Research Paper

Genuine Refusals in Chinese Social Media

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Abstract
Refusal has been attached importance in pragmatics. However, there is a dearth of research on the realization of this face-threatening speech act in the context of social media.The present study examined genuine refusals in Chinese social media by analyzing 40 posts from the Douban group. Results show that in the particular domain of communication examined (everydaysituations online), genuine refusals are realized most frequently through indirect refusals especially stating reason and alternative, followed by direct refusal of expressing negative willingness and negative ability. It is hoped that the paper will shed light on the refusal practice for people who find it difficult to say no to othersandalso the research of online refusals in Chinese.

Keywords: refusal strategy; genuine refusal; speech act of refusal

I. Introduction

It is not always feasible to complywith others in day-to-daycommunication. Declining is sometimes inevitable, even if it threatens both the speaker's and listener's face, especially in Chinese culture where the concept of face (mianzi) holds great significance (Lee-Wong, 2000).Many people find it hard to express refusals properly. Refusals are flexible in form and content according to the previous speech act, request, invitation, or suggestion. Furthermore, refusals are sensitive to social status (Beebeet al., 1990).

This study explores therefusals on the discursive level and systematically investigates the discourse structure, pragmatic strategies, and influencing factors of refusal speech acts in online conversations in extended discourse. The research findings contribute to enriching the existing literature on refusal speech acts in online contexts. It is hoped that this study will shed some light on providing certain guidance for the use of refusal strategies by individuals, enhancing theirpragmatic competence, and offering a reference for relevant departments in constructing a harmonious online language environment.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Studies on refusals and genuine refusals

Refusals are "responding speech acts through which the speaker denies to engage in an activity proposed by the interlocutor" (Chen et al., 1995, p. 121), which lies in the second pair part of an adjacency pair(Gass & Houck, 1999; Shishavan, 2016).They have been examinedextensively in the field of pragmatics research (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010) due to the fact that expressing a negative responsepresents a potentially face-threatening speech act that requires substantial linguistic and cognitive abilities from the speakers.

The existing literature on refusals can be broadly categorized into two primary types of empirical studies: L1 refusals by native speakers of various languages, and comparative studies between L1 and L2 refusals, examining how native speakers of the target language differ from foreign language learners in their refusal strategies.

Existing studies concentrate on refusals in English as a second language(L2) for learners including Arabic(Al-Gahtani& Roever, 2018; Nelson, 2002; Shafran &Stavans, 2023), Chinese(Liao & Bresnahan, 1996), Japanese(Taguchi, 2013) and Persian (Shishavan, 2016). For instance, Lee(2016) observed that the strategy of providing a specific reason predominant in all refusal strategies of Cantonese English learners and that there was a noticeable decline in the direct refusal with increasing age and exposure to language learning. Moreover, the developmental trajectory from direct to indirect refusals in L2 acquisition mirrors similar patterns observed in L2 requests and complaints among young Cantonese English learners, indicating potentialL1 pragmatic transfer.

In recent years, there are also researchers attached attention to refusals of English learners of L2Mandarin Chinese (e.g. Su, 2021).

These refusals are termedgenuine refusals, contrasting with ostensible refusals, which involve transparent insincerity that is mutually recognized andis offered ritually as "a polite act to indicate the speaker's consideration of the hearer" (Chen et al., 1995, p. 152).An accurate judgment of the genuine or ostensible refusals was challenging due to the inherent inability of the listener to discern the speaker'sauthentic sentiments and motivations, while factors such as familiarity, social status, relational proximity, and the degree of imposition play crucial roles in discerning the sincerity in refusals(Shishavan, 2016).Much researchongenuine refusals in Mandarin adopts an experimental method, primarily concentrating on the single turns of head refusals (Su, 2020) rather than the refusal sequence.

2.2 Refusals in Chinese expressed by native Chinese speakers

The research onrefusal as a speech act was introduced to China at the end of the 20th century. Early domestic studies are comparative studies of the refusal between English and Chinese based on Beebe et al.'s classification of refusal strategies (1990) (e.g. Wang, 2001; Wang & Li, 2007; Zhu & Li, 2004), while researchers increasingly regard refusals in Chinese as an independent research target. For instance, Studies in Chinese have examined ostensible refusals in responses to invitations and offers (Chen et al., 1995; Ran & Lai, 2014; Zhu et al., 2000), where refusals functioned as delayed acceptances for politeness.Nevertheless, ostensible refusals are found to be context-specific in Chinese invitational and offering conversations (Su, 2020), while other day-to-day situations of genuine refusals remainrelatively underinvested.

