

## A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF REFUSAL SPEECH ACTS IN “FAMILY·SPRING·AUTUMN”

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### Summary

The study of refusal speech acts has received widespread attention. It is a speech act of uncooperative response to a specific request (such as a request, suggestion, invitation, offering of help, etc.). As a face-threatening act, it is necessary to use appropriate strategies to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships when implementing it, especially in Chinese culture. Under the influence of Chinese traditional culture, there are certain particularities in implementing refusal speech acts. The paper uses the refusal speech acts collected in the novel trilogy “Family·Spring·Autumn” by the famous Chinese writer Ba Jin as the corpus. There are three types of refusal speech acts: direct, indirect, and strong, and a total of 21 refusal strategies. It was analyzed using document analysis and data analysis, combined with the characteristics of the social background of the feudal patriarchal system. Research on refusal speech acts is of great significance for better understanding the character of a nation and the particularities of an era.

**Key words:** face-threatening act, refusal strategy, Chinese culture, feudal patriarchal system, national character, era’s particularity.

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### 1. Introduction

“Refusal” is a speech act that is often encountered and used in daily life. When implementing the refusal speech acts, special attention needs to be paid to the strategies, because it is a face-threatening act, and it will hurt the other party’s face. Language is the carrier of culture, especially in different cultural backgrounds, customs, national characteristics, and values, which will impact their speech acts. In different cultures, there are various refusal speech acts and different refusal strategies. Therefore, to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships between the two parties and minimize the threat to the other party’s face, the study of the refusal speech act has important practical significance. Through data and text analysis combined with the specific characteristics of the era of the corpus, the paper presents the particularities of the Chinese refusal speech act. On the other hand, it also enriches the study in the field of refusal speech acts.

### 2. Theoretical background

#### 2.1 Refusal and refusal speech act

A.S. Hornby’s Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary states “refusal”: an act of saying or showing that you will not do, give or accept sth (A.S. Hornby, 2012:1280).

In “Modern Chinese Dictionary” (5th Edition), “Refusal” means “Do not accept (request, opinion or gift, etc.)” (2005:740).

Zhao Huaizhi: Refusal is a response behavior made by the speaker to deny the hearer’s suggestion to participate in a particular behavior (Zhao Huaizhi, 2009:193).

Wang Fenglan: To refuse means not to accept. In terms of language, refusal may mean not accepting other people’s suggestions, opinions or criticisms, or not accepting favors or gifts from others (Wang Fenglan, 2003:28).

Su Lijing: “Refusal” is a kind of “response negation”. The so-called “response negation” is a verbal reaction activity, which refers to the expression of negation, opposition, and disapproval in a broad sense of the opinions and attitudes expressed by the communicative party’s discourse content in communication. In a specific context, the communicator does not directly express this negative intention but in indirect ways (Su Lijing, 2005:1;4).

Feng Guiqin: “Refusal” is a process in which the subject does not accept the “benefit” or “loss” of the object in interpersonal communication, a kind of behavior, and the transmission of relevant information. At the same time, it is also a way for the subject to change the attitude, belief or behavior of the object by providing the object with an information source that reflects the subject’s “non-acceptance” idea, so that the information sender and the information receiver cooperate to establish a consensus (Feng Guiqin, 2006:13).

Ran Yongping: The speech act of “refusal” is a kind of “non-cooperative” choice made by the speaker after the request, invitation, or suggestion of the other party (Ran Yongping, 2006:93).

Luan Yimin: The refusal speech act is the speaker’s rejection of the listener’s command behavior (Luan Yimin, 2011:36).

Chang Shan: Refusal speech act refers to that in the process of verbal communication, the passive party uses words to deny the request, demand, arrangement, invitation, suggestion, etc. put forward by the active party that can affect his behavior. The speech act process is called the refusal speech act (Chang Shan, 2014:12).

In the thesis, the definition of the speech act of refusal is a speech act of uncooperative response to a specific request (such as request, suggestion, invitation, offering of help, etc.).

## 2.2 Face-threatening acts

According to Brown & Levinson, “Face” is the “listener’s public image” or “self-perception”. The universal feature of verbal communication is like this: the listener’s self-image must be respected, their feelings should be considered, and the acts that threaten the listener’s face (Face-threatening acts, FTAs) should be avoided. Therefore, when acts that threaten the listener’s face occur, the speaker must adopt some strategies to redress the listener’s face.

There are two types of face: positive face and negative face. A person’s positive face reflects his desire to be approved, respected, and appreciated by others. A person’s negative face reflects his desire not to be held back, not to have opinions imposed, or his desire to make free choices. Accordingly, the strategies can be divided into two categories: positive politeness strategies and negative politeness strategies. According to Yule, the positive politeness strategy emphasizes the close relationship between the speaker and the listener, so it is a solidarity strategy. The negative politeness strategy emphasizes the liberty of the listener, so it is a deference strategy (Yule, 1996:5;60).

Brown & Levinson listed 15 positive politeness strategies, such as “Noticing and attending to the hearer”, “Exaggerating”, “Intensifying Interest to Hearer” and “Seeking Agreement” etc. (Goody, 1978), which are mainly divided into three categories. The first category is to show that the speaker has common characteristics with the listener. The speaker indicates that he and the listener belong to the same category, having the same goals, values, or hobbies. The second

category shows that the speaker is willing to cooperate with the listener. The speaker indicates to the listener that he understands the mood, needs, and desires. Also he always declares his willingness to cooperate with the listener at the beginning. The third category is to meet the needs of the listener. The speaker can express liking, concern, understanding, and sympathy for the listener, or give the listener a chance to talk, which directly meets the listener's positive facial needs.

