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Semantic Formulae in Refusal Responses Among Native Speakers of Ga with Limited Formal Education

Patience Calys-Tagoe*

Department of Communication Studies, University of Professional Studies-Accra, Ghana

ABSTRACT

This study explored the factors shaping the semantic formulae used by native speakers of Ga, a language spoken in southern Ghana, when refusing two offers and one request. The research employed a qualitative approach and an ethnographic design, with participants interviewed in their natural environment. Twenty native Ga speakers with limited formal education took part in the interviews. In addition, five proficient Ga speakers participated in a focus group discussion to offer further cultural insights into the responses. The research was carried out in Chorkor Chemunaa, a suburb of Accra. The findings indicated that participants' choice of semantic formulae was influenced by situational factors both within and beyond the immediate context of the refusal event. The study also highlights that refusal behaviour among Ga speakers reflects the sociocultural norms governing interaction within the speech community.

INTRODUCTION

Refusal is widely regarded as one of the most delicate speech acts in human interaction because it inherently threatens the interlocutor's face. When speakers decline an offer or request, they must balance honesty with politeness in order to avoid offending the hearer while still conveying their intended meaning. As Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) explain, refusal responses reflect fundamental cultural values and involve delicate interpersonal negotiation through which speakers attempt to maintain rapport and help the hearer avoid embarrassment. Because refusals carry a strong potential for interpersonal tension and communication breakdown, they have attracted considerable attention in pragmatics and sociolinguistics.

Previous research shows that refusal responses are shaped by sociocultural norms and situational factors that differ across speech communities (Anderson, 2004; Dzameshi, 2001; Holmes, 2012). The strategies speakers employ when declining offers or requests often reflect culturally specific expectations about politeness, hierarchy, and interpersonal relationships. For this reason, the appropriate perception and production of refusal responses require a considerable degree of culture-specific pragmatic awareness (Holmes, 2012). When speakers use inappropriate semantic formulae,

relationships between interlocutors may be strained or even damaged.

Within Ga-speaking communities, communication practices are strongly influenced by communal values and respect for social hierarchy. The Ga society is structured hierarchically, and this social organisation shapes the norms governing how speakers express refusal. In interactions involving unequal social status, speakers adjust their refusal strategies according to their position within the social hierarchy. Subordinates often resort to indirect semantic formulae when refusing offers or requests from superiors in order to demonstrate respect and maintain social harmony. In contrast, superiors may employ more direct semantic formulae when addressing their subordinates (Larbie, 2021). These patterns show that refusal responses in Ga are closely tied to culturally embedded norms of respect and authority.

The situational context surrounding the act of refusal also plays an important role in determining the type of semantic formula used. Context often influences both how and what speakers say when declining an offer or request (Author, 2020). In some situations, refusals carry cultural obligations that require speakers to carefully mitigate the rejection. Dzameshi (2001) refers to such situations as involving compliance prerequisites, in which cultural expectations require the speaker to justify the refusal, offer alternatives, or express politeness before rejecting the act.

For example, requesting to see a worker during official working hours may place a cultural burden on the hearer. In such circumstances, speakers often avoid direct refusal and instead employ indirect strategies that offer alternatives or postponement. A speaker may say:

<div>Icons made from svg iconsis licensed by CC BY 4.0</div> ("Please, you can only see the person you are looking for at another time because he or she is busy working.")

This form of response is culturally more appropriate than a direct statement such as "No, you cannot see this person because he or she is working." By presenting an alternative rather than issuing a blunt rejection, the speaker reduces the potential face threat and preserves social harmony.

Although refusal strategies have been widely studied across languages, most existing studies focus on English and other widely researched languages, often involving speakers with relatively high levels of formal education. As a result, African indigenous languages and less formally educated speech communities remain underrepresented in pragmatic research. In the case of Ga, there is limited empirical work examining how native speakers formulate refusal responses in everyday interaction. Even less attention has been paid to the speech of older native speakers with little formal education, whose communicative practices may reflect more traditional speaking norms.

