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# Offer Refusals in L2 French

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## Abstract

This study examines the production of offer refusals in native and non-native French. Data were obtained through written discourse completion tasks by a group of Canadian learners of French as a second language, a group of L1 French speakers, and a group of English native speakers. The aim was to compare offer refusal strategies in French L1, French L2, and English L1 and to locate traces of pragmatic transfer in L2 French refusal behavior. Significant differences were found between the French L1 speakers and the French L2 learners with respect to the use of direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjuncts to refusals. For instance, it was found that the French L2 learners use a very limited repertoire of linguistic realizations to express the inability to accept offers. At the level of indirect refusals, the results reveal some similarities between the L2 French learners, the L1 French speakers, and the L1 English speakers: the three groups use reasons more often than any other strategy in their refusal utterances. Differences emerge, however, in the linguistic realization of this pragmatic category. Implications of the findings for L2 French pedagogy were also discussed.

**Keywords:** interlanguage pragmatics, offer refusals, L2 French, variation, canadian context

## 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on strategies used by a group of Canadian university students to decline offers in French as a second language. Three groups of participants were involved in the study: 19 French L1 speakers, 12 French L2 speakers/learners, and 32 English L1 speakers. The analysis aimed at comparing the strategies used by French L2 learners with those employed by French L1 speakers and English L1 speakers. The study also examines traces of pragmatic transfers, that is, the impact of the source language of the learners (English) on the refusal patterns produced by the French learners. The chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical background, in which the speech act of refusing is defined and a brief literature review is presented. The methodology is outlined in Section 3, and the findings are presented and discussed in Section 4. The chapter concludes with remarks and perspectives for future research.

## 2. Theoretical background

A speaker may produce a refusal to express his/her will not “to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor” ([1], p. 121). Refusals are usually negative responses to requests, invitations, offers, suggestions. A refusal represents a high degree of threat to the hearer’s face and to social harmony. Refusals can be realized

in many different ways, depending on the language or cultural setting in which the exchange occurs and on whether the speaker intends to achieve a harmonious or conflictive outcome of the verbal exchange. Refusals may appear as single acts/moves (e.g., single direct refusals (*I cannot, I am unable to; no*) or single indirect refusals such as justifications (*I am very busy*), promises (*next time, etc.*) or as multiple moves consisting of head acts (*no I cannot. I am very busy; I am sorry I cannot make it*), or head acts and supportive acts that come before or after the head act (*thanks for the offer but I cannot accept it*). In short, refusals may be described as single speech acts or as speech act sets or communicative acts (cf. [2]). Given the real danger of face threat inherent in refusals, language users are expected to be very cautious in the choice of linguistic realization patterns of refusals. In second language acquisition, this expectation seems even more problematic for the L2 speaker.

A number of interesting studies have been carried out on refusals, from a cross-cultural pragmatic (cf. [3]) or interlanguage pragmatic perspective (cf. [4–6] for a discussion of previous studies on refusals). Studies on refusals from a variational pragmatic perspective include Ren's [7] comparative study of refusals in Mainland and Taiwan Chinese and Mulo Farenkia's [8] comparative study of invitation refusals in Hexagonal (France) French and Cameroon French.

Whereas a considerable body of research in second language acquisition has focused on various speech acts and target languages (cf. [3], pp. 44–55), there are very few studies on refusals in L2 French. These include Bakkum's [9] analysis of request and suggestion refusals by Dutch advanced French learners. It is important to note that the production of other speech acts in French L2 has been the focus of several studies. These include Kraft and Geluykens' [10] analysis of complaint strategies in L2 French by German learners of French, Schaeffer's [11] analysis of complaints in L2 French by English-speaking learners, Mulo Farenkia's [12] study of compliments in L2 French by English-speaking Canadian learners of French, Warga's work [13] on requests in L2 French by Austrian learners of French, and Warga and Schölmberger's [14] study of apologies by Austrian learners of French in a study abroad situation. The present study of offer refusals adds to this growing body of research on how learners become proficient in the pragmatics of French.

Our study is situated within the framework of interlanguage pragmatics, that is, the study of "how non-native-speaking (...) learners of a language acquire pragmatic competence in their target language" ([15], p. 261). Our goal is to examine how a group of Canadian students who are native speakers of English produce offer refusals in French, their target language. Acquiring an appropriate refusal behavior in L2 French learning is considered as a part of the general goal of L2 French learners, which is to be able to communicate effectively in an "L2-speaking environment where the learner's target linguistic behavior is, ultimately, that of the [native speaker]" ([15], p. 261).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

A total of 63 students participated in the present study: 19 French L1 speakers (native speakers of French), 3 males and 16 females, aged between 18 and 23, University students in Toulouse (France); 12 intermediate French learners at Cape Breton University (Canada), three males and nine females, aged between 20 and 25, and native speakers of Canadian English; and 32 English L1 speakers, first and second year students at Cape Breton University, 16 females and 16 males, aged between 18 and 23, and native speakers of Canadian English.