A negative politeness strategy is a deference strategy. When implementing a negative face strategy, the speaker considers the negative face needs of the listener, expresses that he is unwilling to force the other party, and respects the listener's autonomy. Brown & Levinson listed 10 negative face pragmatic strategies, such as "Be conventionally indirect", "Questioning and hedging", "Give deference", "Apologize" and "State the FTA as a general rule" etc. (Goody, 1978:103).

### 3. Previous researches

#### 3.1 Studies on the types of refusal speech acts

For the research on the types of refusal speech acts, different scholars have come up with different classifications from different perspectives.

Yan Xiaochun: According to subjective classification, refusals can be divided into strong refusals and tactful refusals; According to objective classification, it can be divided into direct refusals and indirect refusals (Yan Xiaochun, 2007).

Gao Xiao'an: Based on its division, classify refusal speech acts in modern Chinese: sincere refusal and false refusal. Sincere refusal follows Yan Xiaochun's classification, and false refusal is divided into three categories: procedural, purposeful, and joke (Gao Xiao'an, 2010:17).

Chang Shan: Due to the different classification standards: according to the content that the subject wants to refuse, it is divided into the refusal of requests, requirements, arrangements, suggestions, invitations, etc.; According to the way of refusal, it can be divided into direct refusal, indirect refusal, etc.; According to the tone of refusal, it can be divided into strong refusal and euphemistic refusal; According to whether the rejecter really wants to refuse, it can be divided into sincere refusal and false refusal (Chang Shan, 2014:12).

Wu Yan: Findings show that the refusal speech acts include direct refusal speech acts in incisive, self-abasement language and indirect refusal speech acts in self-deprecating, normative language (Wu Yan, 2015:319).

Ma Jing: From the analysis of the refusal content, it can be divided into direct refusal and indirect refusal objectively, and sincere refusal and false refusal; Analysis from the refusal form, it can be divided into assertion class, instruction class, promise class, statement class and declaration class (Ma Jing, 2020:9).

#### 3.2 Studies on the strategies of refusal speech acts

In recent years, many scholars have also done research and classifications on refusal strategies. Liao obtained 24 rejection strategies by calculating the average number of rejection strategies used by each survey subject: silence; hesitation; lack of enthusiasm; offering an alternative; postponement; blaming a third party or something over which you have no control; avoidance; general acceptance without giving details; divert and distract the addressee; general acceptance with excuse; saying what is offered or requested is inappropriate; external yes, internal no; statement of philosophy; direct no; excuse of explanation; complaining or appealing to feelings; rationale (Liao, 1996:703).

Ma Yuelan used pragmatic theory to summarize 11 refusal strategies through the inductive analysis of 5 refusal contexts, namely, avoidance strategy; diverting the requester's attention, deferring strategy; criticizing education strategy; suggesting strategy; false consent strategies; suggestive strategy; ambiguous expressions strategy; joke strategy; objective strategy; subjective strategy (*Ma Yuelan, 2000:46*).

## 4. Research methods and corpus introduction

### 4.1 Research methods

This article mainly adopts the method of literature analysis and data statistical analysis. Through specific literature analysis of the corpus "Family·Spring·Autumn", identifies, extracts, summarizes the refusal speech acts, and combines the cultural characteristics at that time to give analysis.

### 4.2 Corpus introduction

The novel trilogy "Family·Spring·Autumn" describes the life of the four generations of the Gao family, a feudal extended family, in a turbulent era from 1919 to 1924, a turning point in Chinese history. The author of the novel, Ba Jin, is known as one of the most influential writers in China since the "May 4<sup>th</sup>" New Culture Movement, an outstanding Chinese literary master in the 20th century, and a master of contemporary Chinese literature.

The novel describes the disintegration and decline of a feudal family, and the process of the young generation breaking through the shackles of the feudal patriarchal clan and leading to a new life. The social background of the novel is the era shrouded by the feudal patriarchal system. Throughout the novel, the fierce conflict between the collapsing feudal patriarchal system and the revolutionary trend among the younger generation runs through.

The feudal patriarchal system was established by Chinese feudal rulers to adjust the internal relationship of the family, ensure patriarchal rule and husband's authority, and maintain the feudal order. Under this system, there is a hierarchical system between family members. The upper has power and the lower obeys. Servants have the lowest status, especially servants with no rights and freedoms, and their masters control their fate.

To sum it up: First, the hierarchical structure within the feudal family is mainly based on seniority and ranking, with the elders respecting and the younger being inferior. Secondly, the status of men is higher than that of women. Wives should obey their husbands. Again, the husband has an official wife, and there are no restrictions on taking concubines. Concubine is not regarded as a member of the family. Correspondingly, the status of children born to concubines is much lower than that of formal wives. Finally, in feudal families, the more distant the relatives are, the lower the status; the closer the blood relationship, the greater the power.

## 5. The pragmatic analysis of refusal speech acts in "Family·Spring·Autumn"

### 5.1 Direct refusal speech acts

Direct refusal speech acts mean expressing the meaning of refusal unabashedly. The general form is negative form using negative words (no, not + verb, etc.).

[1] “你的事情我完全明白。事情已经到了这个地步，还有什么办法？...我劝你还是忘记的好。”“忘记？我永远不会忘记！”觉慧愤怒地答道，眼睛里闪着憎恨的光。

["I fully understand your matter. But it has reached this point, what else can you do?... I advise you to forget." "Forget? **I won't forget! never!**" Juehui replied angrily, with the light of hatred flashing in the eyes.]

Mingfeng's death made Juehui hate the family which was shrouded in the feudal system at that time even more. Juehui couldn't bear and accept the comforts and suggestions given by her elder brother Juemin. He couldn't forget Mingfeng's death, and couldn't forgive the feudal system at that time, so he used the sentence pattern of "I will not..." directly refused.