At the same time, social and linguistic change is occurring within Ga-speaking communities. Educated Ga speakers frequently operate in bilingual environments where English plays a dominant role. As a result, they may consciously or unconsciously transfer pragmatic patterns from English into Ga when performing speech acts such as refusals. This process may lead to negative pragmatic transfer, whereby second-language behaviour influences first-language communication patterns.

The influence of mass media may also contribute to these changes. Many Ga speakers regularly listen to OBONU FM, a radio and television station that broadcasts primarily in the Ga language. The presenters on this station are generally educated speakers whose discourse may incorporate elements of English pragmatic conventions. Continuous exposure to such speech raises an important question: do uneducated native Ga speakers adopt the refusal strategies used by these educated media presenters, or do they continue to rely on traditional Ga communicative practices?

Against this background, the present study is necessary. By examining the refusal responses of native speakers of Ga with limited formal education, the study seeks to gain insight into the semantic formulae that characterise traditional Ga speaking norms and to determine whether these norms are being affected by emerging patterns of mediated language use.

The Ga people occupy a coastal territory in southern Ghana extending northwards from the Gulf

of Guinea to the foothills of the Akwapim Hills. They are bordered to the west by the Awutu and Guan peoples and to the east by the Adangbe, a group with close linguistic ties to the Ga. From west to east, the Ga are traditionally organised into several principal settlements, including Ga Mashi (Central Accra), Osu (Christiansborg), La, Teshi, Nungua, and Tema. The Ga language belongs to the Kwa subgroup of the Niger-Congo language family (Dakubu, 2004). Understanding this cultural and linguistic context is essential for analysing how refusal responses are formulated and interpreted within Ga-speaking communities.

The main objective of this study is to determine whether native speakers of Ga with limited formal education reproduce refusal strategies associated with educated media discourse or retain more traditional Ga norms of refusal.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the factors that influence the semantic formulae used when refusing an offer of a job from a higher-status person and an offer of food from a close friend.
2. Examine the factors that influence the semantic formulae used when refusing a request from a distant friend.

The study, therefore, addresses the following research questions:

1. What factors influence the types of semantic formulae used when respondents refuse a job offer from a higher-status person and an offer of food from a close friend?
2. What factors influence the semantic formulae used when respondents refuse a request from a distant friend?

This study contributes to the broader field of linguistics by showing how sociocultural norms within the Ga speech community shape refusal strategies. It also offers insight into whether traditional communicative practices are being maintained or gradually influenced by education and media discourse. In addition, the findings may inform language educators and curriculum planners about the importance of incorporating sociocultural speaking norms into the teaching and development of the Ga language.

Theoretical framework

This study draws on Speech Act Theory, politeness theory, sociolinguistic competence, and the concept of semantic formulae to explain how speakers formulate

Fig.1: Map showing selected Ga settlements in southern Ghana.

refusal responses within culturally defined norms of interaction. Together, these perspectives illuminate the relationship between speakers' intentions, social relationships, and the cultural expectations that shape the linguistic strategies used when declining offers and requests.

Speech Act Theory views language as a form of social action through which speakers perform different communicative functions. Although speech act research often focuses more on the production of speech acts than on responses to them, the theory remains useful for the present study because it highlights the speaker's intention and the cultural orientation embedded in language use. Speech acts provide speakers with culturally recognised categories of verbal interaction, and their full significance can only be understood within the cultural context in which they occur (Bentahila & Davies, 1989).

Speech acts occur in various forms in everyday interaction, including requests, offers, apologies, greetings, promises, and warnings. Refusals, which are the focus of this study, arise as responses to other speech acts such as requests and offers and therefore play an important role in managing interpersonal relationships. Searle (1969) explains that utterances can be analysed at three levels: the locutionary act, which refers to the production of a meaningful expression; the illocutionary act, which refers to the communicative intention behind the utterance; and the perlocutionary act, which concerns the effect of the utterance on the hearer.