### 3.2 Instrument

A discourse completion task questionnaire (see [16]) consisting of many different situations was employed to elicit refusals from the three groups of participants. The questionnaire comprised many situations in which the participants were asked to produce speech acts. Data were collected in Toulouse, France, in 2014 and in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada, in 2016. The French version of the DCT questionnaire was distributed to the L1 French respondents and the L2 French learners, while the English version of the questionnaire was distributed to the L1 English informants. Three of these situations elicited offer refusals, the focus of the present study. The three scenarios employed were described as follows:

**a. Situation 1:** *financial assistance from a friend*

*Vous avez quelques difficultés financières ces derniers temps et l'un(e) de vos ami(e) se propose de vous prêter deux mille francs, que vous rembourserez quand vous pourrez. Vous voulez décliner l'offre. Vous lui dites.*

“You are in a difficult financial situation and your friend offers to lend you some money. You want to decline the offer. You say to him/her.”

**b. Situation 2:** *ride from a stranger*

*Alors que vous attendez le taxi / bus à la sortie des cours, une voiture s'arrête devant vous. Le/la chauffeur(e) que vous ne connaissez pas vous propose de vous déposer où vous rendez. Vous voulez décliner l'offre. Vous lui dites.*

“You are waiting for a cab/the bus after classes. A car stops and the driver, who you have never met before, offers to give you a ride home. You want to decline the offer. You say to him/her.”

**c. Situation 3:** *job offer from the boss*

*Vous travaillez à temps partiel dans une entreprise de la ville. Votre patron vous propose un poste à temps plein et nettement mieux rémunéré dans une autre ville. Vous voulez décliner cette offre. Vous lui dites.*

“You are working part-time in an enterprise and your boss offers you a full-time and better paid job in another town. You want to decline the offer. You say to him/her.”

In Situation 1, the speakers, that is, the person refusing the offer, the addressee, and the offerer, know each other very well: the relationship is a close one; in Situation 2, the participants do not know each other, that is, their relationship is distant. In Situation 3, the person making the offer has a higher socio-professional status.

### 3.3 Data analysis

The 63 informants provided 189 answers for the three questionnaire tasks: 57 responses by the L1 French participants, 36 responses by the French L2 informants, and 96 responses by the English L1 speakers. The offer refusals collected mostly consist of combinations of at least two utterances. Analysis of the data was based on schemes established in previous studies (cf. [3, 17]) in which refusals are examined with respect to number of moves involved in the same utterance, the use of head

acts and supportive moves, level of directness of head acts, the use of internal mitigating or intensifying devices, etc.

The first step of the analysis consisted in segmenting the examples produced by the participants of the three groups and in classifying each occurrence or token as either a head act or an adjunct or supportive act. A head act is the main component or strategy used to realize refusals, independently of other elements in the conversational turn. It can be direct (direct refusal) or indirect (indirect refusal).

In the examples produced by the respondents, direct refusals are realized in many different ways. While some participants use “no,” others prefer utterances that express their inability to accept the offer using utterances like ‘I cannot,’ ‘I cannot accept,’ and *je ne peux pas l’accepter* “I cannot accept it.” In the three data sets, direct refusals are generally embedded in sequences made up of different types of speech acts with various pragmatic functions as in (1–3). In (1), the direct refusal *non* “no” is mitigated by a gratitude expression *merci* “thanks,” which is then followed by a justification *je vais prendre le métro et le bus* “I will take the metro and the bus.” In (2), the direct refusal is *je ne peux pas l’accepter*. It is preceded by a gratitude expression (*Merci pour l’offre*) and followed by the reference to an alternative (*Je vais voir si je peux travailler plus à mon emploi*). In (3), the direct refusal is “no.” It is followed by a gratitude expression “thank you” and then by a statement of the speaker’s principle “I do not like to take money from people” which may also be considered as a justification of the direct refusal. In the three examples, the accompanying speech acts are intended to soften the illocutionary force of direct refusals and to save the face of the person who made the offer.

1. Non merci je vais prendre le métro et le bus (FL1-S2<sup>1</sup>).

“No thanks I will take the metro and the bus.”

2. *Merci pour l’offre! Je ne peux pas l’accepter. Je vais voir si je peux travailler plus à mon emploi* (FL2-S1).

“Thanks for the offer! I cannot accept it. I will see if I can work more.”

3. No, thank you. I do not like to take money from people (EL1-S1).

Indirect refusals also appear in many different forms. They can take the form of justifications as in (3), statements of preference as in (4), or statements of principles as in (5). In many examples of the corpus, indirect refusals are usually combined with different types of speech acts or refusal strategies as in (6).

4. *Je préfère rester dans ma ville, en plus c’est là où je fais mes études* (FL1-S3).

“I prefer to stay in my city moreover I am a student here.”

5. *Je n’aime pas dépendre de quelqu’un surtout lorsqu’il s’agit d’argent* (FL1-S1).

“I do not like to depend on someone especially when it concerns money.”

Adjuncts to refusals, also called supportive moves, are strategies or speech acts that normally accompany refusals but cannot realize refusals on their own. They are acts that come either before or after head acts. They cannot be used alone to

<sup>1</sup> The examples are coded as follows: the three situations are coded as S1 (for the friend situation), S2 (for the stranger situation), and S3 (for the boss situation). French L1 is coded as FL1, French L2 is coded as FL2, and English L1 is coded as EL1. For instance: (FL1-S2) stands for examples of refusals to offers of a ride offer by a stranger in French L1.



decline an offer. Rather, their pragmatic function is to mitigate the head acts, in order to save the other’s face and preserve social harmony as in (6), where the direct refusal *je suis toutefois obligé de décliner* is supported by a positive opinion about the job offer, namely, *c’est une belle perspective*, and a gratitude expression, namely *je vous remercie d’avoir pensé à moi*. These adjuncts are intended to inform the boss that despite the refusal, the speaker really appreciates the offer. In doing so, the speaker intends to mitigate the refusal and to dissipate any potential threat to their professional relationship.

