

‘Ah, uhm, yeaaaaah, maybe.’ Developing a New Data Collection Instrument to Explore the Gendered Realisation of Refusals by Young Adult Speakers of Irish English

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Abstract

Presenting the development of a specifically created data collection tool, the online spoken discourse completion task (OSDCT), this study aims to shed light on how young adult Irish-English speakers aged 20-30 realise refusals and the factors which influence linguistic choice. The novel OSDCT was created using Google Forms and the Mote browser extension. Eight situationally controlled audio prompts eliciting refusals were recorded onto the form. The 18 participants (9 male and 9 female) responded orally to the prompts by recording their own audio response via the Mote browser extension. The use of the OSDCT resulted in more natural responses and facilitated the consideration of both linguistic and paralinguistic features. The oral-based nature of the tool highlighted, in particular, the prominence of (para)linguistic modifiers such as elongations, pauses, tuts and dysfluencies as pragmatic phenomena present in refusals. The results indicate that the social need to avoid threatening face played a greater role than gender in realising the speech act of refusal; however, gender-based differences emerged when the age of the prompter was taken into account.

Keywords: Online spoken discourse completion task; Irish English; refusals, gender; age, (para)linguistic modifiers

1. Introduction

Set against a research landscape whereby advances in technology are facilitating the creation of pragmatic data collection instruments which can give rise to more naturalistic/authentic language production (Bardovi-Harlig & Su, 2023; Halenko, 2013), the primary aim of this paper is to present the newly developed online spoken discourse completion task (OSDCT) and provide an example of how it can be used to shed light on difficult to access pragmatic phenomena. The OSDCT utilises the free online tools Google Forms and the Mote extension for Chrome. They allow for the recording of authentic, spontaneous oral prompts onto a questionnaire which can be easily disseminated. Study participants subsequently listen to the prompts and record responses spontaneously using an implied speech act. The paper then provides an example of how, unlike many established instruments included corpora, roleplays and traditional discourse completion tasks, the data generated can be used to explore difficult

to elicit pragmatic phenomena such as (para)linguistic phenomena present within a specific speech act. In this particular case the speech act under exploration is refusal as realised by young adult speakers of Irish English. While data collected were extensive and covered a wide range of strategies involved in the complex act of refusing, the focus in this paper is on highlighting how the OSDCT can be used to explore linguistic and paralinguistic modifiers such as hedges, elongations and pauses. Such features are rarely captured in traditional discourse completion tasks and have not previously been studied in Irish English. The use of such modifiers will be explored through the lens of gender of the refuser and age of interlocutors.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Data Collection Tools for Research in Pragmatics

Research into pragmatics, which can be defined as a ‘set of internalised rules of how to use language in socio-culturally appropriate ways, taking into account the participants in a communicative interaction and features of the context within which the interaction takes place’ (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 19) is typically concerned with capturing and analysing the authentic use of language that is highly-contextually bound. That is to say that pragmatic language use is complex and predicated on individual, social and contextual features. In order to assess how language is being used, it is necessary to take into account the individuals involved, their relationship, the topic, the location as well as linguistic norms for that type of interaction within that particular speech community. As a result, the act of gathering data which can accurately take so many variables into account can prove challenging. A range of data collection tools have been designed or utilised in order to shed light on specific pragmatic phenomena. These may be ‘explicit in nature’ (O’Keeffe et al., 2011, p. 21) focusing on specific speech acts such as refusals. Alternatively, they may be developed to capture authentic language use in action and focus on (para)linguistic pragmatic

features like hedging or pauses. The main tools have traditionally been corpora, roleplays or (written) discourse completion tasks. In more recent times, technology has been introduced with the aim of eliciting more naturalistic data while controlling for contextual variables. Examples of this include Halenko's computer animated production task (Halenko, 2013).

2.2 Corpora

Turning firstly to corpora as a means of studying pragmatics, in simple terms, a corpus is a machine-readable, rapidly retrievable database of written or spoken language. The field of Corpus pragmatics has been broadly defined by Romero-Trillo "as the science that describes language use in real contexts through corpora" (2017, p. 1). Although corpora have not been designed specifically to capture pragmatic features, they have produced a rich body of research, especially in Irish English pragmatics. The research has drawn on a range of genres including "Broadcast discussions, Business transactions, Classroom discussions, Face-to-face conversations, Legal presentations and Telephone conversations" (Ronan, 2022, p. 175) to investigate the use of a wide range of pragmatic phenomena for instance, pragmatic markers (Aijmer, 2022), responses (Barron, 2022) and politeness (Ronan, 2022).