Refusal in Chinese can be expressed indirectly or directly through idioms such as "refusing an offer with gratitude"(xiejue), "refusing with gentle/mild words" (wanyanxiejue), "refusing rudely or flatly"(yikouhuijue), and "refusing absolutely without hesitation"(duanranjujue)(Chen et al., 1995).Much researchon the refusal strategies of Chinese speakers exhibits a consistent preferencefor the use of indirect refusals, which reinforces the Chinese indirect communication approach and the norm of politeness(Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).Chen et al. (1995) conducted a study on Chinese refusal patterns using a DCT involving 100 Mandarin-speaking individuals who had an average duration of 2.4 years of residence in the US. They explored how refusal strategies were distributed in response to four types of initiating acts (request, invitation, suggestion, and offer), and examined how social status(high-low, equal-equal, and low-equal) influenced the distribution of these refusal strategies.They classified refusals into two types: substantive and ritual, which is in line with genuine and ostensible refusals mentioned above. However, the four types of initiating acts are not inclusive enough because they could be subcategorized and lead to different refusals. Additionally, refusal strategies were often combined, with the predominant sequence involving providing a reason alongside an alternative, since offering a reason could mitigate the adverse impact of the refusal, and presenting an alternative could offer the listener an alternative option.

Liao and Bresnahan's (1996) research on Mandarin Chinese speakers at a university in Taiwan and native American English speakers across six request scenarios showedthat native Chinesestudents were observed to refrain from providing extensive explanations or employing numerous politeness markers when refusing friends. Instead, they commonly used phrases such as "I don't want"(wobuxiang) without soliciting reasons. Similarly, when refusing close family members, they exhibited an economical tendency towards brevity, employing fewer speech tokens and shorter refusals. Thesewere termed the politeness theory of dian-dao-wei-zhi"point-to-is-end--marginally touch the point politeness principle", suggesting a preference for minimal elaboration or explanation in awkward refusal discourse. Meanwhile, Chinese tend not to expresspositive opinions before refusals due to their collective orientation,which stems from a fear that if they were to express a positive opinion initially, they would have to comply. It is noted that the phrase "I'd love to..." (wo hen leyi) does not serve as a standard expression of refusal and is not commonly used by Chinese speakers.

In recent years, the research on refusalshas further increased and enriched. For instance, TV series and reality TV shows are attached attention as data sources(Ren & Woodfield, 2016; Yang, 2008). And age factoris examined in Chang's study (2021), where a cross-sectional methodology was employed to investigate the developmental trajectory of interlocutor sensitivity in 400 children regarding their ability to perform speech acts ofrefusal.There is a great reliance on employing non-formulaic expressions in refusal strategies such as "excuse/reason" and"alternative" to mitigate the directness and threat, which makes refusals develop behind other speech acts. Among other things, the researchers found thatsocial status and social distance factors were found to affect the college students' selection of strategies, aligning with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.Ma and Li (2024) innovatively investigated strategies, distributional patterns, and functions of translanguaging practices in digital refusals through the analysis of naturally occurring data collected on WeChat and found that online interlocutors adopted a wide range of translanguaging strategies including multimodal, multilingual, and multi-semiotic resources.

2.3 Research Gap

Previous research adopted role plays (Al-Gahtani& Roever, 2018; Lee, 2016; Siebold & Busch, 2015; Su, 2020) and Discourse Completion Task(DCT) (Beebeet al., 1990;Chang, 2011;Chang & Ren, 2020; Chen et al., 1995; MuloFarenkia, 2023) as their source of data collection. Nevertheless, the naturalness of DCT is limited compared to real-life conversations as it typically involves only a single turn of conversation, whereas real-liferefusal conversations often encompass multiple turns (Morkus, 2014). The study conducted by Beebeet al., (1990) and many subsequent research have predominantly employedDiscourse Completion Tasks for data collection. However, it is noted that these tasks do not shed light on the sequential organization or online production (Golato, 2003; Kasper, 2006; Turnbull, 2001). In roleplays,there arebeginning of conversation, roles, and some prompts or tasks (Hassall, 2020), while participants in roleplays provide less comprehensive informationcompared to natural interactions(Ewald, 2012).Hassall (2020) investigated the validityof utilizing roleplay in request sequences and highlighted the possibility of participants deliberately modifying their actions or conduct when aware of their role as subjects of research, thereby potentially impacting their performance.In general, there is still a lack ofempiricalstudies on natural and authentic data in daily life.