6. *C’est une belle perspective, je vous remercie d’avoir pensé à moi, je suis toutefois obligé de décliner* (FL1-S3).

“It’s a good offer. I thank you for having thought about me. However, I am obliged to decline the offer.”

The research questions addressed are the following: (1) How do L2 French learners refuse offers in comparison with L1 French and L1 English speakers? (2) What is the effect of social distance and social power on the choices of refusal strategies by L2 French learners? (3) Are there any elements of pragmatic transfer in the use of refusal strategies by L2 French learners? The results are presented and discussed in the next section.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Overall distribution of refusal strategies

We will start with the overall distribution of the three main refusal strategies (direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjuncts to refusals) in the three groups of respondents (cf. **Table 1**).

There is a total of 163 refusal strategies in the French L1 data. The L2 French learners produced 126 refusal strategies, and the L1 English speakers used 243 refusal strategies. Indirect refusals are the most commonly used strategies by the participants of the three groups, with the L1 French speakers showing a higher number of indirect strategies than the L2 French learners and the L1 English speakers (French L1, *n* = 75 (46%), vs. French L2, *n* = 51 (40.5%), vs. English L1, *n* = 94 (38.7%)). Although adjuncts are the second most frequent strategies in the three data sets, the L1 English speakers used a higher percentage of adjuncts (37.8%) than the respondents of the two other groups (L2 French learners, 35.7%, and L1 French speakers, 32%). Direct refusals are the least employed strategies, and they are distributed equally across the three data sets. The results summarized in **Table 1** show that the participants of the three groups displayed the same preferences for head acts strategies, albeit with slight differences with respect to their frequencies.

Refusal strategies	L1 French	L2 French	L1 English
Direct refusals	36 (22%)	30 (23.8%)	57 (23.5%)
Indirect refusals	75 (46%)	51 (40.5%)	94 (38.7%)
Adjuncts to refusals	52 (32%)	45 (35.7%)	92 (37.8%)
Total	163 (100%)	126 (100%)	243 (100%)

**Table 1.**  
*Distribution of refusal strategies in French L1, French L2, and English L1.*

The analysis further reveals that the three groups of informants differed in many ways in the choice of direct and indirect refusal strategies and adjuncts to refusals.

4.2 Realizations of refusal strategies

4.2.1 Direct refusal strategies

Direct refusals are expressed in many different ways, as can be seen **Table 2**. Overall, four different direct refusal strategies emerge across the three language groups, albeit with differences.

While the L1 French speakers and the L2 French learners used four different direct strategies, the L1 English participants used three direct strategies. **Table 2** also shows that the most frequently used direct strategy in the three groups is “no.” It represents 61% in the L1 French data set, 53.3% in the L2 French data, and 47.4% of the L1 English responses. The results indicate that the choice of the L2 French learners leans more toward that of the L1 French speakers.

The second most frequent type of direct refusal consists in expressing the speaker’s inability to accept the offer. We can see in **Table 2** that the three groups of participants behaved differently in using this direct strategy. While this strategy accounts for 45.6% and 36.7% of the L1 English and L2 French direct refusals, respectively, it accounts only for 22.3% of the direct refusals in L1 French. In other words, L2 French learners express their inability to accept offers much more frequently than the L1 French speakers but in a lesser extent than L1 English speakers.

The analysis of linguistic realizations of the “inability” strategy revealed some interesting results. In the L1 French and L2 French examples, statements of inability to accept the offer are realized using negative short or elliptic syntactic constructions such as *Je ne peux pas (accepter)* “I can’t (accept)” and *Je ne peux pas l’accepter* “I can’t (accept) (it).” The L1 French and L2 French participants also produce expanded negative syntactic structures in which they explicitly mention the object offered and declined, as can be seen in the following examples: *Je ne peux pas accepter votre proposition* (FL1-S3) “I can’t accepter your offer” and *Je ne peux pas donner suite à votre demande* (FL1-S3) “I can’t give a positive response to your offer/ request.” While all the L2 French learners used the verb *pouvoir* in the present tense, some of the L1 French speakers used *pouvoir* in the future tense (e.g., *Je ne pourrai accepter/je ne pourrai pas* “I won’t accept/I won’t”).

Overall, the L2 French learners have a limited repertoire of the patterns of “*je ne peux pas*” to express “inability,” while the L1 French speakers have a larger and more diversified repertoire of constructions to express “inability” to accept the offer. The fact that the L2 French respondents mostly make use of short structure to express inability may be due to a similar behavior in their first language. As a matter of fact, the analysis shows that the L1 English speakers mostly use short structures such as “I can’t (accept)” and “I will not.” They also employ expanded structures, such as

Type of direct refusal	L1 French	L2 French	L1 English
No	22 (61.1%)	16 (53.3%)	27 (47.4%)
Inability	8 (22.3%)	11 (36.7%)	26 (45.6%)
No want/interest/need	3 (8.3%)	1 (3.3%)	4 (7%)
Performative	3 (8.3%)	2 (6.7%)	0
Total	36 (100%)	30 (100%)	57 (100%)

**Table 2.**  
*Distribution of direct refusal strategies in French L1, French L2, and English L1.*

“I can’t take your money/the job,” “I cannot accept the offer,” “I am unable to accept the position,” etc., but in a much lesser extent. Also noteworthy is the fact that realizations of the “inability” strategy are generally accompanied by other speech acts, as can be seen in the following three examples. In (7), the direct refusal is followed by three other strategies. In (8), the direct refusal is preceded by a gratitude expression and followed by the mention of an alternative plan to solve the problem. In (9), the direct refusal is preceded by an expression of gratitude.