Within this framework, requests and offers are particularly important in everyday communication. Searle (1969) classifies requests as directive speech acts because they attempt to get the hearer to act, while offers belong to commissive speech acts because they involve the speaker committing themselves to a future action. Because of their communicative purpose, speakers who make requests or offers generally expect a favourable response. This expectation reflects the illocutionary force of the act. However, when offers or requests are refused, the interaction may produce important perlocutionary consequences. A refusal may disappoint the hearer or threaten the relationship between interlocutors if it is not expressed appropriately. For this reason,

refusal responses must often be managed carefully to avoid misunderstanding or offence.

Politeness theory helps explain why refusals are considered delicate acts. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), certain speech acts threaten the interlocutor's face, or public self-image. Requests and offers may place pressure on the hearer because they involve some degree of obligation or cost. Similarly, refusing such acts may threaten interpersonal harmony. As Leech (2016) observes, these interactions require speakers to minimise the potential social cost of their responses. Consequently, speakers often rely on indirect and mitigated expressions when formulating refusal responses.

In multilingual societies such as Ghana, the appropriate performance of refusal responses requires not only linguistic knowledge but also sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to the social and cultural context in which communication occurs. Alptekin (2002) explains that this competence involves understanding culture-specific norms, values, and patterns of behaviour that shape interaction within a community. In the context of the present study, sociolinguistic competence is particularly important because situational and cultural considerations influence the choice of semantic formulae used in refusal responses. Native speakers of Ga must draw on their knowledge of culturally appropriate communication in order to formulate refusals that minimise the potential perlocutionary effects of rejecting offers or requests.

To analyse how these refusals are structured, the study also draws on the concept of semantic formulae proposed by Beebe et al. (1990). Semantic formulae refer to the conventionalised linguistic strategies that speakers use when performing refusals, such as expressions of regret, explanations, postponement, or the presentation of alternatives. These strategies often occur in particular combinations that allow speakers to soften the impact of a refusal while maintaining politeness and social harmony.

Taken together, these perspectives provide a useful framework for examining how refusal responses are constructed within the Ga speech community. By combining Speech Act Theory, politeness theory,

sociolinguistic competence, and semantic formulae, this study seeks to explain how speakers organise their refusal responses in ways that reflect both communicative intent and culturally grounded norms of interaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on refusal strategies across cultures consistently shows that speakers often rely on indirect forms when declining offers or requests. Beebe et al. (1990) demonstrated that refusals are typically realised through patterned combinations of semantic formulae rather than through single isolated expressions. Their work has remained central to refusal studies because it provides a systematic taxonomy for analysing the content, order, and frequency of refusal strategies. Subsequent studies have continued to show that refusals are shaped not only by linguistic structure but also by the social meanings attached to the interaction.

Cross-cultural studies also indicate that cultural norms, social distance, and power relations strongly influence directness and indirectness in refusals. Nelson et al. (2002), for example, found that speakers of Egyptian Arabic and American English employed different refusal strategies under similar interactional pressures. More recent studies have reported comparable patterns. Alajmi (2024) found that both Kuwaiti Arabic and British English speakers preferred indirect refusals, although the reasons provided and the influence of social status differed across the two groups. Mohamad (2025) similarly showed that Iranian and American speakers used indirect strategies shaped by culturally grounded expectations of politeness and interpersonal harmony.

At a broader level, recent reviews in cross-cultural pragmatics confirm that speech acts vary across cultures because shared norms and values guide communication practices. Usmani and Almashham (2024) argue that speech-act variation in intercultural communication often reflects cultural expectations regarding hierarchy, solidarity, and politeness. Taken together, these studies suggest that refusals cannot be fully understood without attention to the cultural and situational contexts in which they occur.