Despite such fruitful research, the use of corpora is not unproblematic. The first obstacle may be access to a relevant corpus. Although some are freely available, others are subject to a licence fee and others belong to publishing houses and are thus not accessible (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). However, technological developments have resulted in the possibility of self-built specific small corpora (see Vaughan & Clancy, 2013). Nevertheless, even the compilation of small corpora requires researchers to have the technical capabilities to perform the complex tagging necessary to ensure that linguistic items are automatically retrievable. In addition, using corpora to investigate very specific pragmatic phenomena may not always yield benefits. According to Landert et al. (2023, p. 1) "corpora still tend to be characterised

by a lack of access to context”. Given the context dependency of the use of pragmatic features, this is particularly problematic. Furthermore, as corpus linguistics tends to rely on surface forms, this makes the retrieval of speech acts challenging as they are function rather than form oriented (Landert et al., 2023; Vaughan & Clancy, 2013). A final issue that can prove problematic in pragmatic research is controlling for the use of the pragmatic items that a researcher wishes to study. It has been noted that pragmatic features ‘are not evenly distributed across texts’ (Landert et al., 2023, p. 56) and, to date, methods to deal with this have not been adequately developed.

2.3 Roleplays

While corpus pragmatics is based on naturally occurring data, roleplays belong to the category of elicited data which can be categorised as ‘high-interaction’ (Kirner-Ludwig, 2022, p. 464). They constitute simulations of social encounters (Nguyen, 2019) and facilitate ‘the control of certain variables’ (Demeter, 2007, p. 85) by the researcher which may be difficult to capture in real life. In general, participants are arranged into dyads and given a card containing their roles and a description of the situation they have to enact. Alternatively, instructions can be relayed orally. The roleplays are video and/or audio recorded and transcribed. Furthermore, attempts are often made to ensure that the situations are ones in which the participants could find themselves. They fall into two categories: closed or open. Closed give rise to single turn interactions. These are particularly useful when analysing ‘predetermined categories of speech act strategies’ (Nguyen, 2019, p. 8). On the other hand, open roleplays facilitate multiple turn interactions especially when this is indicated in the instructions (Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012). In addition to the analysis of specific speech acts, this also allows for in depth analysis of conversational sequences.

Roleplays have many advantages especially in terms of controlling contextual variables; and eliciting very specific pragmatic phenomena. In fact, they have been found, in certain cases, to “yield more realistic data than other data elicitation methods” (Golato, 2017, p. 22). Notwithstanding, there are drawbacks. These relate mainly to “logistical challenges” (Kirner-Ludwig, 2022, p. 464) whereby it is simply difficult to find participants and a space to conduct the research. Another issue is concerned with the fact that “role play interaction is a pretense (sic) without real-world consequences for the participants” (Nguyen, 2019, p. 10). This can result in participants not taking the activity seriously and realising the task in a manner that is not natural. In addition, if data collection involves a series of roleplays, interacting with a partner playing multiple roles may lead to a heightened awareness of the simulation; and, finally, it may put stress on the interactants to perform (Nguyen, 2019). All of this may compromise the authenticity of the data.

2.4 Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs)

Similar to roleplays, DCTs fall into the category of instruments used to elicit pragmatic data. Typically, they consist of a series of contextually rich, situated written prompts designed to elicit a written response using a predefined speech act. The nature of the tasks facilitates variation “in contextual parameters of power, social distance, and degree of imposition (Nguyen, 2019, p. 11) thus rendering them effective tools especially in the study of sociopragmatic variation. They are extensively used in the field and have “left a very important mark on the way in which speech acts have been studied” (Wojtaszek, 2016, p. 161). They are particularly beneficial insofar as they can be administered easily to large numbers of participants and can potentially generate extensive quantities of readily comparable data.

Like other tools, criticisms have been levelled at DCTs. As with roleplays they require participants to respond to imaginary situations which may give rise to a lack of authenticity and can impose artificial constraints in what can be realised and thus analysed (Wojtaszek, 2016). For example, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2013) found that, in the case of requests, DCTs produced differential responses in terms of directness, lexical and syntactic simplification, and speaker-orientation when compared to natural phone calls. On the other hand, Demeter (2007) found that participants used a similar range of strategies for apologies in both roleplays and DCTs corroborating the claim by Felix-Brasdefer (2010) that they have been shown to produce high rate of validity. In an attempt to maintain the administrative and controlled advantages of DCTs while addressing issues relating to the authenticity of the language produced, technological solutions have been introduced. For example, Halenko (2013), using specialised software, created a computer-animated production task (CAPT) which resulted in a more realistic and enjoyable experience and generated more satisfactory responses a written DCT.

