

Speech Act of Refusal on the Phone

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the speech act of refusal taking as a case study British responses to a salesperson's offer through the study of recordings of 109 conversations between the salesperson and a potential British customer. The data are analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively with the aim of finding the most frequent responses that denote refusal by the English native speakers. Most of the expressions used to reflect the British people's annoyance with the use of cold calls, the majority being brief phrases of refusal. In addition to the recorded calls, two questionnaires were conducted in Britain to shed light on the frequent expressions used on the phone in response to the salesperson. It is interesting here to catalog the range of strategies used by individuals, most of the time verbal, to avoid talking to the salesperson. These strategies seem to exist on a continuum of directness-indirectness. Firstly to perform an act of refusal efficient enough to end the call. Secondly to make the balance between the impacts of refusal per se and the keeping up with the social convention of mutual cooperation presented in the theory of politeness.

Key words: phone conversation, politeness theory, refusal, speech act, salesperson-customer

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