



## Sexual Refusal by Indonesian Female University Students

Marwah Juwita Yusuf<sup>1</sup>

[marwahjuwita.yusuf@gmail.com](mailto:marwahjuwita.yusuf@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*This research aims to find out the most frequent strategies used by Indonesian female university students in expressing their refusal to sexual intercourse and the refusal strategies that they used to refuse the sexual intercourse. This research was carried out in 14 cities in Indonesia with 638 respondents (307 female respondents and 331 male respondents). The data were collected by using Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and interview to identify the sexual refusal strategies by female university students. The data were analyzed by using reconstructed conversation and Speech Act theory by Searle (1976) and Politeness of Brown & Levinson (1989) as a supporting theory. This research finds seven frequent strategies used by Indonesian female university students to refuse the sexual intercourse. The first is pregnancy risk reason (37,07%), next is legality reason (21,59%), postponement (15,48%) is at the third place, direct refusal non-performative (14,05 %) as the fourth and is followed by religious reason (7,94%) at the fifth, direct refusal performative (2,24%) is the sixth and the last strategy is topic switch (1,63%). The data also show that most of Indonesian female university students refuse the sexual intercourse by giving pregnancy risk reason such as fear of being pregnant. From the reconstructed conversation, the data analysis show that most of them use Indirect Speech Act to maintain the relationship, the politeness and the positive face want of their boyfriend.*

**Keywords:** Sexual Refusal, Politeness, Speech Ast, Direct-Indirect

**How to cite:** Yusuf, M. J. (2018). Sexual Refusal by Indonesian Female University Students. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 1 (4), 398- 408.

### 1. Introduction

One of the most potential miscommunication in a social interaction may happen in refusal. According to Brown and Levinson (1989), refusal is one of Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs). When the speaker invites person, he or she wishes that his or her invitation is accepted and appreciated. On the other hand, the invitees have to consider the invitor's sincerity and good intention to invite them before refusing the invitation. When the invitees refuse, they have threatened the invitor's positive face, that is, his or her public self-image to maintain approval from others (Brown and Levinson, 1989). Therefore, in order to reduce the risk of the invitees' losing face, they have to know the face-preserving strategies (Brown and Lavinson, 1989).

Kana (1982) in her research noted that the Indonesian notion of politeness required maintaining at all times a smooth, untroubled appearance between individuals. An explicit refusal is interpreted as impolite, and as means of causing friction and hurt feelings. It is

<sup>1</sup> STIE Tri Dharma Nusantara Makassar

influenced by the Indonesian culture and tradition which say that people should be polite and friendly that Indonesians feel inappropriate to refuse someone's invitation or offer directly.

Women are often trained to be ineffective communicators in a sexual relationship. Muehlenhard and Cook (1988) suggest that young women find it hard to 'just say no' because they are concerned about the damage to their reputations if they do not comply with male sexual demands (e.g. fear of being labelled 'frigid' or 'lesbian').

Other researcher such as Campbell and Burnland in *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* vol.47 (1977), Howard (1985), Warzak and Page (1990), state that young women find it difficult to refuse the unwanted sex. Another finding done by Cairns (1993) said that victims of sexual assault often report feeling that they had 'failed' to make their refusal sufficiently clear. Kana (1982), in her research noted that the Indonesian notion of politeness required maintaining at all times a smooth, untroubled appearance between individuals. An explicit refusal is interpreted as impolite, and as means of causing friction and hurt feelings. Those strategies which were used by the Indonesian are the strategies to refuse the invitation in general or a common offer. That is why the researcher wants to find out the strategies in refusing sexual intercourse based on Indonesian culture as eastern.