To sum up, the three instruments discussed are extensively used as a data source in pragmatic research. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. Corpora work with authentic language in use; however, they can be difficult to access and compile and specialised technical knowledge is required. In terms of the data stored in corpora, adequate contextual information is not always available. The focus tends to be on language form which can be challenging when retrieving function-based phenomena; and finally, researchers cannot control the input. Both roleplays and DCTs are controlled instruments for the elicitation of specific pragmatic phenomena occurring in specific sociocultural contexts. While both have been criticized on the grounds of pretence, they allow for a fine-grained focus on specific speech acts. As opposed to DCTs, roleplays also facilitate the study of paralinguistic and interactive features. In order to bridge the gap between the different instrument, online tools

such as CAPT (Halenko, 2013) have been developed. The current study, by presenting a novel online spoken DCT, exemplifies how such an instrument draws on the advantages of all three methods to generate large quantities of focused authentic data in an easily administered manner.

2.5 Speech Act of Refusal

In this section, we provide an overview of the speech act of refusal and situate it in an Irish English and a gendered context. In general, refusals constitute especially challenging speech acts due to their highly face-threatening nature (Demirkol, 2016). Drawing from a wide range of cultural contexts, researchers consistently highlight the extent of mitigatory and face-saving features present in their realisation. Bare refusals rarely occur as they are realised in conjunction with a range of other speech acts such as negotiations, explanations, expressions of gratitude, partial agreement, positive remarks or compliments (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Gass & Houck, 1999; Nelson et al., 2002; Riddiford & Holmes, 2015). However, exactly how the complexities are realised is highly culturally dependent. From the perspective of Irish English, although there is a distinct lack of studies related to refusals, avoidance of disagreement is highly regarded and interlocutors are expected to be supportive with each other (Hickey, 2015; Kallen, 2005). With this in mind, Barron (2007) explores ritual refusals in Irish English compared to German. She illustrates that the first refusal is often not interpreted as a true “no” but rather a marker of politeness and routine. She highlights that Irish English speakers favour being mindful of the feelings of the interlocutor rather than the directness of German whereby honesty and the avoidance of ambiguity signal closeness between speakers.

In terms of the use of (para)linguistic modifiers within refusals, as far as the authors are aware, this has not previously been studied within an Irish English context. They “linguistic devices, such as *actually*, *sort of*, or *you know* that can be used to strengthen or

weaken the force with which propositions are expressed while at the same time realizing manifold social pragmatic purposes” (Lin, 2010, p. 1173). We consider In pragmatic research, they have been partially classified under indirect strategies and adjuncts to refusals in the taxonomy developed by Safont & Salazar (2009). Elongations and dysfluencies have received some prior attention. Kalman & Gergle (2014) describe these elongations as “phoneme extensions” and described their usage as being a “paralinguistic cue”. Arafat & Hamamra (2021) found that elongations are a tactic of avoidance or a way to keep emotional distance in anxiety-induced situations. Dysfluencies are likewise associated with stressful situations (Behnke & Sawyer, 2000). Possibly due to the prominence of the use of DCTs to collect pragmatic data, paralinguistic modifiers in particular have been overlooked. However, due to the high imposition of the refusal prompts and the disfavoured use of direct strategies in the realisation of refusals, it is surprising that they remain under researched.

2.6 Gender

Finally, turning to gender, once more studies exploring its impact on the realisation of refusals are rare, and, as far as the authors are aware, there have been no studies into Irish English. Although many studies into language use in general typically position male and female patterned use as binary, when it comes to realising refusals, the literature suggests, albeit from a very small database, that gendered differences in language use are minimal. The social need to avoid a face-threatening act and to uphold societal values seem to ensure that both males and females show a strong preference for indirectness. When gendered differences do occur, it appears that they intersect with other variables such as cultural outlook (Ang & Kuo, 2003a), context (Samaali & Bayouli, 2019) or age and level of education (Parvaresh et al., 2014a).