7. Je ne peux pas accepter! T’inquiète pas je vais m’en sortir, merci quand même (FL1-S1).

“I can’t accept it. Don’t worry (about me). I will be fine. Anyways, thanks.”

8. *Merci pour l’offre! Je ne peux pas l’accepter. Je vais voir si je peux travailler plus à mon emploi* (FL2-S1).

“Thanks for the offer. I can’t accept it. I will see if I can work more.”

9. Thank you for the opportunity, but I cannot accept that offer (EL1-S3).

The third strategy employed to refuse offers directly consists in expressing either lack of interest (“no interest”) in the offer or lack of need (“no need”) for the object or help offered. This strategy represents 8.6% of the L1 French direct refusals, 3.3% of the L2 French direct refusals, and 7% of the L1 English direct refusals. The “no interest/no need” strategy is realized in the L1 French corpus as *je ne suis pas intéressé par cette offre* (S3) “I am not interested in the offer,” *ça ne m’intéresse pas* “I am not interested,” and *je n’en ai pas besoin* “I don’t need it,” while it is realized in the L2 French data as *je n’ai besoin pas*<sup>2</sup> (FL2-S1) “I don’t need it.” In the English L1 data, it is realized as “I don’t want to borrow money” and “I don’t need your charity.”

The fourth direct strategy consists in employing performative utterances. This strategy occurs only in the L1 French and L2 French data sets. In the L1 French responses, the strategy appears either in a direct form as in (10) or in the form of a hedged performative, as in (11) and (12). In both examples, the illocutionary force is directly expressed by the performative verb *decliner* “to decline” and mitigated by means of the hedging expressions *je suis obligé de*; *je me vois obligé de* (“I obliged to”).

10. **Je refuse de déménager.** Ce n’est. pas dans mes projets (FL1-S3).

*I refuse to move (to another city). It is not part of my plans.*

11. C’est. une belle perspective, je vous remercie d’avoir pensé à moi. *Je suis toutefois obligé de décliner* (FL1-S3).

*It’s a good idea. Thanks for thinking about me. I am however obliged to decline (the offer).*

12. Je suis très intéressée. ***Cependant je me vois obligée de décliner*** car pour ma vie de famille j’ai besoin de stabilité et je ne peux pas me permettre de changer la ville (FL1-S3).

“I am interested. However, I have to decline (the offer) because I need stability in my family and I cannot afford to move to another city.”

<sup>2</sup> This example shows that the FL2 learner has difficulties in the use of the negation particle “ne pas”: instead of “je n’en ai pas” or “je n’ai pas besoin de”, the FL2 learners mostly write “je n’ai pas besoin” or “je ne besoin pas.”



In the two examples attested in the L2 French data set, the performatives are characterized by the use of the verbs *décliner* (to decline) and *refuser* (to refuse), and these verbs are modified by means of the modal verb “je dois” (I must/have to), as in (13) and (14). The mitigating devices employed in performative utterances by the L1 French speakers and L2 French learners seem to be motivated by their intention to be explicit enough while trying to save the face of their interlocutors/superiors.

13. *Malheureusement, je dois te décliner*<sup>3</sup>. Je ne peux pas déménager à une autre ville à ce temps (FL2-S3).

“Unfortunately, I have to decline (the offer). I cannot move to another city at this moment.”

14. *Je suis très contente que vous m’offrez ce poste et j’apprécie beaucoup, par contre je dois refuser* (FL2-S3).

“I am very happy that you offer me the position and I really appreciate it, I however have to decline it.”

#### 4.2.2 Indirect refusal strategies

Indirect refusals may take different forms, as can be seen in **Table 3**. The results show similarities and differences regarding their use by the three groups of respondents.

**Table 3** shows that the L1 French speakers produced 75 tokens, the L2 French learners used 51 examples, while the L1 English speakers used 94 examples of indirect refusals. **Table 3** also establishes that the L1 French speakers used six different speech acts (reason/explanation, dissuasion, preference, principle, apology, and delayed response), the L2 French learners employed six different speech acts (reason/explanation, dissuasion, preference, principle, apology, and request), while the L1 English speakers chose seven different speech acts (reason/explanation, dissuasion, preference, principle, apology, alternative, and moralizing).

Reasons/explanations are by far the most preferred speech act by the respondents of the three groups when declining offers indirectly: the percentage of this speech act is much higher in the L2 French corpus (64.7%) than in the L1 French data set (60%) and the L1 English data set (43.6%). This result suggests that the L2 French learners felt more comfortable giving reasons for their refusals than the participants of the other two groups. The reasons and explanations provided by the respondents when declining offers are generally combined with other speech acts as in (15–17).

15. *C’est très gentil de ta part mais je ne peux pas accepter, cela me gêne et ce n’est pas ton rôle* (FL1-S1).

“That’s very kind of you but I can’t accept (the offer), it makes me uncomfortable and it’s not your role” (to help me out).