Despite these important contributions, much of the existing research focuses on widely studied languages and frequently relies on elicited data such as discourse completion tasks. As a result, refusal practices in African indigenous languages remain underexplored, especially among speakers with limited formal education. The present study addresses this gap by examining how native speakers of Ga formulate refusal responses to offers and requests in a community where traditional speaking norms remain highly valued.

METHODOLOGY

Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to examine how native speakers of Ga formulate refusal responses to offers and requests. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to understand the meanings and intentions underlying participants' linguistic choices rather than measure them numerically. Through this approach, the researcher explored how participants interpret and express refusal responses within their cultural and social contexts.

Research design

The study employed an ethnographic research design. Ethnographic methods, originally developed in anthropology and later advocated in linguistic research by Hymes (1962, 1972), aim to understand language use within its natural social environment. This design allows the researcher to observe and interpret communicative practices within the cultural context in which they occur.

The ethnographic approach was considered suitable because refusal responses are closely connected to social relationships and cultural expectations. Examining participants' speech behaviour within their community, therefore, provides a clearer understanding of how refusals are formulated and interpreted among native speakers of Ga.

Population

A population refers to a group of individuals who share at least one characteristic that distinguishes

them from other groups (Kahn, 2006). The population for this study consisted of native speakers of Ga with limited formal education living in Chorkor Chemunaa. Members of this group share common characteristics: they are native speakers of Ga, they have not received formal education, and they use Ga as their primary language of communication in everyday life.

Sampling technique

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select individuals who possess characteristics relevant to the study's objectives. Since the present study focuses on refusal responses among speakers with limited formal education, participants were deliberately selected from a community that met these criteria.

Although many Ga communities are linguistically heterogeneous, Chemunaa, a small settlement in Chorkor with approximately fifty residents, provided a suitable setting for the study. Interviews with community members indicated that they communicate almost exclusively in Ga despite living in a multilingual environment. According to the participants, this practice reflects a deliberate effort to preserve their linguistic and cultural heritage.

Sample size

A total of twenty participants took part in the study. The sample consisted of ten men and ten women between the ages of 60 and 80 years. Participants within this age range were selected because they are likely to possess extensive knowledge of traditional Ga communicative practices and cultural norms. Their linguistic behaviour therefore provides valuable insight into the refusal strategies used within the community.

In addition, five competent Ga speakers participated in a focus group discussion to provide further cultural interpretation of the refusal responses.

Research site

The study was conducted in Chorkor Chemunaa, a Ga community situated in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The community was selected because it represents a relatively homogeneous Ga-speaking environment where residents mainly communicate in Ga and maintain strong cultural and linguistic traditions. This setting, therefore, offers an appropriate context for examining refusal responses that reflect culturally rooted norms of interaction.

Data collection procedures

Data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions. During the interviews, participants were presented with a set of stimulus situations designed to elicit refusal responses to offers and requests. To encourage natural interaction, the scenarios were presented orally in a simple, everyday style. Similar procedures have been used in Ghanaian pragmatic research (Agyekum, 2004; Anderson, 2004).

Focus group discussions were also conducted to gain deeper insight into the participants' responses. During these discussions, participants explained the reasons behind their choice of refusal strategies and discussed whether particular responses were considered appropriate within Ga cultural norms. These discussions helped clarify the cultural meanings associated with the refusal responses.

Data analysis procedure

The refusal responses obtained from the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Since the responses were produced in Ga, the transcriptions were translated into English while preserving the original meanings of the utterances.

The analysis focused on identifying the semantic formulae participants used when refusing offers and requests. The responses were categorised according to the framework proposed by Beebe et al. (1990), which identifies common strategies used in refusal responses, such as expressions of regret, explanations or reasons, postponement, and statements of alternatives.

The data were also analysed using thematic coding guided by the research questions. Each research question provided a framework for identifying the factors that influenced respondents' choice of refusal strategies across the three situations. Following Chafe's (1980) notion of dividing discourse into idea units, each refusal response was first segmented into smaller meaningful units. These idea units were then

coded according to the relevant semantic formula categories derived from Beebe et al.'s framework. This procedure made it possible to identify the types of strategies used by the participants and to examine the factors influencing their choice of refusal responses.