Taken together, the above highlights the need for the development of a novel data collection tool which simultaneously combines ‘the orality of conversation with the control

of the [...] DCT” (Bardovi-Harlig & Su, 2023, p. 6) with the aim of shedding light on under-researched phenomena in pragmatics. The aims of the paper are thus:

1. To outline the development of a novel OSDCT
2. To exemplify how the OSDCT sheds light on the gendered use of (para)linguistic modifiers in Irish English refusals

3. Developing the OSDCT

As previously discussed, the OSDCT is a novel data collection tool which follows the trend of “controlled tasks for pragmatics research (becoming) increasingly aural-oral with the intent of simulating the listening and speaking of conversation” (Bardovi-Harlig & Su, 2023, p. 8) while simultaneously retaining the contextual control and administrative ease of traditional DCTs. It allows participants to listen to authentic prompts and reply orally. It was developed using freely available tools which can be used on any laptop with internet connection and audio facilities. It requires the use of Google Forms and the downloading of the Mote browser extension for Chrome. Mote is a free extension for Chrome which allows users to record audio messages directly and securely onto a range of Google products including Google Forms.

For the purpose of the current study, after receiving ethical approval from the social research ethics committee at University College Cork, the authors developed eight socially and contextually differentiated situations requiring a refusal (see table 1 for an overview) – all of which could be classified as high impact. These were saved on a Google Form on a computer with the Mote extension downloaded. A cohort of eight speakers of Irish English was then recruited: two males and two females aged 20-30; and two males and two females aged 50-60 to record prompts which elicit refusals directly onto the OSDCT via Google Forms and the Mote browser extension. This was conducted in the presence of the researcher.

The speakers were given detailed contextual descriptions of each scenario (see figure 1 for an example). They then recorded their prompts unscripted to facilitate naturalistic discourse.

Figure 1 Example of Instructions Provided for Prompts

Prompt 3: Concert ticket

You are having a conversation with a close friend when they tell you that they had recently bought 2 tickets to a concert of one of their favourite artists. You also like this artist and listen to their music a lot. You think it would be really fun to go together and ask if you can have the other ticket so you and your friend can go together. How would you ask?

Table 1 Overview of Prompts and Promoters Used to Elicit Refusals

Situation	Gender	Age	Context
1	Male	20-30	A friend asks to borrow money
2	Female	20-30	A shop assistant asks if the responder is interested in the sale items
3	Male	20-30	A friend asks if they can have the responder's spare ticket to a concert
4	Male	50-60	A manager asks the responder to plan the staff party
5	Male	50-60	A landlord asks if the responder can take care of their dogs
6	Female	20-30	A stranger asks if they can switch seats on an airplane
7	Female	50-60	A manager asks if the responder can cover a colleague's shift
8	Female	50-60	A lecturer suggests an idea for a project that the responder must complete for assessment

Once the OSDCT was compiled, it was made available to the study participants via a link to the Google Form. They were first instructed to download the Mote extension to their computer before opening the Google Form. Once they had done that, instructions on the Google Form directed them to listen to the prompts and to record their refusals directly onto the Google Form using Mote.

Mote has the facility to automatically transcribe recordings. It also includes timestamps which indicate how long it takes the participant to respond. This is valuable information which can give insight into the spontaneity of the responses. Recordings and transcripts were stored on the Google Form and only the research team had access to them. It is important to note that the Mote extension does not currently work on mobile phones. See below for examples using screenshots including timestamps of the respondent's responses. The generated transcripts often had to be edited as words would be misinterpreted and some paralinguistic modifiers were not accounted for.