## 5.2 Indirect refusal speech acts

### 5.2.1 Explain the reason

[2] “三弟，走快点，”说话的是一个十八岁的青年，一手拿伞，...在后面走的弟弟是一个有同样身材、穿同样服装的青年。....“不要紧，就快到了。....二哥，今天的练习的成绩算你最好，英文说得自然，流利。你扮李医生，很不错。”

["Brother, hurry up," said an eighteen-year-old youth, holding an umbrella in one hand... The younger brother walking behind was a young man of the same build and wearing the same clothes... "It doesn't matter, **we'll be home soon...**brother, today's exercise is your best result, and you can speak English naturally and fluently. It's suitable for you to play Dr. Li."]

The elder brother Juemin urged his younger brother Juehui to hurry home. But Juehui expressed his attitude with "It doesn't matter." Then he explained the reason that they would be home soon."

### 5.2.2 Give alternative suggestions

[3] 淑英把两道细眉微微一皱，推辞说“怎么喊我去打？为什么不请三太太打？”

[Shuying slightly frowned her slender eyebrows, and declined, "Why asked me to do it?

**Why not ask Mrs. Zhang to play the cards?" ]**

Shuying hated playing cards, so she didn't want to participate. After hearing the invitation, she suggested inviting Mrs. Zhang to participate.

### 5.2.3 Use polite expressions

[4] 觉民仿佛觉得一些悲痛的情感在他的身体内奔腾。....他痛苦地、但是依旧坚定地答道：“大哥，我懂你这番好意。我对你只有感激。但是我不能够答应你。我要走我自己的路。我当然比你更了解我自己。我们在思想上差得远，你不会了解我。”

[...Juemin replied painfully but still firmly: "Brother, **I understand your kindness. I can only be grateful to you.** But I can't promise you. I want to go my own way. I certainly know myself better than you do. We are so far apart in thought that you will not understand me."]

Juemin could not heed the dissuasion of his elder brother Juemin, and he would continue to run a newspaper even if it was dangerous. He would contribute to the spread of new ideas and enlighten the people's minds. While refusing, he is grateful to his elder brother for caring about him.

### 5.2.4 Make requests

[5] “太太，我宁愿受冻挨饿，我不情愿给人家做小....”鸣凤吐出了这句以后，觉得自己的全身的力量都用尽了，她站不住，跪下来，抓着周氏的膝头哀求道：“太太，请你不要把我送走，我愿意在公馆里做一辈子的丫头。我愿意服侍你一辈子。....太太，可怜我，年纪轻轻！....你打我、骂我都可以，只是不要把我送到冯家去。....我怕，我怕过那种日子。....太太，请你发点慈悲，可怜可怜我罢。....太太，我不能去啊！”....

["Madam, I'd rather be cold and hungry than be someone else's concubine..." After Mingfeng uttered this sentence, she felt that all the strength in her body was exhausted, and she couldn't stand and knelt. She grabbed her master's knee and begged: "**Madam, please don't send me away.** I am willing to be a maid here for the rest of my life. I am willing to serve you for the rest of my life...**Madam, please pity me,** I'm too young!... You can beat me and scold me, but **please don't send me to Feng's house...** I'm so scared, I'm terrified of living

that kind of life... **Madam, please show some mercy and pity me... Madam, please don't let me go!**"...]

Maid Mingfeng will be given to Mr. Feng (a man who can be as old as Mingfeng's grandfather) as a concubine. Due to her status as a maid, though she is unwilling to accept such a fate, the only thing she can do is to beg her master to be merciful and not give her away.

### 5.2.5 Make excuses

[6] 淑华看觉民一眼。觉民丝毫不动声色安静地答道：“翠环，你回去说我现在要预备功课，没有空，三老爷有话，请他告诉大少爷好了。”

[Shuhua glanced at Juemin. Juemin replied calmly, “Cuihuan, you go back and say that **I have to prepare my homework now, I don't have time.** If uncle has something to say, please tell my elder brother.”]

Faced with his uncle's invitation, as a nephew, Juemin could not refuse directly, so he indirectly refused the meeting. He took the excuse that he needed to prepare homework and had no time.

### 5.2.6 Make postponements

[7] “这倒不要紧，我也晓得办这件事情要费很多时间。不过家舅还有点小事情要请表妹夫过去谈谈，”觉新温和地说。“我想改天再到岳父那边去。今天来不及了。家严要我出来办一件要紧事，”国光连忙推辞道，他不愿意到周家去。

[“It doesn't matter. I also know that it will take a lot of time to do it. But my uncle still has something that needs to talk with you,” Juexin said gently. “**I would like to go to my father-in-law another day.** It's too late today. My father wants me to deal with something important now,” Guoguang declined, for he didn't want to go to Zhou's house.]

Guoguang didn't want to meet his father-in-law to talk about dealing with his wife's funeral. He didn't value his wife very much and didn't want to bury her according to the standard etiquette. Therefore, he took the strategy of procrastinating time to save himself from the current situation.

### 5.2.7 Play jokes

[8] 众人笑了起来，琴红着脸笑骂道：“死丫头，你也来打趣我。我回头告诉你们太太去。”

[Everyone laughed. Qin blushed and scolded with a smile: “**Bad girl**, you also with the others to make fun of me! **I will tell your master later (to punish you).**”]

Qin wasn't mad here but just joked about going to the maid's master to complain. She didn't mean to do it. She just used the strategy to refuse to talk about her future marriage in public.