16. *Merci, c’est très gentil, mais je ne suis pas confortable avec ceci* (FL2-S1).

“Thanks, that’s very kind, but I am not comfortable with that.”

<sup>3</sup> In this example, the L2 French speaker literally says “I have to decline you” instead of “I have to decline the offer.”

Type of indirect refusal	L1 French	L2 French	L1 English
Reason/explanation	45 (60%)	33 (64.7%)	41 (43.6%)
Dissuasion	18 (24%)	9 (17.7%)	23 (24.5%)
Preference	6 (8%)	4 (7.9%)	1 (1%)
Principle	3 (4%)	3 (5.9%)	12 (12.7%)
Apology/Regret	2 (2.7%)	1 (1.9%)	12 (12.7%)
Avoidance	1 (1.3%)	0	0
Request	0	1 (1.9%)	0
Alternative	0	0	4 (4.3%)
Moralizing	0	0	1 (1%)
Total	75 (100%)	51 (100%)	94 (100%)

**Table 3.**  
*Distribution of indirect refusal strategies in French L1, French L2, and English L1.*

17. *Merci beaucoup! Mais, je ne suis pas confortable d’accepter de l’argent de vous. Je vais trouver un [sic] autre façon d’avoir de l’argent* (FL2-S1).

“Thanks a lot! But I am not comfortable accepting money from you. I will find another means to get money.”

The content of the reasons given is not the same across the three situations. In Situation 1, one of the main reasons given to decline a loan from a friend is that such an offer makes the speaker uncomfortable. Expressions of embarrassment are different in three groups. As a matter of fact, the L1 French speakers mostly used constructions like *cela me gêne* “it bothers me” and *je suis super gênée* “I am really not comfortable,” whereas the L2 French learners preferred the construction *je ne suis pas confortable*, which appears to be a literary translation of “I am not comfortable.” The L1 English speakers used constructions such as *I do not feel right taking your money; I do not want to cause conflict in our relationship*.

In Situation 2, the main reason given to decline the ride offered by a stranger is that the speaker wants to use public transportation or take a cab. Some respondents indicate that they are waiting for a drive, as in (18–20).

18. *Non merci, j’ai déjà appelé un taxi pour me ramener* (FL1-S2).

“No thanks, I have already called a cab.”

19. *Non, merci! Je vais prendre l’autobus* (FL2-S2).

“No thanks! I will take the bus.”

20. *No, thank you. I’m already waiting for a drive* (EL1-S2).

In Situation 3, the respondents most commonly justify their refusals to the job offer by indicating that they do not want to leave the city in which they are currently. Other participants indicate that they are happy with the part-time job or that they have commitments (e.g., family, friends, etc.) that make it impossible to move, as in (21–22).

21. *C’est une superbe opportunité mais je ne peux pas partir de Toulouse* (FL1-S3).

“It’s a superb opportunity but I cannot leave Toulouse.”

22. *Merci, mais je ne peux pas quitté [sic] cette ville maintenant. Je dois finir mes études premièrement* (FL2-S3).

“Thanks, but I can’t leave this city now. I first have to finish my studies.”

23. **I’m too busy with school and other things.** Thank you but I cannot accept your offer (EL1-S3).

Dissuasion is the second most common act used to decline offers. With the dissuasion act, the refuser seeks to do two things: to convince the interlocutor not to worry or to tell him/her that the refuser has a way out or other options. In some cases, both intentions are expressed in the same turn. The dissuasion act is also distributed differently in the three data sets. While this speech act is equally distributed in the L1 French (24%) and L1 English (24.5%) data sets, it shows a much lower frequency in the L2 French examples (17.7%). This result may be due to the fact that some of the L2 French learners cannot adequately articulate this intention (the dissuasion act) in the target language. With regard to realization patterns, the results show that the dissuasion act generally appears with other refusal strategies in the data as in (24–26).

24. *Non, c’est bon t’inquiète, pas envie d’avoir une dette en plus* (FL1-S1).

“No, **that’s fine don’t worry about it**, (I) don’t want to be in debt.”

25. *Merci pour vouloir m’aider, mais je ne peux pas accepter. Vous travaillez fort pour votre argent et vous le méritez. Je vais trouver un autre moyen* (FL2-S1).

“Thanks for trying to help me, but I can’t accept it. You work hard for your money and you deserve it. I will look for another way out.”

26. No thank you. I appreciate your offer but I cannot take your money. **I’ll figure something out** (EL1-S1).

Many differences emerge in the way the respondents of the three groups frame their dissuasions. The L1 French speakers mostly used constructions like *T’inquiètes /ne t’inquiète pas* “do not worry,” *je vais m’en sortir* “I will be fine/I’ll find a way out,” *je vais trouver une autre solution* “I will find another solution,” *je vais me débrouiller* “I will cope/I will *préfère me débrouiller toute seule*, *je vais me débrouiller (par moi-même/autrement)*, and *je vais trouver une (autre) solution*. The L2 French learners used constructions like *c’est okay* “It’s fine,” *ça va, ce n’est pas grave, je vais être ok* “I will be fine,” *c’est pas une bonne idée, Je vais voir si je peux travailler plus à mon emploi, Je vais trouver un autre façon d’avoir de l’argent, je vais faire un plan, and Je vais trouver un autre moyen*.