Moreover, they are limited to eliciting participants' offline knowledge rather than capturing their spontaneous responses in context.Online communicationhas taken placewidely and frequently in recent years, which has attracted less attention yet partly resulting from its time-consuming and difficulties of controlling variables such as gender, age, and social class (Gayle et al., 2002).Furthermore, there is ample experimental research thatfocuses on cross-cultural differences in refusals all over the world. For example, Liao and Bresnahan (1996) conducted a contrastive pragmatic study on American English and Mandarin refusal strategies. However, little research concentrates on the comparison between successful refusal and failed refusal.

Based on the previous studies, the present study is particularly intended to address the following questions.

(1)Which categories of refusal are frequently used in online communication shared in Chinese social media groups? Do social status and degree of imposition influence refusal strategies?

(2) Is there any difference between successful refusal and failed refusal shared in Chinese social media groups?

III.   Methodology

3.1Data and data collection

The currentstudy decided to focus on data collected from Douban, a Chinese online social platform that facilitates users in exchanging viewpoints, experiences, and daily lifestyleswithin a shared digital environment. Posts with WeChat screenshots were selected to ensure authenticity and accuracy.

The group is chosen for two reasons. First, the group exactly corresponds with the requirements of the present study, i.e., focusing on experiences of genuinerefusal in real life, and avoids the limitation of choosing suitablesearch words. Second, even though users need to register and join the group to share their experiences, the group is representative enough and among the most active groups on Douban, with new posts published almost every day. The Douban group had 269,626 members.The group has two main sections: the successful refusal zone and the failed refusal zone. The former is for sharing instances where the poster or people around have successfully declined something; the latter is for sharing situations the posteris very dissatisfied with the failed rejection and seeking advice from group members.The successful zone has much more posters than the failed zone. Through careful reading and manual exclusion, the final corpus comprises a total of 30 representative posts from the success group and 10 posts from the failure group.

Social statusis also coded as equal-equal and low-high hierarchies. Most refusals took place between two persons of equal status (classmates, unfamiliar friends), whereas the remaining areseven requestsfrom a higher status (boss or older relatives) with high imposition and two from a lower status (younger relatives).

Table 1 Social status in successful and failed refusals

	Successful refusals	Failed refusals	Total
High-low	6	1	7
Equal-equal	23	8	31
Low-high	1	1	2
Total	30	10	40

3.2 Data analysis

The taxonomy developed by Beebe et al. (1990), which has been extensively adopted by researchers for both oral- and written-discourse analysissince the 1990s,was employed and modified based on the corpus of this research.Table 2 below presents the list of current coding categories of refusal. Preliminary remarks that could not exist alone as refusals are termed as "adjuncts". Face-to-face-specific categories, such as "lack of enthusiasm", "doing nothing", "physical departure"and"pause fillers" were not included.Previous studies have made various adaptations to the categorization of direct refusals. For instance, Nelson et al. (2002) combined all

three types of direct refusal (i.e., "I refuse," "no," and "negative ability/willingness") into a single category, whereas "no" and "I can't" were coded as separate in Chang's (2009) classification. The analysis of the corpus in this study revealed that while "negative willingness/ability" was employed frequently, the direct performative refusal "I refuse" was absent in the responses. Furthermore, single "no" carries little analytical significance and the "no" equivalent in Chinese can reveal the underlying intentions of negative willingness or ability. Although "negative willingness"and "negative ability" can be grouped together, there are notable differences in the level of directness and politeness between these two semantic formulas in Chinese refusals. Consequently, this study distinguishes "negative willingness"and "negative ability" as two subcategories within direct refusals.Wish was recategorized as a kind of adjunct and defined as making positive wishes to the requester, such as "congratulations"."Statement of principle" and "statement of philosophy" were combined together into the general "statement of principle", including personal preference and norm. Additionally, categories such as "guilt trip", "acceptance that functions as a refusal", "suggesting willingness/promise of future acceptance", "letting the interlocutor off the hook", "self-defense", and "hedging" were excluded from the classification scheme because they were not observed in the data.The refusal responses generated by the posters were examined as comprising a sequence of strategic and semantic formulas. For instance, when a participant declined arequest to lend money by stating "Ask someone else. I never lend money to people",it was categorized as: [statement of alternative] [statement of principle].