### 5.2.8 Make hypotheses

[9] “我看你最好还是把二哥劝回来，不然这门亲事将来会落到你身上。”觉新看见觉慧不表示意见，便拿这样的话打动觉慧的心。“如果爷爷真有这个意思，就让他做罢，他总有一天会后悔的。我不怕，我有更好的办法！”觉慧骄傲地说。

[“I think you'd better persuade your brother Juemin to come back. Otherwise, this marriage will fall on you in the future.” Juexin saw that Juehui didn't express any opinion, so he used such words to disturb Juehui's mind. “**If Grandpa wants to, then let him do it. He will regret it one day.** I'm not afraid! I have a better way!” Juehui said proudly.]

Regarding the fact that marriage must be arranged by the uppers(elders) in that era, Juemin resisted this by running away from home. His younger brother Juehui supported him and refused to disclose his whereabouts. Juehui announced that even in the worst-case scenario, he would not betray his elder brother Juemin.

### 5.2.9 Affirm first, then refuse

[10] “你回屋去罢，”周伯涛嫌弃地挥手说：“你每次到我房间里来，不是做怪相，就是发怪声音。真是没有长进，教不改的。”...不平和怜悯激起了觉新的反感。他又鼓起勇气对周伯涛说：“大舅的话自然有理。不过据我看，枚表弟的身体太坏，又有那些病象。最好还是请个医生来看看。...”

["Go back to the room." Zhou Botao waved his hands disgustedly and said, "Every time you come to my room, you either make weird faces or weird noises. You haven't changed at all."... The injustice and pity aroused Juexin's resentment. He plucked up his courage and said to his uncle Zhou Botao: "**Uncle's words are certainly reasonable. However, in my opinion,** my cousin's health is too bad, and he has those symptoms. It's better to ask a doctor to see him...""]

Juexin adopted the method of affirming his uncle's words first and then putting forward his opinion. In this way, carrying out an indirect refusal speech act can make it easier for the other party to accept it.

### 5.2.10 Change the subject

[11]国光的那颗犯了罪似的心经不起这些话的围攻，他快要屈服了。但是他仍然努力作最后的挣扎，他还想到一个注意，又逃遁地说：“这是家严的意思，我做不了主，等我回去禀回家严，再来会话。”

[Guoguang's sinful heart could not stand the siege of these words, and he was about to succumb. But he still tried his best to make the last struggle. He still thought of an idea and said evasively: "**This is what my father wanted. I can't make the decision. I will talk to my father and then come back to continue the discussion.**""]

Guoguang wanted to refuse to commit to burying his wife but knew it was unreasonable, so he changed the subject to his absent father.

### 5.2.11 Express regrets

[12]“大表哥，你这样敷衍下去，自己太痛苦了。你应该想点别的办法，”琴怜悯地劝道。“别的办法？”觉新痛苦地念道。他好像不了解这句话的意义似的。接着他又说：“琴妹，你应该了解我的处境，你看我能够做什么呢？”

["Brother, it's too painful for you to be perfunctory like this. You should think of something else," Qin advised sympathetically. "Any other way?" Juexin said in pain. He seemed not understand the meaning of the sentence. Then he said: "**Sister, you should understand my situation. What do you think I can do?**""]

Juexin refused Qin's advice by expressing the regrets that he is incapable of everything around him. He suffered a lot because of the death of his wife and children, so he instinctively refused other people's proposals, even well-intentioned ones.

### 5.2.12 Express dissatisfaction

[13]“这不好，蕙儿究竟是郑家的人，应该由郑家作主，我们不便多管，”周伯涛在旁边沉吟地说。“呸！亏得你说这种话！”陈氏听见她丈夫还在一边冷言冷语，她又气又急，也不顾旁边有客人便啐了一口，接着带着哭地骂起来：“蕙儿是我生的，我养大的，难道我管不得？我就该眼睁睁看着她死？我晓得你的脾气，你是多一事不如少一事，你害怕麻烦。我不会来找你的。我就没有见过像你这样不近人情的父亲。”

["This is not good. After all, Hui is a member of the Zheng family, and the Zheng family should make the decision. It is inconvenient for us to take care of it," Zhou Botao said thoughtfully beside her. "**Bah! How dare you say such things!**" When Chen heard that her husband was still talking indifferently, she was angry and anxious, ignoring the guests beside her. She spat and cursed with tears: "**Hui is my daughter. She was born and raised by me. Don't I have some right to deal with this? Should I watch her die? I know your temper**""]

**that you are afraid of trouble. I won't count on you. I have never seen a father as cold-blooded as you.”]**

As a follower of feudal ethics, Zhou Botao held that “the married daughter no longer belongs to her own family but a member of her husband’s family”. Therefore, he thought that his sick daughter’s fate should be decided by his son-in-law. Mrs. Chen refused her husband’s suggestion by expressing dissatisfaction.

### 5.2.13 State negative consequences

[15] 翠环听见淑英说要到花园里去玩，心里很高兴，马上悄悄地带笑说：“那么，我去打个灯笼来。”“你不要回去，怕惊动了老爷、太太反而不好，”淑英连忙阻止道。“我们就这样走。横竖有月亮，我们也看得见路，”她说说着就挽起琴的膀子向前走了。翠环高兴地跟在后面。

[Cuihuan was very happy when she heard Shuying say that she wanted to play in the garden, and immediately said with a smile, “I’ll go back and get a lantern.” **“Don’t go back. I’m afraid it will cause trouble if you disturb my uncle and aunt,”** Shuying hurriedly stopped. “Let’s just walk. There’s a moon tonight anyway. We can see the road,” she said, taking Qin’s arm and walking forward. Cuihuan happily followed behind.]

Shuying refused Cuihuan’s proposal to go back to get the lantern, she stated that taking the lantern would have the negative consequences of disturbing the elders late at night.