The responses were further analysed in relation to contextual factors embedded in the stimulus situations, including the relationship between interlocutors, differences in social status, and compliance requirements. Insights from the focus group discussion were incorporated into the analysis to explain why certain refusal strategies were considered appropriate within the participants' cultural context.

Reliability of coding

To ensure the reliability of the analysis, the refusal responses were coded carefully according to the semantic formulae categories. Each response was examined more than once to confirm the accuracy of the categorisation. When an utterance contained more than one refusal strategy, all relevant semantic formulae were identified and recorded.

Trustworthiness of the study

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through careful documentation of the research procedures and the use of established analytical categories for refusal strategies. In addition, the combination of interviews and focus group discussions allowed the researcher to verify participants' responses and interpretations, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study before data collection began, and their participation was entirely voluntary. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage if they wished.

To protect participants' privacy, no identifying information was included in the study. The data collected were used strictly for academic purposes, and the responses were reported in a way that ensured participants' anonymity. The researcher also ensured that the interviews and discussions were conducted respectfully and in a manner that recognised the community's cultural values.

STIMULUS SITUATIONS
Situation 1: Request from a distant friend

You are the receptionist at a reputable bank. During working hours, a friend who is not very close to you calls and asks to speak directly to a female staff member of the bank. The caller says the message is urgent and should not be disclosed to anyone else. However, due to workplace regulations, you cannot allow the caller to speak with the staff member. How would you refuse this request?

Situation 2: Job offer from a higher-status person

You have been unemployed for some time. An older, wealthy woman who is a friend of your mother suggests that you drive her ice cream van for the time being. Your mother agrees with the suggestion, but you find the offer intimidating and unsuitable for you. How would you refuse this offer?

Situation 3: Offer of food from a close friend

You visit a close friend early in the morning. Although you are hungry, you cannot accept the food offered to you because you find it unsuitable for breakfast. How would you refuse the offer in such a way that your friend does not realise your negative feelings?

Data coding
Classification of semantic formulae

The study adopted Beebe et al.'s (1990) classification of semantic formulae to analyse respondents' refusal responses.

Direct semantic formulae

These are divided into performative and non-performative forms:
1. **Performative**: e.g. "I refuse."
2. **Non-performative statement**: e.g. "No."

3. **Negative willingness / negating a proposition**: e.g. "I cannot", "I will not", "I do not think so."

Indirect semantic formulae

These refer to strategies that speakers use to soften the illocutionary force of their refusal responses in order to minimise offence to the interlocutor's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

a. **Statement of regret**: e.g. "I am sorry."
b. **Wish**: e.g. "I wish I could help you."
c. **Excuse, reason, explanation**: e.g. "I have a headache."
d. **Statement of alternative**: e.g. "Why don't you ask someone else?"
e. **Condition for future or past acceptance**: e.g. "If you had asked me earlier, I would have …"
f. **Promise of future acceptance**: e.g. "I will do it next time."
g. **Statement of principle**: e.g. "I never do business with friends."
h. **Statement of philosophy**: e.g. "One cannot be too careful."
i. **Attempt to dissuade interlocutor**, including threat, guilt trip, criticism, request for empathy, letting the interlocutor off the hook, or self-defence.

Illustration of the coding procedure

Consider the response:

"I am sorry. I have already taken my breakfast. Maybe next time."

This response was categorised as follows:

Unit	Category
I am sorry.	Statement of regret
I have already taken my breakfast.	Excuse
Maybe next time.	Statement of alternative/ postponement

In the present study, the most critical component in the refusal act was the **head act**. In the example above, the head act is an **excuse**, while "I am sorry" functions as a pre-refusal act and "Maybe next time" functions as a post-refusal act. The research questions focused primarily on the head act in determining respondents' preferred semantic formulae. Finally, selected samples of refusal responses were subjected to further qualitative analysis in order to understand how refusals were negotiated.