Table 2 Coding categories of refusal

Refusal	Categories	Examples
Direct	1. Negative willingness	*I don't want to.
	2. Negative ability	I can't.
Indirect	1. Excuse,reason, explanation	I appreciate the offer but I can't take it.
	2. Setting a condition for future or past acceptance	If you had asked me earlier, I would have ...
	3. Statement of alternative	I'd prefer to ... /I'd rather ... /Why don't you do X instead of Y?/Why don't you ask someone else?
	4. Statement of principle	* I never lend money to people
	5. Statement of regret	I'm sorry.
	6. Criticizing the request/er	Who do you think you are? That'sa terrible idea!
	7. Threat/statement of negative consequences	*If you ask again, I'll block you.
	8. Repetition of part of request	Monday?
	9. Topic switch	*Auntie, if you need to pay the water fee or other things, just let me know then
Adjuncts	1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement	That's a good idea./I'd love to ... *So do I
	2. Statement of empathy	I realize you are in a difficult situation.
	3. Gratitude	*Thank you, Principal Liu.
	4. Wish	*Wishing you a happy marriage

Examples with an asterisk (*) are taken from the present datasetwhile the others are extracted from Beebe et al. (1990).

IV.   Results

This section analyzes the refusal strategies quantitatively by presenting the frequencies and percentages of individual strategies and qualitatively by examining representative transcribed WeChat conversations from

the collected posts. Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of each refusal strategy analyzed from the 40posts(30 successfulrefusals and 10 failed refusals) collected.

Table 3 Frequency and percentage of refusal strategies

Strategy	Successful refusals	Failed refusals	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Direct	**23**	**8**	**31**	20.13
Negative willingness	15	5	20	12.99
Negative ability	8	3	11	7.14
Indirect	**82**	**26**	**108**	70.13
Excuse,reason, explanation	17	14	31	20.13
Setting a condition for future or past acceptance	2	1	3	1.95
Statement of alternative	19	8	27	17.53
Statement of principle	10	0	10	6.49
Statement of regret	2	1	3	1.95
Criticizing the request/er	17	1	18	11.69
Threat/statement of negative consequences	5	0	5	3.25
Repetition of part of request	7	0	7	4.55
Topic switch	3	1	4	2.60
Adjuncts	**11**	**4**	**15**	9.74
Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement	1	1	2	1.30
Statement of empathy	1	0	1	0.65
Gratitude	4	3	7	4.55
Wish	5	0	5	3.25
Total	**116**	**38**	**154**	**100**

As indicated in Table 3, refusal strategiesin the present dataset were predominantly employed indirectly, with directrefusalstrategies accounting for 20.13% of the data collected.The subsequent sections will concentrate on the individual pragmatic strategies utilized by Chinese posters in their refusals. Strategies that are employed infrequently (less than 4%) will be excluded from the ensuing illustrations with examples.

4.1 Direct refusal
4.1.1 Negative willingness
(1)A：你验收 xx 了吗？
A: Did you check xx?
B：验了
B: Yes, I did.
A：老师问得详细吗
A: Did the teacher ask detailed questions?
B：还行吧，不怎么难，都是基础的问题
B: It was okay, not too difficult, just basic questions.
A：哦哦
A: I see
A：那你能不能帮我验收?
A: Can you help me with the check?
A：[表情包：猛汉卖萌]
A: [Sticker: Tough guy being cute]
B：不能
B: No, I can't.
A：帮我一下嘛!
A: Please help me!
A：不费你多少时间的呀
A: It won't take much of your time.

A：[表情包：你真的要这样对我吗]

A: [Sticker: Are you really going to treat me like this]

B：不帮，再问拉黑

B: No, if you ask again, I'll block you.

The background of excerpt (1) is that an unfamiliar classmate A came to ask B to present a final work for her after already being rejected by one of B's roommates.The request was a cheat in essence. It is reasonable for B to refuse directly twice by "buneng"不能 and "bu bang"不帮, together with the strategy of threatening to block to show B's firm attitude. Other high frequency expression of negative willingness includes"buyong"不用, "buxing"不行, "wo buyao"我不要, "buxuyao"不需要, and "bufangbian"不方便. These listedexpressions are categorized as negative willingness since the Chineseprefer to express euphemistically compared with the English language.For instance, "buyong" seems to say that the hearer needs not to bother or make an effort while the unspoken words are the speaker is not willing to do so.