### 5.2.14 Express one’s own opinion

[16]“你不要就得意。你爱管他的事情，你将来总会吃亏的。我劝你还是少管闲事的好，”觉新担心地说。“我碰到这种事情，我不管就不痛快。我不像你，我不能够把任何一件事情闷在心里头，”淑华毫不在意地答道。

[“Don’t be complacent. If you like to meddle in his affairs, you will suffer in the future. I advise you to keep your meddling in mind,” Juexin said worriedly. **“When I encounter this kind of thing, I have to deal with it, otherwise I will feel uncomfortable. Unlike you, I can’t keep anything in my heart in silence,”** Shuhua replied indifferently.]

Shuying is brave and upright. She always dares to stand up and express her views without being bound by the old feudal etiquette.

### 5.2.15 Tell principles

[17]“妈，如今时代不同了，跟那时候已经隔了二十几年！世界是一天一天地变新的。男女都是一样的人，为什么我不可以和男同学一个学堂读书？……”

[“**Mom, the times are different now, and it has been more than twenty years since then! The world is changing day by day. Men and women are the same people, they are equal.** Why can’t I study in the same school as my male classmates?...”]

In the old feudal system, girls were not allowed to leave the yard until they got married and did not need to learn knowledge, they were only responsible for housework. Here Qin was talking to her mother about the principle of “gender equality” to refuse her mother’s suggestion of stay at home.

### 5.2.16 Quote idioms

[18]“我偏要管！你不要凶，豆芽哪怕长得比天高，总是一颗小菜！”王氏顿着脚回骂道。

[“I do want to take care of it! Don’t be fierce, **even if the bean sprouts grow taller than the sky, they are still a side dish!**” Wang scolded back, stamping her feet.]

Mrs. Wang refused the other party’s request that she should step back and not interfere in this matter. She quoted an idiom to despise the other party, using bean sprouts as a metaphor for the other party, which means nobody.



### 5.3 Strong refusal speech acts

#### 5.3.1 Use rhetorical question

[20]“四弟，你放了它吧。人家好好的飞着，你为什么一定要把它捉来关起？”淑英不愉快地对觉英说。“那不行。这样好的鸽子，哪个舍得放走！”觉英固执地答道。

[“Brother, let it go. He is flying well, why do you have to catch it and lock it up?” Shuying said to Jueying unhappily. “That’s not right. Such a good pigeon, **who is willing to let go!**” Jueying replied stubbornly.]

In Chinese, rhetorical questions do not require the addressee to answer. It has a negative meaning. Jueying refused to accept her sister’s suggestion to let the pigeon go. The rhetorical question does not mean to get an answer from the sister but expresses the refusal.

#### 5.3.2 To satirize

[21] 周伯涛忽然抚摸着自已的八字须轻蔑地哂笑了两三声。他固执地说：“明轩，你也太热心了。难道我还不清楚枚娃子的事情？古人说：‘知子莫如父。’这句名言你未必就忘记了？我是枚娃子的父亲，我岂有不关心他的身体、让他有病不医的道理？……”

[Zhou Botao suddenly stroked his mustache and smiled contemptuously. He said stubbornly: “**Mingxuan, you are so warm-hearted.** Don’t I know about Meiwazi? There is an old saying: ‘No one knows a child better than a father.’ You may have forgotten this famous saying. I am Meiwazi’s father. Is there any reason why I don’t care about his body and let him refuse to heal his illness? ...] ”

Zhou Botao said that Juexin is a warm-hearted person, but he satirized Juexin for meddling in his own business and refused Juexin’s suggestion to let Meiwazi see a doctor for a physical examination.

#### 5.3.3 To blame

[22]“你说的太过火了。这跟同情心有什么关系？五舅他们得到了满足，玩龙灯的人得到了赏钱。各人得到了自己所需要的东西。这还不好吗？”琴发表她的见解道。

[“**You speak too seriously. What does this have to do with sympathy?** Uncle and the others are satisfied, and those who play dragon lanterns are rewarded. Everyone gets what they need. Isn’t that good enough?” Qin posted her opinion.]

Qin refused Juehui’s suggestion that he disapproved of the entertainment of Dragon Lantern. Qin blamed Jue Hui for being too serious and harsh on this entertainment.

#### 5.3.4 To scold

[23] 周老太太气冲冲地望着周伯涛骂道：“我还没有死！这些事没有你管的！你给我马上滚开！”她停了一下，看见周伯涛还没有走，又骂道：“我不要你在我屋里。我给你说，从今天起，蕙儿的事情，不准你开一句腔！你再出什么主张，不管你的儿子有那么大了，我也要打烂你的嘴巴！这好多年我也受够你的气了。你不要以为我还会让你再这样胡闹下去。不是你，蕙儿哪儿会死得那样惨！”

[The old lady Zhou looked at her son Zhou Botao angrily and scolded: “**I’m not dead yet! These things have nothing to do with you! Get out of here immediately!**” She stopped for a while, and seeing that Zhou Botao hadn’t left, she scolded again: “**I don’t want you in my room. Let me tell you that from today on, you are not allowed to say anything about Hui! If you dare make any other suggestions, I will smash your mouth no matter how old you are! I’ve had enough of being mad at you for years. Don’t think that I will let you go on fooling around like this. If it wasn’t for you, Hui would not have died so miserably!**”]

The old lady Zhou refused the suggestion from her son Zhou Botao by scolding him for being a cold-blooded father who was responsible for Hui’s death.

### 5.3.5 To order

[25]“我看妈生气也没有用。妈最好再耐心等一等。其实蕙儿死后还不到一年，时间并不久，”周伯涛固执地说。“你给我出去！我不要听你这些话！”周老太太对周伯涛挥手说。但他并不马上走出房去。

“I think it doesn't help to be angry. Mom, you'd better wait patiently. It's not been long since Hui died,” Zhou Botao said stubbornly. “**Get out!** I don't want to hear your voice!” The old lady Zhou waved to her son Zhou Botao. But he didn't leave the room right away.]