Example 1 is shown in figures 2, 3 and 4

Figure 2 Response from Male 3 to Situation 1 with Timestamps

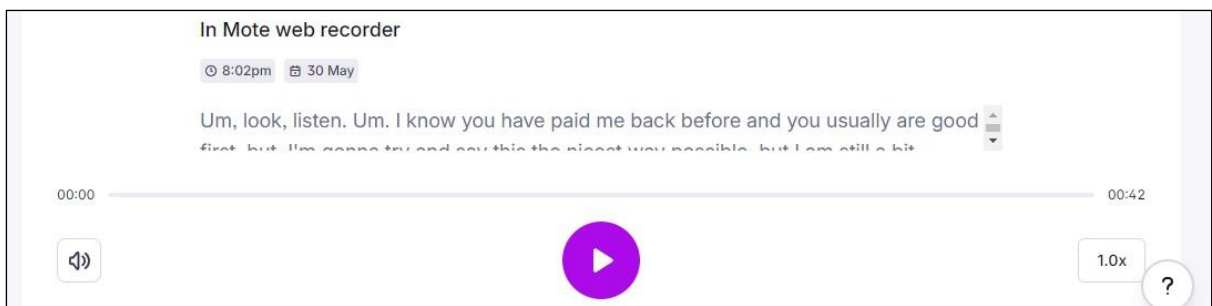


Figure 3 Response from Male 3 to Situation 2 with Timestamps

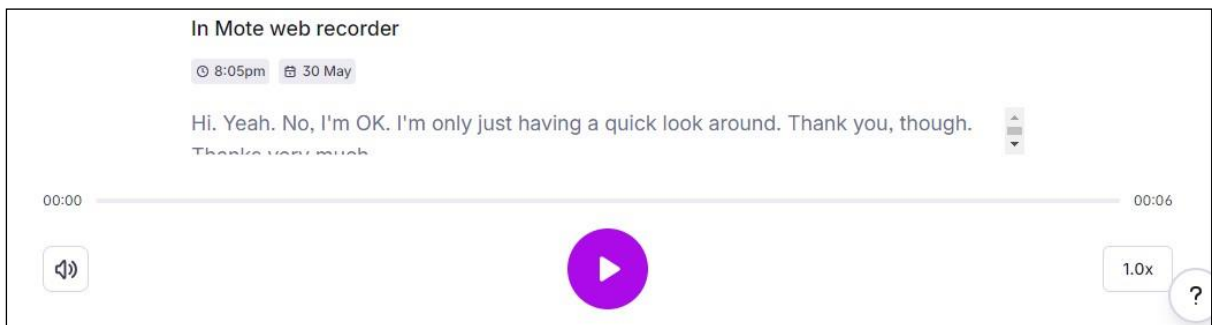
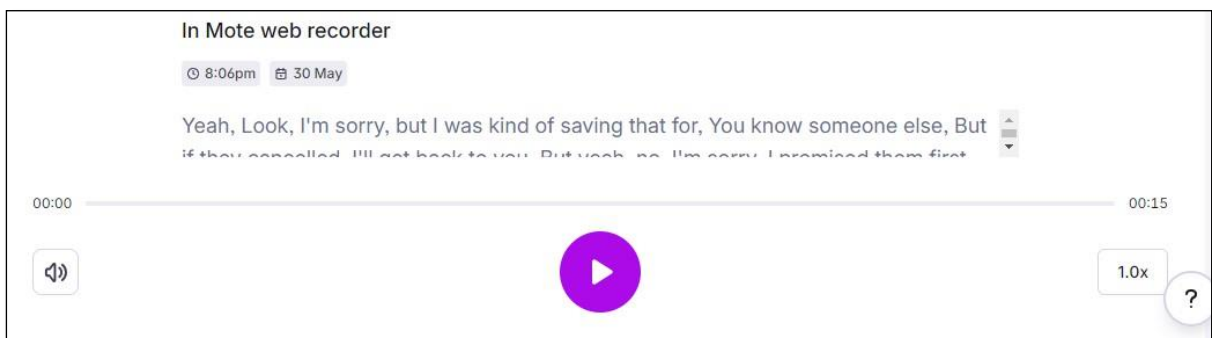