4.1.2 Negative ability

(2) A：在不

A: Are you there

B：嗯

B: Yes

B：咋啦

B: What's up

A：你会写起诉状么

A: Do you know how to write a lawsuit

B：不会

B: No, I don't.

A：或者有模版么

A: Or do you have a template

A：或者你告诉我怎么弄

A: Or can you tell me how to do it

B：我没有模版哎

B: I don't have a template

B：😂我也不会

B: 😂I don't know how to either

A：你不是学法律的

A: Aren't you a law student

A：……

A: ...

B：我不会整这啊关键是

B: I don't know how to do this, indeed

As shown in the above instance, the poster rejected four times by using the same strategy of negative ability. Typical expressions of negative ability involve "bu hui"不会,"bu dong"不懂,"mei you"没有, and some specific nouns can be added after them according to certain contexts. For example, B replied,"I don't have a template".And intensifiers such as really, indeed can be inserted freely to strengthen the rejection as in the last line.

4.2 Indirect refusal
4.2.1 Excuse,reason, explanation

The strategy of providing anexcuse,reason, or explanation was frequently employed, accounting for 20.13% of the refusals collected, making it the most commonly used strategy.

(3)A：[Word 文件：竞赛通知]

A: [Word file: Competition Notice]

A：工会有个竞赛你去参加哇

A: The union has a competition,and you participate in it

B：xxx, 我最近手里工作比较多可能顾不上背题，要不您再找别人看看

B: xxx, I have a lot of work on my hands lately and probably can't manage to study for it. Maybe you can find someone else.

A：好的

A: Okay

B：[表情包：不好意思]

B: [Sticker: Sorry]

Example (3) took place between an interlocutor with higher status and a hearer with lower status. The poster was asked by the previous leader to take part in a competition representing the previous working place. The background information was also shared that the poster had beenon loan or seconded("jiediao") to a new public-sector job for half a year. However, B continued doing previous work online while A neglected B's holiday benefits on purpose, which hurt B's feelings and made the refusal necessary even though A had high imposition. Although the request was out of B's duty and unreasonable, B still adopted polite and mild refusal strategies by combining reason and statement of alternative. The hedge"may" and respectful form of the second person pronoun ("nin")were also carefully selected to not threaten the interlocutor's face.

4.2.2Statement of alternative

The strategy of stating analternativetook up17.53% of the collectedrefusals, being the second most frequently used strategy.

(4) A：你大学学的是计算机应用还是编程?

A: Did you study computer applications or programming in college?

A：有时间给我来个电话

A: When you have time, give me a call.

B：我学的计算机科学与技术，软硬件都要学的，但硬件比较生疏，软件运用多一点

B: I studied computer science and technology. We had to learn both software and hardware, but I'm more familiar with software since I haven't done much hardware work.

A：java 编程会不会，我买了个小程序，开发者不更新了，你看能不能把源码解读出来，自己编译一下。

A: Do you know Java programming? I bought a small application, but the developer is no longer updating it. Can you look at the source code and compile it yourself?

A: 加我 QQ，xxx，我把程序发给你看一下。

A: Add me on QQ, xxx, and I'll send you the program to take a look.

B: 我擅长的语言不是 java，java 几乎不会的程度，xx 可以去闲鱼找找看有那种 java 后端的可以找他们来运营。

B: My expertise isn't in Java; I hardly know it at all. You might check on Xianyu for someone who specializes in Java backend development to help with operations.

As illustrated in the above example, the poster provided a practical suggestion to his/her relative after stating the negative ability to help with the request of writing Java. The poster first mentioned the negative ability which belongs to the direct refusal even though it conveys a weak refusal compared with saying "no" or "I refuse". Considering the social relationship, B offered a practical alternative option immediately to weaken the face-threatening refusal.

4.2.3Statement of principle

Statement of principle was often adopted in the present corpus, involving proposing personal preferences and norms. The strategy was mild in that the refusal was targeted towards the request itself instead of the requester. For instance, in example (5), B rejected lending money to A by saying "I never lend money to people". In this way, the requester would find it both difficult to persuade the person and easier to accept the rejection and adopted the suggested alternative to ask someone else.