The old lady Zhou refused to take the terrible suggestion to be patient and wait to bury Hui shortly, she ordered her son to get out of the room angrily.

## 6. The data analysis of refusal speech acts strategies in corpus of “Family·Spring·Autumn”

### 6.1 The analysis of refusal speech acts' frequency usage by refusal content

In the thesis, refusal speech acts are divided into four categories according to the content of refusal: refusal to suggest, refusal to request, refusal to invitation, and refusal to offer. According to statistics, there were 418 cases of refusal speech acts in the research corpus “Family·Spring·Autumn”, including 266 cases of refusal to suggest, 121 cases of refusal to request, 16 cases of refusal to offer, 15 cases of refusal to the invitation, accounting for 63.64%, 28.95%, 3.83%, and 3.59% of the total respectively.

It shows that the refusal of the suggestion occupies the highest frequency, followed by the refusal of the request, then the refusal of the offer, and the least is the refusal of the invitation. The number of refused speech acts to suggestion exceeds half of the total, accounting for 63.64%. So it can be said that refusal to suggest is the most important refusal speech act here.

### 6.2 The analysis of the refusal strategy's frequency usage

#### 6.2.1 Refusal strategy's frequency usage in general

According to comprehensive statistics, the total number of refusal strategies used in the research corpus “Family·Spring·Autumn” is 1081 of 21 strategies. And the statistics of each strategy are as follows (Table 1).

Table 1

The frequency of refusal speech act strategies

| Types of refusal speech acts | Frequency (times) | The proportion of the total frequency (%) | Refusal speech acts strategies | Frequency (times) | The proportion of the total frequency (%) |
|------------------------------|-------------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| 1                            | 2                 | 3   | 4                              | 5                 | 6   |
| Direct refusal speech acts   | 171               | 15.82                                     |                                |                   |   |
| Strong refusal speech acts   | 225               | 20.81                                     | Use rhetorical question        | 98                | 9.07                                      |
|                              |                   |   | To satirize                    | 17                | 1.57                                      |
|                              |                   |   | To blame                       | 39                | 3.61                                      |
|                              |                   |   | To order                       | 40                | 3.7                                       |
|                              |                   |   | To scold                       | 31                | 2.87                                      |

Table 1 (Continued)

| 1                            | 2   | 3     | 4                            | 5   | 6     |
|------------------------------|-----|-------|------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Indirect refusal speech acts | 685 | 63.37 | Explain reasons              | 162 | 14.99 |
|                              |     |       | Give alternative suggestions | 59  | 5.46  |
|                              |     |       | Use polite expressions       | 21  | 1.94  |
|                              |     |       | Make requests                | 25  | 2.31  |
|                              |     |       | Make excuses                 | 9   | 0.83  |
|                              |     |       | Make postponement            | 11  | 1.02  |
|                              |     |       | Play jokes                   | 12  | 1.11  |
|                              |     |       | Make hypotheses              | 46  | 4.26  |
|                              |     |       | Affirm first, then refuse    | 22  | 2.04  |
|                              |     |       | Change the subject           | 72  | 6.66  |
|                              |     |       | Express regrets              | 24  | 2.22  |
|                              |     |       | Express dissatisfaction      | 62  | 5.74  |
|                              |     |       | State negative consequences  | 72  | 6.66  |
|                              |     |       | Express one's own opinion    | 65  | 6.01  |
|                              |     |       | Tell principles              | 21  | 1.94  |
| Quote idioms                 | 2   | 0.19  |                              |     |       |