The L1 English speakers employed utterances like *that’s okay, I’m alright, I’ll be alright, I’m fine, I’m good, I’ll be fine, I’d rather pull my own weight, I’ll manage and get back on my feet soon*, and *I’ll figure something out*. Overall, the two most frequently used speech acts by the participants of the three groups represent more than 80% of all instances of indirect refusals in the L1 French and the L2 French data sets, while they represent less than 70% of all instances of indirect refusals in the L1 English examples.

The distribution of the third and fourth most frequent speech act is also different in the three groups. As can be seen in **Table 3**, while the expression of preference is the third most common type in the L1 French corpus (8%) and the L2 French examples (7.9%), this speech act is the least employed by the L1 English speakers. The statement of preference is similar to the justification act in that it indicates

that refuser would consider another plan of action instead of accepting the offer made by the interlocutor. Differences emerge regarding realization strategies of this speech act in the three groups. In refusing a friend's offer to lend them money, L1 French speakers expressed preference using constructions like *je préfère me débrouiller toute seule* and *je préfère ne pas mélanger mes amis à ces affaires* as in (27). In refusing a stranger's offer of a ride, the L1 French respondents used constructions like *je préfère rentrer à pied* "I prefer to walk" and *je préfère marcher et utiliser les transports en commun* "I prefer to walk and use public transportation."

27. *Non merci, c'est adorable mais je préfère me débrouiller seule* (FL1, S1).

"No thanks, that's kind of you but I prefer to deal with the situation on my own."

In the L2 French data set, there is one instance of the preference strategy in Situation 2 (refusing a ride from a stranger): the speaker explicitly prefers to wait for the bus (*Non merci, je préfère l'autobus* "No thanks, I prefer the bus"). The other three examples are found in the boss situation, where the L2 French learners indicate their preference to keep their current part-time job as in (28). It is noteworthy that preference in the three corpora is supported by other speech acts (direct refusals, indirect refusals, and adjuncts). The only example in L1 English is found in the stranger situation: the refuser says he/she would prefer to wait for the bus, because the person offering the ride is a stranger as in (29).

28. *Non, merci beaucoup! Mais, j'aimerais rester ici avec mon temps partiel* (FL2-S3).

"No, thanks a lot. But I would like to stay here as a part-time employee."

29. Thanks, but **I'd prefer to wait for the bus**, because I do not know you (EL1-S2).

The statement of principle act and the apology act are the third preferred strategies by the L1 English participants (12.7% each), whereas the statement of principle act appears in the fourth position in the L1 French (4%) and the L2 French (5.9%) data sets. By stating a principle act, the speaker attempts to make reference to (moral) philosophy and lifestyle or habits that would hinder him/her from accepting the offer. This strategy is generally supported by other speech acts. The informants of the three groups displayed some similarities in refusing a friend's loan offer: they mostly expressed discomfort in borrowing money from friends, depending financially on others, having debts. The L1 French speakers realized the preference strategy using the construction *je n'aime pas X* "I don't like to X" as in (30). The L2 French speakers used the constructions *je n'aime pas X* as well. Other constructions found in the L2 French corpus are *je ne peux pas* *permis vous de faire ça* and *je ne suis pas votre responsabilité*. In Situation 2 (refusing a lift from a stranger) an L2 French learner stated that s/he cannot accept a ride from a stranger as in (31). In the L1 English corpus, statements of principles are realized using constructions like *I do not feel like getting into a car with a stranger*, *I do not take rides from strangers*, *I do not like to take money from people*, *I am not a fan of borrowing money*, and *I do not like to owe anyone anything, especially money*. In the L1 English data set, statements of principle could be repeated in an utterance as in (32) or accompanied by other types of speech acts as in (33).

30. *Non ne t'inquiète pas, je vais me débrouiller, je n'aime pas avoir de dettes* (FL1-S1).

"No don't worry, I will find a way out, I don't like to have having debts."



31. *Non merci, je préfère l'autobus. Je ne pense pas que je veux aller avec une personne que je ne sais [sic] pas* (FL2, S3).

“No thanks, I prefer the bus. I don't think I would want to go with somebody I don't know.”

32. I do not like borrowing money from people. It is a personal standard (EL1-S1).

33. Thanks for the offer, but I do not like owing money. I'd rather pull my own weight (EL1-S1).

Also interesting is the use of apologies and regrets by the three groups. While these speech acts are least employed by the L1 French speakers (2.7%) and L2 French learners (1.9%), they are highly employed by the L1 English speakers (12.7%). The two apologies attested in L1 French are realized as *je m'excuse* and *veuillez m'excuser*, while one L2 French respondent expressed his apology using the form *désolé*. In the L1 English data set, apologies and regrets are realized as *sorry* and *I'm sorry*. In the three data sets, apologies and regrets are always accompanied by other speech acts as in (34–36).

34. *Ça ne m'intéresse pas, veuillez m'excuser, mais je me sens très bien dans mon poste actuel* (FL1-S3)

“I am not interested, please excuse me, but I am very comfortable with my current position.”

35. *Désolé, mais j'ai déjà décidé de prendre l'autobus. Merci pour l'offre* (FL2-S2)

“Sorry but I have already decided to take the bus. Thanks for the offer.”

36. *Sorry*, no thanks. I'm just going to wait for the bus (EL1-S2)

A small number of other strategies were also used as indirect refusals, with very low frequency. They include acts such as delayed refusal, request, suggestion, and moralizing. The delayed refusal occurred once in the L1 French corpus as in *je vais y réfléchir* “I will think about it”. The speaker does not want to commit him/herself. The requesting act was used by an L2 French learner to accompany a justification act. The refuser says that it is at the moment not possible for him/her to accept a new job in another city because he/she is currently a student. This also explains the request for permission to stay on the part-time job as in (37). The request could also be interpreted here as a suggestion.