(5) A：你能借 500 钱吗

A: Can you lend me 500 yuan

B：啥

B: What

A：钱

A: Money

B：你要借钱?

B: You want to borrow money?

A：我一会就给你

A: I'll give it back to you soon

B：干啥的

B: What for

A：私事

A: For privatebusiness

A：你能转给我的支付宝吗
A: Can you transfer it to my Alipay
B：你问问别人吧，我从来不借钱给人
B: Ask someone else**,** I never lend money to people

4.2.4 Criticizing the request/er
(6) A：哈喽
A: Hello
A：摩西摩西
A: Moshi moshi (Hello in Japanese)
A： xx 江湖救急[捂脸]
A: I need your urgent help [facepalm]
B：我刚看到消息
B: I just saw your message
B：咋了
B: What's up?
A：帮忙翻译个日语翻译方便吗
A: Can you help me with a Japanese translation?
A：日语专利
A: It's a Japanese patent
B：全文翻译吗[捂脸] [捂脸]
B: A full translation? [facepalm] [facepalm]
A：对
A: Yes
B：……那我怕是没时间哦
B: ...I don't think I'll have time for that
A：[捂脸] [捂脸]
A: [facepalm] [facepalm]
A：我一会发给你吧，有时间就看看，没时间就算了[捂脸]
A: I'll send it to you later. If you have time, take a look. If not, that's fine [facepalm]
B：你可以试试谷歌翻译
B: You can try Google Translate
A：试了
A: I tried
A：有道，百度，谷歌
A: Youdao, Baidu, Google
A：翻译了个寂寞
A: The translations were useless
B：淘宝应该有人工翻译，那个会准一点吧
B: Taobao should have human translators, they might be more accurate
B：我先去做实验了
B: I need to go experiment first
A：我试试
A: I'll give it a try
A：OK
A: OK
A：撒由那拉
A: Sayonara (Goodbye in Japanese)
A：（一天后）[PDF 文件]
A: (One day later) [PDF file]
A：有时间帮忙看下
A: When you have time, help me take a look
A：不胜感激
A: I'd be very grateful

A：（删好友后发验证消息）那篇专利你看了吗?

A: (After being removedfrom friends, sends a verification message) Did you look at that patent?

B：看了，一万多字你让我翻译?咱俩关系有好到这种程度吗?你咋好意思张口问的呢?淘宝人工翻译百字十元，真那么想看自己花钱去，别找我。没答应你不知道咋回事吗?这么大人了，心里没点数?怎么好意思再问我看没看呢?

B: I saw it. Over 10,000 words and you want me to translate it? Are we that close? How can you even ask? Taobao's human translation service is 10 yuan per 100 words. If you really want to see it, pay for it yourself. If I didn't agree, don't you get the hint? How can you even ask again if I looked at it?

A：不是.....

A: It's not...

B：我真是无语…

B: I'm really speechless...

A：就是他是做醇还是做醛

A: Just tell me if it's about alcohols or aldehydes

A： ……

A: ...

B：你还挺委屈?翻译全文不是你说的?

B: Are you seriously feeling wronged? Didn't you ask for a full translation?

B：无语。

B: I'm speechless.

In the above example, the conversation consists of two stages. At first, the poster tried to be polite and adopted several indirect refusal strategies including giving reason ("...I don't think I'll have time for that") and stating alternative ("You can try Google Translate"). In addition, the poster added the modal particle "o (哦)"at the end of the sentence and used emoticonsin order to soften the refusal considering the interlocutor is a senior student.However, A sent the file after being declined and asked for help again, which annoyed the poster greatly. B replied nothing and removed A from the friend list as a silent indirect refusal. Nevertheless, A did not give up and requested once again by sending a verification message.At this time, the poster could not suppress his/her anger and criticized the requesterin several lines of rhetorical questions. It is noted that either a modal particle or emoticon is not used this time. Instead, B employed both the punctuation mark of suspension points and words to emphasize impatient and speechless emotions.

4.2.5 Repetition of part of request

(7) A：你那边的车证可以摇我们这的牌号不

A: Can your car registration be used to apply for a license plate in our area?

B：不知道啊

B: I don't know.

A：想买车

A: I want to buy a car.

A：我的征信过不了的，你应该可以

A: My credit won't pass, but you should be able to

A：用你的帮我按揭，我按时打钱给你还

A: Can you use your name to help me get a loan? I'll transfer money to you on time to repay it.