The developments of theories of language which are mostly formed and found by Western theorist have been proved not always applicable in Eastern data. Some western researchers found that young women find it hard to 'just say no' because they are concerned about the damage to their reputations (fear of being labeled 'frigid' or 'lesbian'), fear of the possibility to be pregnant and they are not ready to be a young parent and also fear of Sexuality Transmitted Diseases (STDs). Another strategy gave by western young women is menstruating. On the other hand, the researcher's data found the different strategies which used by the young women (university students) in Indonesia. Some of them prefer to use the legality status of the relationship to refuse sexual intercourse.

Sexual refusal strategies in Indonesia had not been researched since there is no former researcher conducting or documenting it in Indonesia. It is hoped by doing interview, collecting questionnaires then classifying it into categories, the strategies will be found. The researcher chooses university students as her respondents because she believes that they attained a high level of education and the range of their age is compatible. Therefore, they are considered to be competent participants in this research.

For those reasons the topic of this research is sexual refusal by female university students in Indonesia. This research aims to find out the most frequent strategies used by Indonesian female university students in expressing their refusal to sexual intercourse and the refusal strategies that they used to refuse the sexual intercourse.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Design**

The researcher main purpose in investigating this study is to find out the most frequently used refusal strategies of the female university students in Indonesia in refuse the unwanted sex. The researcher believes that the most suitable approach used to conduct this investigation is by using descriptive method. Surakhmad (1982) argued that descriptive method explains, analyzes, and classifies investigation by using survey, interview, questionnaire, observation, or by using case study, comparative study, and

cooperative study. Because the researcher used questionnaires in the form of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) to analyze the responses of the both group respondents, this descriptive method was the most appropriate one to be used in this study.

## **2.2. Population and Sample**

This research is mainly investigating the way female university student express their sexual refusal to sexual intercourse. In this case, the researcher chose university students as her respondents because she believes that they attained a high level of education, therefore, they are considered to be competent participants in this research. The respondents of this research were 638 university students from several universities in Indonesia. The researcher asked a technical assistance from her friends and families in the several cities in Indonesia to help her gather the responses from the other city outside Makassar. The researcher did this way because she did not find enough students coming from other cities. The researcher got 638 respondents (307 Female Respondents, 331 Male Respondents).

## **2.3. Procedures of Collecting Data**

Data play very important role in a research, because without data it is impossible to get the result of the research. To obtain the data, the researcher used interview and questionnaires. The researcher interviewed some respondents related to the female university students' sexual refusal. She asked her respondents from other cities in Indonesia by using electronic mail and social network site. The researcher distributed questionnaires consisting statement related to the sexual refusal strategies in two ways. First way is direct distribution to the random university students in Makassar. The second way is by using electronic mail and Mail delivery service such as POS and JNE to distribute questionnaire for other respondents in several cities in Indonesia.

The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the several university and colleges in Makassar at random. To gather the data from another city, the researcher asked for help from her friends and families in the target city. The researcher sent the questionnaire through the attachment file along with an electronic mail explaining about how to distribute and answer the questionnaire. After they receive the email, they printed it out and made some copies of the questionnaire before distributing it to the university students on their city.

After all the questionnaires gathered, the researcher's friends and families sent all the questionnaires back to the researcher via POS Indonesia and JNE. These questionnaires then were gathered together to be analyzed.

## **2.4. Technique of Data Analysis**

To analyze the data, the researcher would firstly give the general idea of the findings. In this section, seven most frequently used strategies of sexual refusal by the respondents would be shown in a table. The researcher would show the frequency of dominant strategies as well as the percentage of the frequency in a table. After having a general view on the strategies in all given situations, the researcher would analyze the strategies by using the Brown and Levinson Politeness Theory and the Speech act theory by Searle. After that, the researcher would give the conclusion.

## **3. Findings**

This research investigates the strategies of sexual refusal used by female university students in Indonesia. From all questionnaires distributed to the respondents, there were gathered the total of 638 responses. Among them, 331 responses were male respondents and 307 responses were female respondents. From the total of 638 responses, 147 responses were excluded because the respondents gave only acceptance expressions of sexual invitation. So, the total analyzed data were 491 responses; Female Respondent (FR) 253 and Male Respondent (MR) 238. From the analysis, the researcher found and classified the strategies in 7 (seven) most frequent strategies expressed by female university students in Indonesia.