37. *Merci pour l'offre de temps plein, mais comme je suis encore à l'école, pourrais-je rester à temps partiel pour maintenant?* (FL2, S3)

“Thanks for the offer of a full-time job, but since I am still a student, could I keep my part-time position for the moment?”

The analysis also reveals that L1 English speakers suggested alternatives and produced moralizing acts in order to refuse offers. Of the four suggestions made, three appeared in the boss situation: the employee suggests working full-time position without having to move to another city as in (38) or suggests to defer the offer to another time in the future. Another indirect refusal strategy was the act of moralizing as in (39), which could be interpreted here as a form of justification or an indirect statement of principle.

38. Is there any way to make that happen here? (EL1-S3)

39. Money can cause a wedge between friends (EL1-S1).

#### 4.2.3 Adjuncts to refusals

As already indicated in Section 3, adjuncts are different kinds of speech acts, which may come before or after direct and indirect refusals. Adjuncts are only used as external modification devices to soften or intensify refusals. **Table 4** below presents the types of adjuncts<sup>4</sup> found in the three data sets.

As can be seen in **Table 4**, the L1 English speakers produced the highest number of adjuncts, using three different types of speech acts (expression of gratitude/appreciation, expression of positive opinion, and expression of willingness).<sup>5</sup> The L1 French speakers produced 52 tokens of adjuncts, using six different speech acts (expression of gratitude/appreciation, expression of positive opinion, expression of willingness, greetings, regret, and hesitation). The L2 French learners produced 42 examples of adjuncts using three different speech acts (expression of gratitude/appreciation, expression of positive opinion, and expression of willingness). Expressions of gratitude/appreciation are the most preferred adjuncts by the respondents of the three groups, with the L1 English speakers being the most productive in using this adjunct (93.4%), followed by the L2 French learners (91.2%). The frequency of gratitude expressions in L1 English corpus is much lower (82.7%).

Expressions of gratitude and appreciation are realized in the L1 French data set mostly by using the term *Merci*, which can be accompanied by adverbs such as *beaucoup/200 fois* and *quand même* or by a prepositional clause highlighting the reason for the gratitude expression (e.g., *Merci pour/de votre offer*). Some L1 French speakers made use of performative formulas such as *Je vous remercie d'avoir pensé à moi* and *Je vous remercie pour votre offre*. Also attested are expressions like *c'est adorable*, *c'est très amiable*, *c'est (très/super) gentil (de ta part)*, *ton attention me touche énormément*, and *ça me touche beaucoup ma poule*. Positive opinions about the offer are realized in L1 French as *c'est une belle perspective* and *c'est une super opportunité*.

The L2 French learners expressed gratitude and appreciation using structures like *merci*, *merci quand même/beaucoup*, *merci (beaucoup) pour l'offre*, *merci pour vouloir m'aider*, *c'est très gentil*, *c'est vraiment gentil de vous*; *vous êtes très gentil (le)*, *ça c'est vraiment gentil*, *merci beaucoup de me considérer*, *merci pour l'opportunité*, *merci pour l'offre de temps plein*, *Je vous remercie pour votre proposition gentile*, *merci d'avoir penser à moi*, *Je suis très contente que vous m'offrez ce poste*, and *j'apprécie beaucoup*. Expressions of positive opinion about the offer were realized as *c'est tentant*, *c'est une bonne idée*, and *Ça c'est une bonne offre*.

Expressions of gratitude in L1 English are *thanks (so much) for the offer/the opportunity*, *thank you*, *I appreciate the offer*, and *I am grateful that you think of me so highly*. The L1 English speakers used the following expressions of positive opinion about the offer: *it means a lot*, *I am glad you considered me*, *plus appreciate my work*, *this is an amazing opportunity*, *I am humbled by your offer*, *you are the best*, *I always knew you had my back*, and *love you*.

The other adjuncts, namely, the expression of willingness and deception, have very low frequencies in the data. While "willingness" is realized twice in the L1 French (4%) and once in the L2 French (2.2%) data sets, this adjunct appears four times in the L1 English corpus (4.3%). In the French L1, willingness is realized as

<sup>4</sup> The classification emerged from the speech acts found in the data.

<sup>5</sup> The very higher number of adjuncts to refusals, compared to the other two groups, may be due to the higher number of L1 English participants in the study.

Type of adjunct to refusal	French L1	French L2	English L1
Gratitude/appreciation	43 (82.7%)	41 (91.2%)	86 (93.4%)
Positive opinion	3 (5.9%)	3 (6.6)	2 (2.2)
Willingness	2 (3.8%)	1 (2.2%)	4 (4.4%)
Greetings	2 (3.8%)	0	0
Regret	1 (1.9%)	0	0
Hesitation	1 (1.9%)	0	0
Total	52 (100%)	45 (100%)	92 (100%)

**Table 4.**  
*Distribution of types of adjuncts in French L1, French L2, and English L1.*

*ça aurait été avec plaisir* as in (40) and *je suis intéressé* as in (41), while it appears in L2 French as *j’aurais trop aimé* as in (42). In L1 English, willingness is expressed using *I wish I could*, *I would have*, and *I’d/would love to* as in (43). There is one token of the expression of deception in L1 French: it is realized as *c’est dommage*, and it is employed together with a gratitude expression to soften a direct refusal as in (44).