Results and Discussion

Refusal of a job offer from a higher-status person

Table 1: Distribution of semantic formulae used in refusing a job offer

Semantic formula	Frequency	Percentage
Excuses	14	70%
Hedging	6	30%
Total	**20**	**100%**

The results show that respondents relied primarily on excuses and hedging strategies when refusing a job offer from a higher-status individual. These strategies correspond to the semantic formulae identified in Beebe et al. (1990). The preference for indirect responses appears to have been influenced by social power relations, as the offer was made by a wealthy older woman who occupies a respected position within the Ga community.

Among the Ga people, individuals with wealth or seniority often command authority and respect (Larbie, 2021). Consequently, speakers tend to avoid direct refusals that may appear disrespectful. Instead, they employ indirect strategies that soften the refusal. This pattern also reflects the principles of politeness theory, which suggests that speakers often mitigate face-threatening acts through indirect expressions (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2016). For example, one respondent stated:

"Makase tsɔnɔ kudumɔ otsi enyɔ bei amli koni mabawo." ("Within two weeks, I will learn how to drive and come for the car.")

This response postpones acceptance rather than rejecting the offer directly. While the strategy is indirect, focus group participants suggested that some such implicit excuses were not fully appropriate within traditional Ga norms because they appear to redirect the elder's offer rather than respectfully decline it. According to the discussants, such responses are increasingly heard among educated speakers and may reflect the influence of external discourse patterns.

Overall, the findings suggest that social hierarchy and cultural norms of respect strongly influenced the respondents' choice of semantic formulae when refusing a job offer from a higher-status person.

Refusal of an offer of food from a close friend

Table 2: Distribution of semantic formulae used in refusing food

Semantic formula	Frequency	Percentage
Excuses	10	50%
Explanations	6	30%
Reasons	4	20%
Total	20	100%

The results indicate that respondents relied primarily on excuses and explanations when refusing a close friend's offer of food. These strategies correspond to the refusal taxonomy proposed by Beebe et al. (1990). Although the interlocutors were close friends, the respondents still avoided directly rejecting the offer.

Food occupies an important cultural position among the Ga people. Traditionally, communal living encourages the sharing of food and other resources, and outright rejection of food may be interpreted as unfriendly behaviour. Consequently, speakers tend to employ indirect expressions that preserve social harmony.

For instance, one respondent stated:

"*Hani w4yakase nii, k1 niyenii l1 ato da.*" ("Let us keep the food and eat after lectures.")

Here, the refusal is framed indirectly by referring to another obligation. This behaviour reflects sociolinguistic competence, in which speakers adjust their language to protect their interlocutors' feelings (Alptekin, 2002). It also aligns with politeness theory, which explains why speakers mitigate potentially face-threatening acts through indirect strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The focus group discussion further revealed that, although food is not expected to be rejected outright in Ga culture, speakers are not under an absolute obligation to accept food that is unsuitable in a particular context. What matters is the manner of refusal. In this sense, excuses, explanations, and reasons were acceptable because they did not amount to a blunt rejection.

Overall, the results show that cultural expectations surrounding food sharing influenced the respondents' preference for indirect refusal strategies.

Refusal of a request from a distant friend

Table 3: Distribution of semantic formulae used in refusing a request

Semantic formula	Frequency	Percentage
Explanations	13	65%
Statement of wish	7	35%
Total	20	100%

The results show that respondents primarily relied on explanations and statements of wish when refusing a request from a distant friend. These semantic formulae correspond to those identified in the refusal taxonomy proposed by Beebe et al. (1990).