These are seven most frequently used sexual refusal strategies expressed by female university students in Indonesia.

Strategies	Female responses		Female responses according to the male		Total	
	$\Sigma$	$\Sigma$ %	$\Sigma$	$\Sigma$ %	$\Sigma$	$\Sigma$ %
<b>Pregnancy Risk Reason</b>	92	36,36 %	90	37,82 %	182	<b>37,07 %</b>
<b>Legality Reason</b>	50	19,76 %	56	23,53 %	106	<b>21,59 %</b>
<b>Postponement</b>	43	17 %	33	13,87 %	76	<b>15,48 %</b>
<b>Direct Refusal Non-Performative</b>	46	18,18 %	23	9,66 %	69	<b>14,05 %</b>
<b>Religious Reason</b>	16	6,32 %	23	9,66 %	39	<b>7,94 %</b>
<b>Direct Refusal Performative</b>	3	1,19 %	8	3,36 %	11	<b>2,24 %</b>
<b>Topic Switch</b>	3	1,19 %	5	2,10	8	<b>1,63 %</b>

The table above shows that the most frequent strategy used by female university students in Indonesia is **pregnancy risk reason (37,07%)**. It shows that respondents used pregnancy risk reason as the strategy in refusing the sexual intercourse.

The expressions of pregnancy risk reason used by female university students were as follows:

- “*Takut nanti hamil*” (FR. 003)  
(I was afraid that I could be pregnant”)
- “*Takut terjadi hal-hal yang tidak diinginkan (kebobolan).*” (MR. 002)  
(She is worried that there will consequences for that.)
- “*Takut saya tidak bertanggung jawab dan takut kebobolan*” (MR. 028)  
(She was afraid that I would not be responsible and that she would be pregnant.)

The expression of “*Takut hamil*” or “*Afraid of being pregnant*” was used in refusing the sexual intercourse invitation from the addressees. The addressers acknowledged that

their refusal might have offended the addressee or even might have endangered their relationship. They attempted to make their refusal acceptable.

The second frequent strategy expressed by female university students in Indonesia is **Legality Reason**. According to the findings **21,59%** respondents used legality reason to refuse the sexual intercourse invitation from the addressee. For example:

- “*Kita kan belum Married*” (FR. 016)  
(We haven’t been married)
- “*Nanti saja kalau sudah sah. Kalau tidak mau nunggu nunggu ya sudah cari cewek lain saja*” (FR. 203)  
(Let’s wait until we are married. If you don’t want to wait, then find another girl.)
- “*belum ada ikatan suami-isteri*” (MR. 087)  
(We’re not husband and wife)
- *Belum halal* (FR. 009)  
(It wasn’t legal)
- “*Menikah dulu, baru Making Love*” (MR. 177)  
Let’s get married first and then make love

By giving legality reason, the addressers implicitly showed her refusal. The reason has clearly stated the condition of the relationship. This strategy also shows that young women do indeed find it difficult to ‘just say no’ to unwanted sex. What these data illustrate, then, is that these female university students proved that women use much of indirectness to express their unwillingness.

Next frequent strategy in refusing the sexual intercourse invitation is **Postponement (15,48%)**. There are 76 female university students in Indonesia refusing the sexual intercourse by using postponement, such as:

- *Belum Waktunya* (MR. 085)  
“It’s not the time.”
- *Nanti, yang jelas bukan sekarang* (MR.132)  
“Later, not now”
- *Nanti saja yah sayang* (MR. 194)  
“Let’s do it some other time baby”
- *Belum saatnya sayang* (FR.012)  
“it’s not the time honey”
- *Jangan sekarang. Selesai kuliah dulu* (FR.252)  
“Not now. Let’s wait until we are finished studying”

These examples indicate that the addressers wanted to be polite to the addressee. It shows that there was an effort from the addresser to maintain the positive face of the addressee.