B：。。。

B: ...

B：我帮你贷款?

B: You want me to get a loan for you?

B：想太多了

B: You're asking too much.

As illustrated in the above excerpt, the poster declined her sister's request by restating the request without directly saying no. It carried a sense of questioning the requester in the current context, as a rhetorical question.In the remaining situations, repetition could also work as seeking confirmation.

4.3 Adjuncts

Adjuncts are relatively less employed (9.74%）compared to direct refusal (20.13%）and indirect refusal (70.13%)in the present corpus.

4.3.1 Gratitude

Gratitude is frequently employedin high imposition situations, with 6 out of 7 examples taking place such as boss and elder relatives. As an adjunct, gratitude could be employed either before or after the refusal strategies. As shown in the following example, the poster begun and ended the refusal with the grateful expression "thank you" to show respect to the requester, headmaster of the school.

(8) B: 谢谢刘校。年级小组长我之前担任了好几年，心想等到毕业后学校会轮换一个老师做，其实一直力不从心，二来小组长轮着当大家没那么辛苦，都体验一下组长的工作我想应该配合会更积极。而且这次支教回来，我要面临新接的班，新的家长，适应新的工作环境，对我来说是挑战，想把心思更多放在这上面。恳请刘校在年级组长的选择上考虑一下其他人，我相信其他老师肯定也能胜任，如果刘校实在找不到，我也积极配合，恳请您考虑一下谢谢!

B: Thank you, Principal Liu. I have served as the grade group leader for several years, and I thought the school would rotate another teacher into the role after graduation. Honestly, I have always found it overwhelming. Also, rotating the group leader position would make it less tiring for everyone and give others a chance to experience the responsibilities, which I believe would lead to more active cooperation. Furthermore, after returning from this teaching support trip, I have to face a new class, new parents, and adapt to a new working environment. This is a challenge for me, and I want to focus more on it. I earnestly request that you consider someone else for the grade group leader position. I believe other teachers are certainly capable. If you really cannot find anyone else, I will still cooperate actively. Please consider this, thank you!

V. Discussion

The present study aims to investigate genuine refusals in Chinese social media by examining posts collected from a Douban group. Previous empirical studies on Chinese refusals have primarily relied on elicited data through written Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) (e.g., Chen et al., 1995; Liao and Bresnahan, 1996; Ren et al., 2013) or roleplays (e.g., Siebold & Busch, 2015). Due to the nature of elicited data, such refusals may not accurately represent actual language use in real interactions, particularly in the context of modern online conversations. The challenge of collecting precise and authentic data has resulted in limited research on genuine refusals in everyday life. In this respect, this study contributes to the current literature of pragmatics by analyzing genuine refusals in Chinese collected fromposts in the Refusal Douban group.

The first research question investigated the types of pragmatic strategies employed in the posts, as well as the frequency of these strategies in both successful and failed refusals.Existingstudies in Chinahave demonstrated that "explanation" emerges as the most commonly utilized indirect strategy for refusals, irrespective of the nature of the initiating speech act, power relation, and social distance (e.g., Liao and Bresnahan, 1996; Su, 2020). The present study aligns in this aspect with "excuse, reason, and explanation" being the most frequently used strategy. At the communicative level, genuine refusals in Mandarin are frequently observed to be delayed, softened, and manifested through extended sequences, which is similar to several other languages (e.g., Lii-Shih, 1994; Li and Cao, 2011).Nevertheless, the current data present relatively more direct refusals and less frequently usedconflictive strategies such as criticizing the request/er.Features of the data source partly account for this. First of all, the group is an open and anonymousplatform for public browsing. All netizens have access to these posts without an account or membership in the group. It filters many online conversations of close social distance since the poster can choose to share with friends or close relatives instead of writing an open post to declare the refusal to the cyber world.The posters are to some extent blow off their steamby sharing refusal stories online. When offended by the unreasonable request or offer, they would turn to conflictive refusal strategies. Furthermore, communicating with acquaintances lessens the stress of rejecting. The posters do not feel the need to decline as politely as possible to maintain each other's face. It is also possible that the type of the initiating speech act plays a vital role. The collected corpus is mainly request with several exceptions of offer concerning blind date and marriage. In addition, the platform is more popular with young people in their 20s or 30s, the generation that is less limited by traditional Chinese culture of avoiding conflict compared with elder people.