Figure 4 Response from Male 3 to Situation 3 with Timestamps



Example 2 can be seen in figures 5,6 and 7

Figure 5 Response from Female 6 to Situation 4 with Timestamps

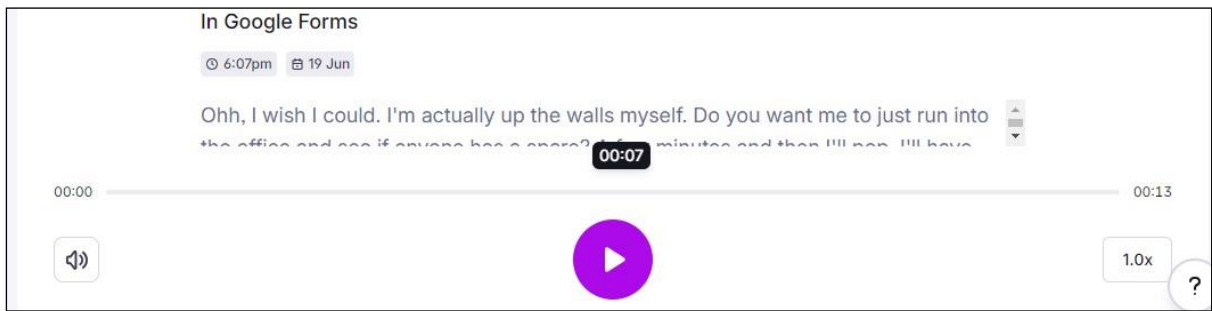


Figure 6 Response from Female 6 to Situation 5 with timestamps

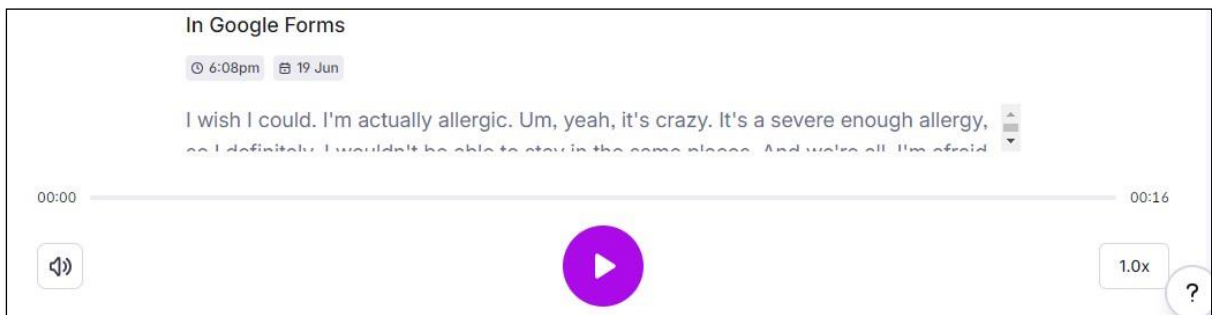
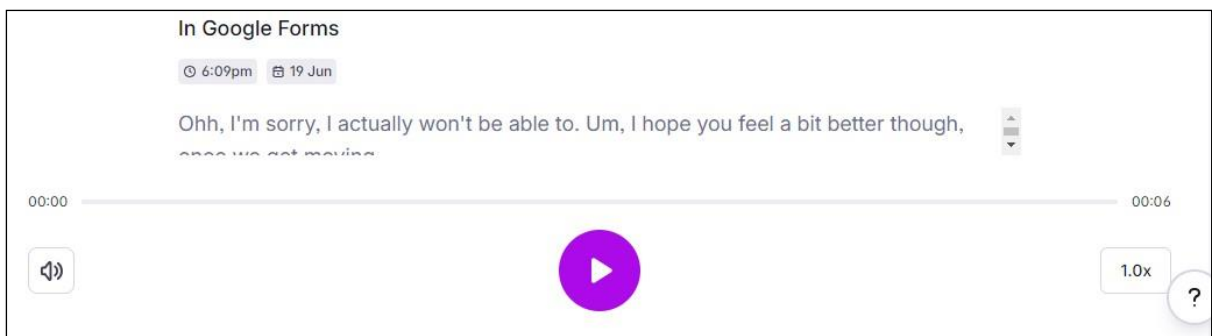


Figure 7 Response from Female 6 to Situation 6 with Timestamps



These screenshots display that the respondents recorded and realised their refusals almost immediately, if not very soon after listening to the audio prompts. The study participants completed their responses without the researcher present.

4. Study: Using the OSDCT to Elicit (Para)Linguistic Modifiers

The data generated exemplified the full complexity of realising the speech act of refusal in a speech community that values harmony and the avoidance of disagreement between interlocutors. An example of this is:

Eh yeah look I can't actually loan you that money because I'm actually short on cash myself as well (pause) em I know you're stuck too like and I'm sorry about that like but eh I don't have enough money for myself either (pause) to get by for a while like so I won't be able to loan you any more for the time being... (Male 1)

However, for the purpose of this paper, the focus is on (para)linguistic modifiers. This is due to the fact that it is more difficult to capture such phenomena using traditional DCTs.

4.1 Participants

Nine male and nine female, Irish English-speaking participants aged 20-30 were recruited to respond to the prompts voiced.

4.2 Analytical Tool

Drawing on classifications developed by Safont & Salazar (2009) and Blum-Kulka & Olshain (1983), a taxonomy for (para)linguistic strategies was developed in response to the data and are presented in table 2. Examples included in the table are direct extracts from data.