The fourth most frequent strategy is **Direct Refusal Non-Performative (14,05%)**. They use direct “No” or expression “I can’t” or “let’s break up” or use any rude words. For examples:

- *Jangan. Ini sudah melampaui batas*” (MR. 133)  
“No. It’s been too much”
- *Marah. Trus bilang “jangan lagi kayak gitu”* (MR. 124)  
She was furious and then said “Don’t you ever ask suck thing anymore”
- *Jangan lakukan* (FR. 023)  
Don’t do it
- *Kurang ajar. Kalau memang kamu menghargai saya, tolong jangan perlakukan saya seperti ini.* (FR. 042)  
“You’re such a jerk. If you do appreciate me, please don’t treat me like that”

The finding shows that some female university students find no difficult to just say no to sexual intercourse. The addressers directly refuse the sex invitation without using any softener to maintain the ‘face’ of the addressee.

**Religious reason** is the next frequent strategy used by female university students in Indonesia to refuse the sexual intercourse. **7,94%** of respondents expressed religious reason as the strategy. They use the expression like *haram* (forbidden) and fear of sin. For examples:

- *Takut dosa* (MR. 048)  
Fear of sin
- *Tidak mau begituan, takut dosa* (MR. 068)  
“I don’t want it. I’m afraid of sin.”
- *Haram* (MR. 166)  
“It’s haram (forbidden).”
- *Itu sudah melanggar norma agama dan dosa besar.* (FR. 026)  
“it breaks the norms of our religion and it’s a great sin.
- *Dosa besar* (FR. 188)  
“It’s a great sin.”

This strategy shows, some female university students in Indonesia still keep their religion norm, but by expressing this strategy, the addressers directly threat the ‘face’ of the addressee. From the interview and taking note data, using religious reason to refuse the sexual invitation obviously gave the negative ‘face’ to the addressee.



Next strategy is **direct refusal performative (2,24%)**. Female university students in Indonesia express their refusal by using swearing words and do harsh actions such as slapping and pushing. For examples:

- *Insyaf...astagfirullah. Mendorong* (MR. 163)  
She said "For God's sake, don't you be like that." While pushing me
- *Dasar kurang ajar. Saya pasti tampar.* (FR. 174)  
"You stupid jerk." I must have slapped him if he asked for it

The above examples show that these female respondents with no hesitation refuse the sexual invitation by doing some actions.

The last frequent strategy expressed by female university students in Indonesia to refuse the sexual invitation is **Topic Switch (1,63%)**. This strategy shows much of indirectness and speech acts. For examples:

- *Lapar nih. Makan yuk!* (MR. 036)  
"I'm hungry. Let's eat"
- *Aduh kok kepala saya sakit ya.* (FR. 144)  
"Ouch, I don't know why but I got a headache."

Those data show the incoherent between the request/invitation and the response that actually show indirectness and speech act.

## DISCUSSION

This research finds 7 (seven) sexual intercourse refusal strategies by female university students in Indonesia. The researcher divided the strategies into two kinds of strategy. They are Direct Strategy and Indirect Strategy. The direct strategies are a) Direct Refusal Performative, b) Direct Refusal Non-Performative. While indirect strategies consist of a) pregnancy risk reason; b) legality reason; c) postponement; d) religious reason; and e) topic switch. There are two kinds of strategies used by Indonesian female university students. They are:

The researcher used reconstructed conversation in analyzing the refusal strategy to get the clear idea of the refusal strategy expressed by female university students in Indonesia.

### 1. Indirect Refusal

It is necessary to consider the way humans keep track on conversation. Labov (1977) stated that there are "rules of interpretation which relate what is said to what is done" and it is upon the presupposition of these rules that any given dialogue can be considered coherent or incoherent. The data below give examples of incoherent:

*Awalnya kissing trus...*

M: "sayang, ayo!"