40. **Ça aurait été avec plaisir** mais je ne me sens pas encore prête à quitter ma ville (FL1-S3).

“I would have been pleased to accept but I am not yet ready to move.”

41. **Je suis très intéressée** cependant je me vois obligée de décliner car pour ma vie de famille j’ai besoin de stabilité et je ne peux pas me permettre de changer la ville (FL1-S3).

“I am interested however I am compelled to decline [the offer] because I need stability for my family and I cannot afford to move.”

42. **J’aurais trop aimé**, mais je ne peux pas accepter quand je suis encore à l’université. Par contre, merci encore (FL2-S3).

‘I really would have loved to but I cannot accept [it] because I am still a university student. Anyways, thanks again.’

43. *I would love more than anything to accept the position* but I cannot (EL1-S3).

44. Non merci, quand même **c’est dommage** (FL1-S3).

“No thanks anyways that’s too bad.”

The L1 French participants produced two greetings to support their refusals, namely, *bonne journée*, as in (45) and *au revoir*, as in (46). One L2 French learner used a marker of hesitation, before declining the offer of a ride by an unknown driver as in (47).

45. Merci bien, mais je prendrais un taxi, **bonne journée** (FL1-S2).

46. Non, merci. **Au revoir** (FL1-S2).

47. *Heu. Non merci!* (FL1-S2)

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The goal of the study presented in this chapter was to answer the question how a group of intermediate L2 French learners decline offers and how their choices compare to those of L1 French speakers. It was found that the L2 French learners make use of direct refusals, indirect refusals, as well as adjuncts to refusals to produce offer refusal utterances.

At the level of direct refusals, the results show some similarities between the three groups. It was found that the L2 French learners mostly employ “no” and “expressions of inability” just like the L1 French speakers and the L1 English speakers. However, differences emerge regarding the linguistic realization of “inability expressions.” It was found that the L2 French learners have a very limited repertoire of forms to express their inability to accept offers. They mostly use the construction *je ne peux pas* “I cannot.” This result may be a case of pragmatic transfer, where the L2 French learners seem to transfer their L1 English behavior (I cannot) into L2 French. It may also be due to the fact that the L2 French learners in this study have had not yet acquired a wide range of expressions of inability to accept offers. Consequently, it would be very important to expose such a group of L2 French learners to other types of direct offer refusals. This may be done through reformulation activities in which the L2 French learners have to replace the construction *je ne peux pas* with different utterances such as those employed by L1 French speakers.

At the level of indirect refusals, the L2 French learners have some common ground with the L1 French speakers and the L1 English speakers. In line with the results of previous studies, it was found that the participants of the three groups use reasons more often than any other strategy in their refusal utterances. Differences emerge, however, in the linguistic realization of this pragmatic category. In the friend situation, for instance, it was found that the L1 English speakers mostly explain their refusals by indicating their discomfort in borrowing money from their friends, using a construction like “I am not comfortable accepting money from you.” The examples of the L2 French learners seem to indicate a direct transfer of the commonly used realization type in L1 English into L2 French, resulting into L2 French constructions like *je ne suis pas confortable avec ceci*, *Je ne suis pas confortable de*, etc. It appears that the L2 French learners tested are not aware of “more appropriate” constructions such as *ça me gêne*, *je suis gêné de*, etc. found in the L1 French speakers’ productions. In this regard, it would be very helpful to address these difficulties in formulating such offer refusals in L2 French. Another interesting finding in our study concerns the linguistic realization of dissuasion, another type of indirect refusal. **Table 3** shows that, although this strategy is the second most commonly employed by the three groups of participants, it is less used by the L2 French learners and it is framed in L2 French using quite different realization patterns.

With respect to adjuncts to refusals, similarities and differences were found regarding the preference the realization forms of speech acts such as thanks and expressions of positive opinion. While the participants of the three groups mostly prefer gratitude expressions to mitigate their offer refusals, it was also found that the L2 French learners produced constructions with some grammatical errors. These errors should be addressed when teaching them how to refuse offers appropriately. Overall, this study shows that an effective teaching and learning of refusal behavior in L2 French should take many different aspects into account: the source language of the French learners as well as the pragmatic and linguistic strategies that are employed by L1 French speakers in daily interactions.

This study has a number of limitations. First, the small-scale nature of the study, based on a corpus of only 12 L2 French learners, does not yield results that could be



generalized to a larger group of L2 French learners. This means that a larger-scale investigation is required to establish the strategies L2 French learners choose and the problems they are confronted with when refusing offers in the target language. Second, the study focused on offer refusals in only three situations. It is important to include more situations highlighting various levels of social distance and power distance as well as many different types of offers in order to have a better picture of offer refusal strategies in L2 French. Third: since the study carried out here is based on written data, it would be necessary to employ other types of data (e.g., role-play data and naturally occurring conversations) in forthcoming studies in order to establish how negotiations of offer-refusal exchanges are enacted by L2 French learners. Fourth, in order to understand the motivations behind the use of certain strategies in the target languages, it would also be necessary to tap into the perceptions and cultural representations or cultural schemas (cf. [6]) underlying refusals in Anglo-Canadian contexts and the way in which they influence the production of offer refusals in L2 French.

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