Table 2 Taxonomy of Strategies and Modifications

Linguistic Modifiers	
Hedges	<i>“Look”, “Listen”, “Here”</i>
Softeners	<i>“Kind of”, “ideally”, “nearly (be)”, “just”, “probably”</i>
Intensifiers	<i>“Really”, “Extremely”, “Up the walls”</i>
Honesty Markers	<i>“actually”, “genuinely”</i>
Dysfluencies	<i>“Em”, “Eh”, Repetitions of words</i>
Greeting	<i>“Hey”, “How are you?”</i>
Paralinguistic Modifiers	

Pauses	
Sighs	
Short laugh	
Tuts	
Elongations	

5. Results

The following section provides an analysis of the (para)linguistic modifiers used by young Irish adults when realising the speech act of refusing. Additionally, it seeks to shed light on the impact of the gender of the refuser and the age of the prompters on the diversity and intensity of such features. Statistical analyses are conducted using Chi Square throughout.

5.1 Linguistic Modifiers

In this section, the focus is on the differential use of linguistic modifiers taking into account the gender of the participant refusing and the age of the prompter initiating the refusal (see table 3).

Table 3 *Linguistic Modifiers*

Linguistic Modifiers										
	Same Age Prompters					Older Prompters				
	Males		Females		Overall	Males		Females		Overall
	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	
Hedges	81	53.2	71	46.8	152	84	41.7	117	58.3	201
Softeners	28	53.8	24	46.2	52	65	48.1	70	51.9	135
Intensifiers	14	34.1	27	65.9	41	32	27.1	86	72.9	118
Honesty Marker	20	57.1	15	42.9	35	21	50	21	50	42
Dysfluencies	14	66.7	7	33.3	21	37	78.7	10	21.3	47
Greeting	18	66.7	9	33.3	27	15	71.4	6	28.6	21

Starting with the impact of the age of the person initiating the refusal, data show that the overall number of linguistic modifiers increased by approximately 72% when refusing older prompters. The main reason was an increase of over 100% in the use by female refusers. In terms of patterns of use with same age prompters, gender-based differences were noted in intensifiers ($X^2(1, N = 82) = 8.244, p = .004$); dysfluencies ($X^2(1, N = 42) = 4.667, p = .031$); and greetings ($X^2(1, N = 54) = 6.000, p = .014$). The patterns were the same with older prompters. Females were more likely to use intensifiers with same age prompters whereas males were more likely to use dysfluencies and greetings. Turning to refusals directed at older prompters, the use of intensifiers among females is significantly higher ($X^2(1, N = 238) = 49.424, p = <.001$). The use of dysfluencies and greetings among males is higher ($X^2(1, N = 94) = 31.021, p = <.001$) and ($X^2(1, N = 42) = 7.714, p = .005$).

Looking at intra-gender differences, within the male cohort, differences were only found in the use of softeners ($X^2(1, N = 186) = 29.441, p = <.001$) and dysfluencies ($X^2(1, N = 102) = 20.745, p = <.001$). In both cases, numbers increased with older prompters. A different pattern in intensity of use emerged from the female cohort. Increases in the use of hedges ($X^2(1, N = 376) = 22.511, p = <.001$), softeners ($X^2(1, N = 188) = 45.021, p = <.001$), and intensifiers ($X^2(1, N = 226) = 61.611, p = <.001$), when refusing older prompters were found. Examples of this include:

If you get what I'm trying to say, like it is a cool idea, but I think it's it's eh too ortho-, unorthodox, sorry, for for me personally.(Male 3)

Em (pause) I just want to say first of all that I really (elongated) do appreciate all of your (elongated) input and all of your guidance em and your help with this, but I've actually already (pause) kind of come up with an idea that I'm (pause) that I really like em...(Female 5)

5.2 Paralinguistic Modifiers

Attention is now turned to paralinguistic modifiers (see table 4).

Table 4 Paralinguistic Modifiers

Paralinguistic Modifiers						
	Same Age Prompters			Older Prompters		
	Males	Females	Overall	Males	Females	Overall

	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	
Pauses	30	61.1	19	38.9	49	44	48.3	47	51.7	91
Elongations	23	46.9	26	53.1	49	20	33.8	39	66.2	59
Tuts	5	62.5	3	37.5	8	3	42.8	4	57.2	7
Sighs	2	66.7	1	33.3	3	10	100	0	0	10
Short laughs	1	100	0	0	1	0	0	6	100	6