Baby, come on!

F: "eeh handphone ku mana ya?" (MR. 038)

Well, where's my cellphone

In this instance, it is assumed that F is not schizophrenic and is making some attempt in responding M's request. M must try to infer F's meaning. The first assumption may be that F has direct means that she lost her cellphone and she realized it when she kissed her boyfriend. So with this assumption, F's responses can be said to count as declaration of the fact that she was looking for her cellphone.

This is not the only interpretation of the above instance. F might want to save the face of M by doing the indirectness. The notions of indirectness and politeness play a crucial role in the negotiation of face during the realization of speech acts such as refusal.

Look at the example below.

*Kissing and then said*

M: "baby, you look so hot"

F: *Lapar nih. Makan yuk!* (MR. 036)

I'm hungry. Let's eat!"

The data above show that higher levels of indirectness may result in higher levels of politeness.

Female university students Indonesia employe some preferred types of indirect refusal patterns when refusing a request. One of them is as follow:

M: "*sayang, mau!*"

Baby, I want it!

F: "*Kamu cacingan yah?*" (MR. 037)

Are you having threadworm?"

According to the results, it seems that when female university students in Indonesia face situations in which they have to refuse the sexual intercourse, they try to avoid refusing the request or invitation directly so as to avoid overt confrontation and arousing the feelings of discomfort in the addressee. By saying "are you having threadworm?" she indirectly said 'no' to the sex invitation and did not imply directly to the state that her boyfriend got threadworm.

Other indirectness can be seen from the examples below:

➤ M: "how does it feel, do u want to do that babe?"

F: "*Takut dosa*" (MR. 048 – Religious reason)

Fear of sin

➤ M: "let's do it honey!"

F: "*Mau, tapi takutnya kamu nggak mau tanggung jawab, jadi bingung deh.*" (FR. 137 – pregnancy risk reason)

Actually, I wanted to do it but I was afraid that you would not be responsible. It was confusing.

➤ M: "come on, I want it"



F: “*Sabar yah sayang, nanti kalau sudah nikah baru deh kamu mau ngapain aja.* (FR. 110 – Legality reason)

“Be patient honey. When we are married, you can do anything that you want.”

Commonly, people use reason or explanation for refusing. The findings show that some female university students prefer to give reason such as religious reason and legality reason. They want to show that they are really truthful about themselves to the addressee. It clearly shows that female university students in Indonesia like to give reason since it is said indirectly.

➤ M: “*Sayaang lagi pengen neh!*” (MR.067)

Babe please, I really want it

F: “*Nanti kebablasan gimana? Aku belum mau nikah sekarang.*” (MR.067)

What if I’m pregnant? I don’t want to get married now.

➤ M: “*Sayang... satu kaliiii saja.*” (MR. 047)

Come on babe, just for this once.

F: “*Takut nanti kebobolan gimana.*” (MR. 047)

I’m worried. What will we do if I’m pregnant.

By giving reason like pregnancy risk reason, the addresser has threatened her own positive face while also increased the addressee’s positive face. The addresser has a want to be appreciated, but by uttering the anxiety expressions and showing interest (FR. 137) her face-want cannot be fulfilled.

## 2. Direct Refusal

➤ “*Dasar kurang ajar*”. *Saya pasti tampar.* (FR. 174)

“You stupid jerk.” I must have slapped him if he asked for it.

➤ “*Insyaf, astagfirullah*” *Mendorong* (MR. 163)

She said “for the God’s sake, don’t you be like that.” While pushing.

➤ *Mendorong badannya, “Tidak mau”* (FR. 177)

I pushed him because I didn’t want it

The finding showed that some female university students in Indonesia preferred using direct refusal as their sexual refusal strategy. The stereotype about young women in Indonesia was not so true.