The refusal strategies used in this situation appear to have been influenced by the degree of imposition and the compliance requirements associated with the request. In the scenario presented to the respondents, complying with the request would have required violating workplace regulations, which created a high level of pressure. One respondent stated:

"*Masum4 ak1 mawa bo shi nitsum4 mlai e`m1l1 gb1.*" ("I would have wished to assist you, but the regulations here will not permit me.")

This response offers an honest explanation that enables the speaker to refuse the request without harming the relationship. The finding supports Speech Act Theory, since the speaker manages the perlocutionary consequences of the refusal by presenting it as constrained by institutional rules rather than personal unwillingness (Searle, 1969).

However, some respondents used white lies, such as claiming that the person being asked for was not present. This strategy was also noted in Nelson et al. (2002), who observed that speakers sometimes turn to deception when social pressures make compliance difficult. The focus group discussion revealed that such responses may conflict with traditional Ga norms of speaking, which favour strategies like postponement or suggesting alternatives rather than

deception. In this sense, the use of white lies may indicate the influence of changing communicative patterns beyond traditional Ga pragmatic norms.

Overall, the findings indicate that situational constraints and institutional rules strongly influenced the respondents' choice of semantic formulae in this context.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the semantic formulae used by native speakers of Ga with limited formal education when refusing offers and requests. The findings reveal that respondents' choice of refusal strategies was strongly influenced by situational and sociocultural factors within the Ga speech community.

First, the semantic formulae used when refusing a request from a distant friend were influenced primarily by the degree of imposition of the requested act and the prerequisites required for compliance. In some cases, respondents employed strategies such as white lies, which do not appear in the refusal taxonomy proposed by Beebe et al. (1990). Although such strategies have been reported in cross-cultural studies, the focus group discussion revealed that they conflict with traditional Ga norms of speaking. Participants indicated that these responses may reflect communicative patterns influenced by electronic media, suggesting that some speakers may have adopted refusal behaviours that are not fully aligned with established cultural practices.

Second, when respondents refused a job offer from a higher-status person, their choice of semantic formulae was influenced by the degree of imposition and the hearer's social power. In the Ga society, older and more affluent individuals often occupy positions of authority and are treated with considerable respect. Consequently, respondents relied mainly on indirect refusal strategies. However, some implicit excuses in the responses were considered inappropriate within traditional Ga communicative norms, as rejecting an elder's offer by suggesting alternatives may be interpreted as disrespectful. According to the participants, such responses are more commonly associated with educated speakers or elites (Author, 2020), which

suggests that external linguistic influences may be affecting the tacit pragmatic knowledge of native speakers.

Finally, the semantic formulae used when refusing an offer of food from a close friend were influenced largely by the social distance between the interlocutors and the compliance prerequisites. Although respondents declined the offer, their responses did not directly reject it. This reflects the cultural understanding among the Ga people that food symbolises communal sharing and social solidarity, and therefore should not be refused outright.

Overall, the findings show that a complex interaction of situational factors, social hierarchy, and cultural expectations shapes refusal responses among Ga speakers. At the same time, the study suggests that external influences, particularly from electronic media, may be gradually affecting the traditional pragmatic knowledge embedded in the language.

Future research could further explore how gender influences the use of semantic formulae in refusal responses. Additional studies may also examine how both educated and uneducated Ga speakers realise speech acts of refusal and other speech acts in both English and Ga, using interviews as the primary method of data collection. Such studies would provide deeper insight into how evolving patterns of language use may contribute to changes in the structure and use of the Ga language.

Overall, the study contributes to research in cross-cultural pragmatics and African linguistics by providing insight into how sociocultural norms within the Ga speech community shape responses to refusals. By examining the semantic formulae used by native speakers with limited formal education, the study highlights the role of cultural knowledge and social relationships in guiding pragmatic behaviour. At the same time, the findings suggest that emerging patterns of language use, particularly those influenced by electronic media, may be affecting traditional communicative practices. Understanding these changes is important for preserving the pragmatic norms embedded in the Ga language and for supporting future research on speech acts in indigenous African languages.

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