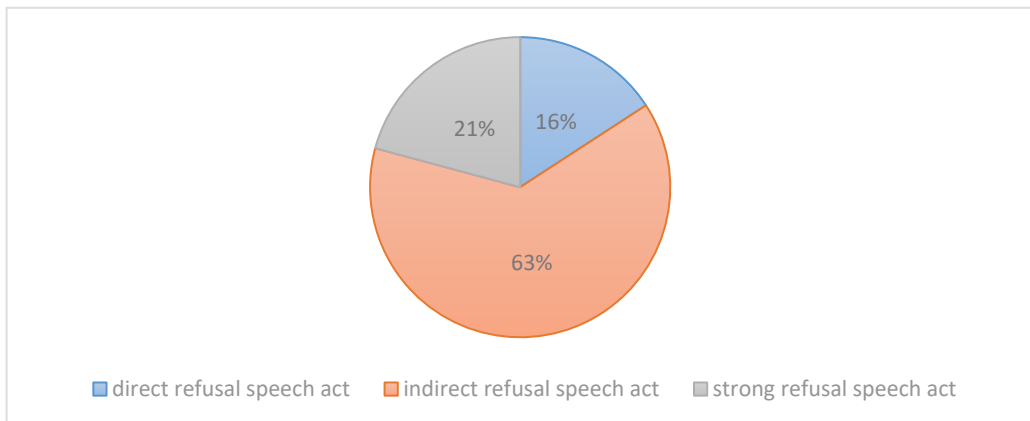


Fig. 1. The chart of refusal speech acts

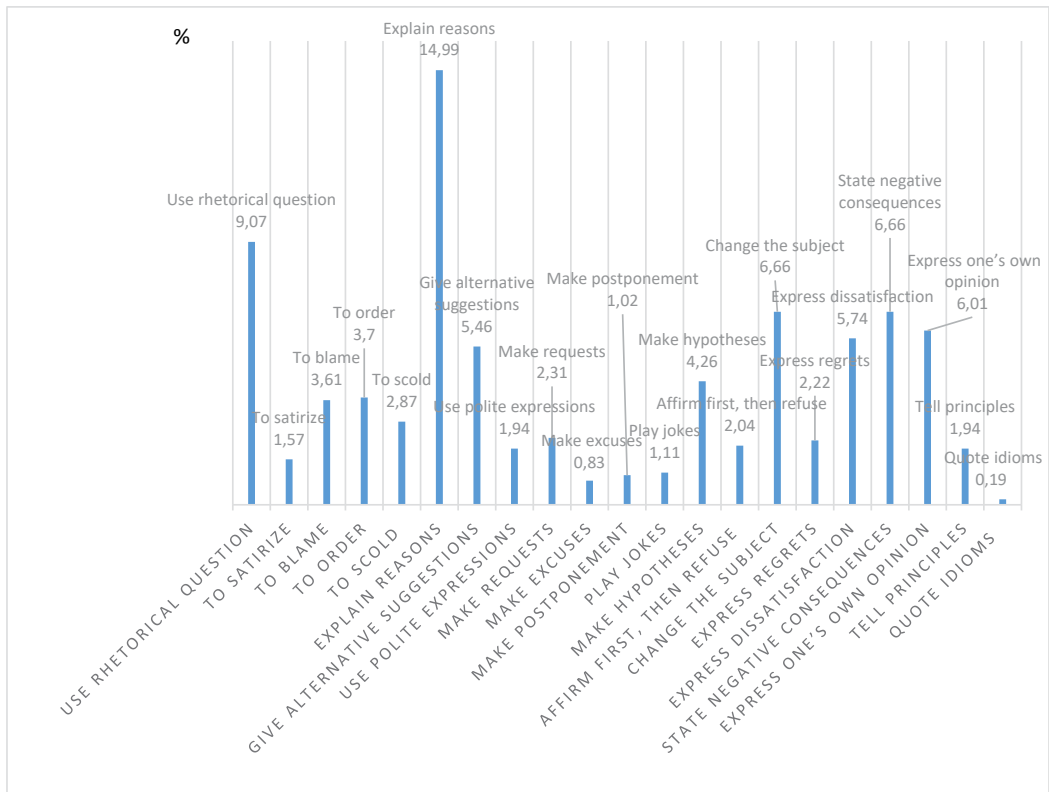
According to statistics, the frequency of indirect refusal strategies is much higher than that of direct refusal, which is consistent with the general research results that the Chinese are more inclined to use indirect refusal speech acts. Many comparative research results between

China and other countries show that people in Western countries often use direct refusal speech acts, which has a great relationship with their own national culture and values. China is a typical collectively oriented Eastern country, while Western countries are individually oriented type.

In addition, China is deeply influenced by Confucianism, a social culture that advocates humility and courtesy, and a reserved and introverted national character determines the strategies of direct refusal with great threats to face. Therefore, more attention should be paid to indirect expressions and pragmatic strategies when implementing the refusal speech acts to reduce the degree of threats to the other party’s face and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships.

It should be noted that the proportion of the strong refusal speech acts in the collected corpus is also higher than the direct refusal speech acts. However, theoretically, its usage frequency should not be higher, because it is more threatening to face. After analysis, it is believed that in the social background of the feudal patriarchal system, people with high status are more inclined to use strong refusal speech acts. In addition, no matter how impolite the way is, the people with low status will not feel face-threatened but will take it as a normal phenomenon.

**6.2.2 Refusal strategy’s frequency usage in specific**



**Fig. 2. The chart of refusal speech act strategies**

After processing the statistics on the specific strategies of indirect and strong refusal speech acts, their percentages are in the chart above. Overall, the usage frequency from high to low is: Explain reasons (14.99%), Use rhetorical question (9.07%), Change the subject (6.66%),

State negative consequences (6.66%), Express one’s own opinion (6.01%), Express dissatisfaction (5.74%), Give alternative suggestions (5.46%), Make hypotheses (4.26%), To order (3.7%), To blame (3.61%), To scold (2.87%), Make requests (2.31%), Express regrets (2.22%), Affirm first then refuse (2.04%), Use polite expressions (1.94%), Tell principles (1.94%), To satirize (1.57%), Play jokes (1.11%), Make postponement (1.02%), Make excuses (0.83%), Quote idioms (0.19%).

**In the aspect of indirect refusal speech acts**, the frequency of each strategy is sorted from high to low as follows: Explain reasons (14.99%), Change the subject (6.66%), State negative consequences (6.66%), Express one’s own opinion (6.01%), Express dissatisfaction (5.74%), Give alternative suggestions (5.46%), Make hypotheses (4.26%), Make requests (2.31%), Express regrets (2.22%), Affirm first then refuse (2.04%), Use polite expressions (1.94%), Tell principles (1.94%), Play jokes (1.11%), Make postponement (1.02%), Make excuses (0.83%), and Quote idioms (0.19%).

**In the aspect of strong refusal speech acts**, the frequency of each strategy is sorted from high to low as follows: Use rhetorical question (9.07%), To order (3.7%), To blame (3.61%), To scold (2.87%), To satirize (1.57%).

**6.2.3 Refusal strategy’s frequency usage combines hierarchical relationship**

Considering the conflict and compromise between the old and new systems under that era’s background, the hierarchical “upper to lower” relationship is categorized mainly according to the relationship between the elder and younger generations, between master and servant, and between some social relations(for example, warlord and students). The hierarchical relationship between peer relatives and classmates is taken as “equal”.

The thesis combines the hierarchical relationship to analyze the top three frequently used strategies in different refusal types, and the statistical results are in the table 2.

