employed in this study. The chapter begins with an outline of a theoretical framework that combines the Taxonomy of Refusal by Beebe et al. (1990) and Al-Issa (2003) to explain the cultural contrastive elements, where the influence of social variables such as power, age, and relation distance is focused on to compare the cultures of the native speakers. This chapter also elaborates on the methodology, instruments, data collection, and procedures used in this study. Chapter 4 on the other hand, provides an analysis of the study in answer to the research questions mentioned in Chapter 1. The refusal strategies made by Malay and German participants are analysed and discussed explicitly using the Combined Taxonomy of Refusal by Beebe et al. (1990) and Al-Issa (2003). Lastly, a summary of the findings is given. Chapter 5 finally presents the final summary, judgment, and decisions reached through the reasoning of this cross-cultural pragmatic study, specifically the refusal speech act. This final chapter also provides recommendations for various target groups that may benefit from this study. Furthermore, suggestions are also made for future studies to ensure the continuance of Malay-German studies and to help new language and cultural learners to better understand both cultures.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the important aspects of this study. The background of the study was explained to provide insights into the nature of the issue being studied. This study may serve as a stepping-stone for future studies to more broadly investigate the refusal preferences between Malay and German, a language pair that has not received much attention in the literature. This study contributes to the field of cross-cultural pragmatics, as its findings can be used as a reference for future research especially those investigating refusal speech acts. Next, Chapter 2 discusses the related literature in the field of refusal, as well as issues of the current study.

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