Overall, paralinguistic modifiers are seen more often when refusing older prompters. With regards refusals directed at same age prompters, differences are only found in the category of pauses with males using pauses more frequently than females ($X^2(1, N = 98) = 4.939, p = .026$). When it comes to refusing older prompters, the category that results in gendered use is elongations. These are used more often by females ($X^2(1, N = 118) = 12.273, p = <.001$). Taking an intra-gender perspective, males use more pauses with older prompters ($X^2(1, N = 148) = 5.297, p = .021$). Likewise, females also vary their language by using more pauses with older prompters ($X^2(1, N = 132) = 23.758, p = <.001$). Additionally, females also have a higher number of elongations when refusing older prompters ($X^2(1, N = 130) = 5.200, p = .023$). Examples include:

But eh (pause) it's just not (pause) the angle I'm tryin' to get at and it's not really what I'm tryin' to do. I appreciate the advice but (pause) I think...(Male 8)

Em (elongated), look, I'm really (elongated) sorry...(Female 5)

6. Discussion

It is first of all important to highlight that the development and use of the novel OSDCT in this study generated an extremely rich data set. The authentically produced aural prompts facilitated naturalistic and spontaneous refusals in line with the sociopragmatic contexts presented. It enabled the responders to realise complex refusals highlighting the extensive range of (sub)strategies. The distinctive nature of the OSDCT particularly allowed for research to be carried out into (para)linguistic modifiers which remain under-researched. It did so in a manner which combined the linguistically and controlled elements of DCTs and roleplay while, at the same time, generating language that is more authentic as in corpora. In addition, unlike the CAPT (Halenko, 2013), it retains the flexibility and ease of

administration of DCTs insofar as the online nature and lack of specialised equipment ensure that it can be used both face-to-face and remotely. It is similar in this respect to the multiple choice DCT developed by Bardovi-Harlig & Su (2023).

In terms of how young Irish adults realise the speech act of refusal, as Irish English speakers seem to favour harmony (Hickey, 2015), it is unsurprising that the realisation of refusals is dominated by linguistic and paralinguistic modifiers along with other indirect strategies. This may have gone unnoticed were it not for the use of the OSDCT. This is particularly true for paralinguistic features such as elongations and dysfluencies. Both of these are associated with stressful situations (Behnke & Sawyer, 2000; Kalman & Gergle, 2014).

Turning to gendered differences, realising refusals seems to be shaped more by the need to uphold positive social values which, in turn, seems to minimise stereotypical gendered language use. For example, it is a common societal stereotype that men are less emotional than women. Kring and Gordon (1998) explain that women seem to be more emotionally expressive than men based on previous literature. However, this also pertains to what society deems as more “emotional” behaviour. According to Kelly and Hutson-Comeaux (1999), happiness and sadness along with more intense emotions are associated with women while men are thought to be somewhat emotionless and are more associated with anger. Intensifiers were used more frequently in this study by females (113 times) than males (46 times). Intensifiers were often used to express regret or gratitude. For instance,

Thank you so much for the offer. I really do appreciate that (Female 7)

and

I’m so sorry. I’d love to help you... (Female 3)

Thus, indicating that women use emotional expression as a way to realise refusals which was not as favoured by male participants.

Overall, the males and females in this study use more or less the same range of linguistic elements to realise refusals which is in line with previous research. However, this does not paint the full picture. To fully understand differences, we need to turn the lens to the intersection between the age of the prompter and the gender of the refuser. The analyses illuminate that females engage in much greater linguistic variation than males. They show significant increases in the intensity and diversity of mitigating devices when refusing older prompters. The increase in the use of mitigating devices especially linguistic modifiers with older prompters is driven by female refusers. Therefore, in terms of gendered language use, the results have shown that female refusers are more situationally sensitive to age than their male counterparts. For example, softeners increased the most with older prompters especially in the lecturer-student dynamic. This increase was seen in both male and female speakers. This highlights the effects that power dynamics and age may have on a speaker's linguistic choices. The landlord-tenant and manager-employee dynamics also had higher instances of softeners; however, lecturer-student dynamic was much more. This could suggest that these speakers consider there to be more of a risk in disappointing or having perceived negative interactions with a lecturer than with a manager or landlord. This would therefore indicate that the strongest power dynamic in this study was between lecturer and student and the responders were conscious of potential negative outcomes of refusing the lecturer.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the current study adds to our understanding of how data collection tools shape our research into gendered language use and refusals in a number of ways. Firstly, it supports prior research which highlights the highly mitigated nature of refusals. Furthermore, the use of the OSDCT as a data collection tool brought to the fore the importance of paralinguistic features when realising refusals which is something that has not been explored previously.

Finally, the design of the study which looked at the intersection of gender and age of the prompter sheds new light on differential gendered language use.

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