Social status has an impact on the selection of refusal strategies. For instance, 6 out of 7 gratitude strategies took place in a high imposition context.It is also noted that there are many online-specific elements including emoticonsand stickers. As shown in example (3) in section 4.2.1, the last response expressed regret in the form of a bowing sticker with the text "sorry" ("buhaoyisi"). It is not necessary for the poster to say sorry for rejecting extra work. In line with the situation, the poster chose the phrase "buhaoyisi"不好意思 (embarrassed, excuse me, sorry) that signifies the least intense level of apology compared to "duibuqi"对不起 and "baoqian" 抱歉.The use of a sticker rather than typing the corresponding words further lessens the intensity of emotions like regret and blame. Additionally, out of the 3 instances of"statement of regret" identified, all instances were combined with other refusal strategies, such as "reason",which aligns with previous research, which suggests that an apology typically precedes or follows other refusal strategies (Liao, 1994; Ren & Woodfield, 2016).Interestingly, despite the data source in Chinese social media, oneposter used the English expression

"sorry" to apologize rather than the Chinese version. Given that most of the users were in their 20s or early 30s, this may indicate a tendency among younger Chinese individuals to code-switch to simple English expressions like "sorry", "thanks", and "ok" in everyday communication.

The second research question examined the difference between successful and failed refusals. By comparing the quantitative use of strategies based on standardized data, some possible explanations can be summarized for the failure.There is frequent expression of positive opinions such as "sounds interesting" or even positive answers such as "okay" and "I have time" in the failed group. The positive opinions are often employed in Western refusals (Chang, 2011; MuloFarenkia, 2023)while rarely used in the current corpus (none in the successful refusals) since any positive comment may create the atmosphere of acceptance and make it harder to say no afterward. The order of strategy also matters. One poster adopted a positive answer in the beginning followed by detailed explanation. However, the request only noticed the first part and regarded the response as a "yes". Within the strategy of "setting a condition for future or past acceptance", both examples in the successful refusal group set a condition for past acceptance to show pity and leave no room for present acceptance, while one usedfuture acceptance in failed refusal group. Setting a condition for past acceptance greatly lessens the tense of refusal in that the reason is an objective bad timing, instead of subjective unwillingness. In the meantime, a reasonable requester would understand quickly and give up. In contrast, promising future acceptance leaves ample space for the requester to request once again. There are also many posters afraid of saying no who did not reveal their rejection in the WeChat screenshotbut shared inner thoughts in their posts. It emphasizes the significance of the current research in that it may shed light on refusing bravely and tactfully in online communication by analyzing and learning from successful examples.It is also possible that factors other than refusal strategies affect the outcome of refusals such as the requester's persistent personality.

Noticeably, there is no occurrence of several indirect strategies as Beebe et al. (1990) listed including"suggesting willingness/promise of future acceptance", "letting the interlocutor off the hook", "self-defense" and "hedging". On the one hand, the present corpus has its own characteristics which contains online conversations shared by young Chinese of relatively far social distance as mentioned above. For instance, close relatives would know each other better and have more offline connections. As shared by several posters, their refusals are targeted at acquaintances who abruptly behave asif they care about some private business, especially marriage. The posters have less pressure to say no without self-defense or hedging. On the other hand, refusal containing some positive feelings or willingness usually leads to unwanted outcomes as is shown by the failed refusal group. It also explains why these four strategies are not employed to avoid possible repeated requests and corresponding refusals.

VI.   Conclusion

The purpose of the current study is to investigate Chinese genuine refusals in online written communications. It has revealed that indirect refusals are most frequently employed followed bydirect refusals and adjuncts whereas direct refusals and conflictive indirect strategies appear more than existing studies.The target of refusal or the social status influences the selection of refusal strategies.And refusal strategies partially affect the conversation outcomes.As mentioned before, little research in the field of pragmatics has focused on Chinese refusals using naturalistic data from social media. The findings from this study highlight the advantages of examining refusals in a public discourse setting. Further research based on naturalistic data is necessary to explore how refusals are realized in real online communication contexts.

The current study has some limitations embedded within it. First of all, the data collected from one social media will weaken the general applicability of the study's findings. Furthermore, the use of refusal strategies is not the only determinant factor in the refusal practice. Future research might seek improvements from the above aspects to understandgenuine refusals in online social media communications in Chinese.

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