It gave a negative face to the addressee since their spouse refuse their want directly by using direct ‘no’ and followed by negative expressions and some responses gave an act of refusal such as slapping and pushing.

The research showed that the Indonesia's young women liked to refuse directly more often than give religious reason or switch the topic as their refusal. As the examples stated below:

- *"Jangan lakukan"* (FR. 023)  
Don't do it
- *Kurang ajar. Kalau memang kamu menghargai saya, tolong jangan perlakukan saya seperti ini.*(FR. 042)  
You're such a jerk. If you do appreciate me, please don't treat me like that."
- *"Jangan. Ini sudah melampaui batas"* (MR. 113)  
No. It's been too much

It show that female university students explicitly said that they refused or even not interested in taking the sex invitation.

Having view on the sexual refusal strategies expressed by female university students, the researcher comes to the last of her findings. Based on the data, she found that a sexual refusal is a face-threatening act that tends to disrupt harmony in relationships. It causes damage to both the face of the addressee and the addresser. A lot of strategies are used to mitigate the effect of a sexual refusal and save the relationship and also save the face of the addresser since sexual invitation is taboo for unmarried.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the data gathered and the data analysis, the researcher found out five most frequent strategies used by female university students in Indonesia to refuse the sexual intercourse. Those strategies are Giving Reason, Postponement, Direct Refusal Non-Performative, Direct Refusal Performative, and Topic Switch. This means giving reason was the most acceptable strategy in sexual refusals. Since the sexual refusal was already a serious threat to the positive face-want of the addressee or even could break the face-want, the reasons were used as remedy to save the possible face breaking and also the relationship breaking. Besides, giving reasons, as one of the indirectness strategies, was also used to show politeness. Based on the interview showed that being indirect besides showing sincere or politeness, it can lose the addressee's face if he takes it seriously. The researcher summarized that female university in Indonesia preferred to choose indirect strategies as their refusal to sexual intercourse. The researcher thought that it might be very interesting for other researchers to analyze the topic on sexual refusal more deeply using spontaneous data to see the extra linguistic features which could not be found through questionnaires. Besides those sexual refusal strategies, the researcher found during her research that there were the influences of the relationships period with the strategies used which are also very interesting to be analyzed further.

## REFERENCES

- Brown P. & Levinson S.C, (1989) *Politeness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cairns, K. (1993) 'Sexual entitlement and sexual accomodation': male and female responses to sexual coercion', *Cannadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, vol. 2, 203-14.
- Campbell, B.K. And Burnland, D.C. (1977) ' Communication patterns and problems of pregnancy', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 47, 134-9
- Howard, M. (1985a) 'How the family physician can help young teenegers postpone sexualinvolvement', *medicl Aspect of Human Sexuality*, vol. 19, 76-87.
- Howard, M. (1985b) 'Postponing sexual involvement among adolescents: an alternative approachto prevention of sexuality transmitted diseases'. *Journal of Adolescents Health Care*, vol. 6, 271-7.
- Kana, M. (1982). *Saying NO in English. A sociolinguistic lesson on refusals*. *RELC Journal*, Vol. 13, 29-50
- Labov, W. and Fanshel, D. (1977) *Therapeutic Discourse*, New york, Academic Press
- Searle, J.R. (1976), *The Classification of Illucutionary Acts*. *Language in Society*, 5.1-24
- Surakhmad, W. (1982), *Pengantar Penelitian Ilmiah: Dasar Metoda Teknik (Introduction to Scientific Research: The Principle of Technical Method)*, Bandung, Taristo.
- Warzak, W.J. and Page, T.J. (1990) ' Teaching refusal skills to sexuality active adolescents', *Journal of Behavioral Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, vol. 21, 133-9.
- Warzak, W.J., Grow, C.R., Poler, M.M. and Walburn, J.N. (1995) ' Enhancing refusal skills: identifying context that place adolescents at rissk for unwanted sexual activity', *Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics*, vol.16, 98-100