Table 2

**The frequency of refusal speech act strategies according to hierarchy**

| Refusal speech act types ( strategies ) |                             | Hierarchy      |       |                |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|
|   |                             | Lower to upper | Equal | Upper to lower |
| Direct refusal speech acts              |                             | 34             | 111   | 26             |
| Indirect refusal speech acts            | Explain reasons             | 27             | 109   | 26             |
|   | Change the subject          | 15             | 47    | 10             |
|   | State negative consequences | 20             | 41    | 11             |
|   | Express one’s own opinion   | 8              | 50    | 8              |
| Strong refusal speech acts              | Use rhetorical question     | 13             | 72    | 13             |
|   | To order                    | 16             | 19    | 5              |
|   | To blame                    | 6              | 33    | 0              |

The strategy usage frequency of the three types of refusal speech acts in the “equal” relationship is much higher than that of the other two hierarchical relationships. It is considered that, firstly, because in an equal relationship, the speech acts of Suggestion, Request, Invitation,

and Offer will occur more, so there will be more opportunities for implementing refusal speech acts. Secondly, it is relatively easy to implement the speech act of refusal among equal relationships. When choosing a refusal strategy, it will be freer and more diverse than in the other two hierarchical relationships, so the total frequency usage of the strategies will be higher than that in the other two hierarchical relationships.

In particular, the relationship of “lower to upper” had the fewest occasions to make suggestions, invite, and provide help, etc., so the frequency of refusal was the least among the three relationships. The lower belongs to the passive acceptance position, even if facing unreasonable matters, they tend to adopt a submissive attitude. It is also worth noting that in the corpus, strong refusal speech acts among peers occur frequently. This is due to the fierce conflict between the different views among peers with the resistance of the new trend of thought in pursuit of equality and freedom.

Except for the usage frequency of “Expressing one’s won opinion” and “Use rhetorical question”, the other four strategies are more adopted in the hierarchical relationship of “upper to lower” than that of “lower to upper” (“Change the subject”, “State negative consequences”, “To order”, and “To blame”).

As for the strategy of “Changing the subject”, there is a higher frequency in the hierarchical relationship “upper to lower”. This is because the upper have the right to speak and are free to change the topic, while the lower is more passive in controlling it. Also, it is impolite to interrupt and change the topic of the upper during the communication, so it is mostly only found in very close relationships, such as “mother and daughter” or just used to comfort the upper to divert their attention from some negative emotions.

As for the strategies of “State negative consequences”, “To order” and “To blame” of the higher frequency in the relationship “upper to lower” are two to three times that of ones in “lower to upper” relationship.

“State negative consequences” is a common remark used by the upper with their sense of superiority. Discourage these behaviors of the lower by foreseeing the negative consequences that will be produced, to some extent, to show their own senior life experience and foresight wisdom.

“To order” is a common speech act of the “upper to lower” relationship. Under the cover of the feudal patriarchal system, the sense of hierarchy in society or family has deepened. The upper do not need to consider maintaining a harmonious relationship with the lower, and the lower also regards it as a normal social rule. Therefore, the strategy of “To order” is often adopted by the upper. There is a noticeable point, which is a few cases were found in the “lower to upper” relationship. Through analysis, they occur between students and warlords at the social level, rather than in family relationships. Commanding discourse emerges as students demonstrate and demand the release of arrested patriotic students.

The usage frequency of the strategy “To blame” of the “lower to upper” relationship is zero. In the cultural background at that time, it was difficult for the lower to blame the upper, and it was even more impossible for a servant to blame their master. For example, maid Ming-feng, a very young girl, faced the fact that she was given to an 80-year-old man as a concubine. Faced with such a cruel situation, she just begged instead of blaming or implementing other strong refusal speech acts.

The usage frequency of “Expressing one’s own opinion” and “Using rhetorical questions” in the two types of hierarchical relationships is the same and less than the other strategies of indirect refusal speech acts. After analysis, the reason why there is less “Expression of opinions” of “upper to lower” relationship is that because the upper (mostly refers to the older

generation in the corpus) accepts the old concepts of ethics, they don't have many new insights of their own. When they encounter problems, they follow the scriptures. Everything is done according to the items listed in the ancient books, and they have no thoughts of their own. In the "lower to upper" relationship, because the lower (mostly refers to young generation in the corpus) have begun to receive modern education and are enlightened by new trends of thought, they are good at thinking about things and try to dare to express their views that are contrary to the old ethics. Therefore, there appear few strategies for the "Expression of opinions".

In Chinese, there are two types of interrogative sentences, "A question that asks questions when there is doubt is called an interrogative sentence, and a question that asks questions without doubt is called a rhetorical question" (*Huang Borong, Liao Xudong, 2002:112*). The strategy of "Use rhetorical questions" is very common in strong refusal in Chinese, which does not require an answer from the addressee and indicates the negation. Therefore, its usage frequency is relatively high in all three hierarchical relationships.

## 7. Conclusions

Through statistics and pragmatic analysis of the corpus, the thesis found that:

Firstly, it is consistent with the general research findings that indirect refusal speech acts are often adopted in Chinese to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships;

Secondly, in the social background of the feudal, patriarchal system, the upper are more inclined to use strong rejection, and they do not need to use strategies to maintain a harmonious relationship with the lower, and the lower also habitually passively accepts this a social rule. No matter how impolite the way is, the lower will not feel the threat of face;

Thirdly, compared with refusal speech acts of the other two hierarchical relationships, the refusal speech acts of an "equal" relationship are more likely to occur, and the choice of strategies is more diverse;

Finally, As for the strategies of strong refusal speech acts, "Use rhetorical questions" and "To blame" appear at the family level of three hierarchical relationships. Because "Use rhetorical questions" is a common strategy in Chinese, it generally occupies a high frequency. The strategy of "To order" of the "upper to lower" hierarchical relationship occurs at the family level but only occurs at the social level of the "lower to upper" hierarchical relationship. In addition, the usage frequency of "To blame" is zero of the "lower to upper" hierarchical relationship, which typically reflects the cultural characteristics of the feudal patriarchal system at the time.

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