REFUSALS: THE PRAGMEME AND THE PRACTS

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Abstract. The article reviews the pragmatic literature on refusals and elaborates on the definitions and taxonomies in order to design a framework that might optimize cross-cultural comparisons and allow more accurate predictions of intercultural misunderstandings. Integrating the distinction pragmeme – practs – allopracts – interpracts with elements from the theories of interpersonal and intercultural communication, I suggest several macro- and micro-parameters that might account for the relationship universal – cultural – (inter)personal in performing the speech act of refusal.

Keywords: pragmeme, refusals, universals vs cross-cultural variation, misunderstanding, predictions in intercultural communication.

1. THE FRAMEWORK

Elaborating an integrative approach, Jacob L. Mey (1999, 2002, 2009, 2010) defined pragmatics as a theory of human action "that specifies, for any given situation, the limitations and possibilities the situation is subject to or opens to" (Mey 2002: 214). By analogy with the structural concepts phoneme / allophones, morpheme / allomorphs, lexeme / allolexemes, and echoing emics / etics in anthropology, he proposed the pragmeme, practs, and allopracts as constitutive units of the pragmatic level.

According to the author, the pragmeme is a "general situational prototype, capable of being executed in the situation", i.e., "a generalized pragmatic act" (Mey 2002: 221, 2009: 751). The pract is the actualization of a particular pragmeme, "the instantiated individual pragmatic act": "What 'counts as' a pract […] is determined exclusively by the understanding that the individual participants have of the situation, and by the effects that practs have, or may have in a given context" (Mey 2002: 221). The allopract is "a concrete and different realization of a particular realization of a particular instantiation of a particular pragmeme".

Glossing around these definitions, one might say that the pragmeme is relevant on the trans-cultural level, referring to speech acts as communicative universals and their core,

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distinctive features; practs pertain to the socio-cultural level and show how culture and society constrain each communication contract through a set of specific conversational rights and obligations applying to every speech act, which turns out to be a socio-culturally accepted form-content match that servers a specific communicative intention; allopracts function on the personal level and instantiate practs within the allowed range of individual variation in a given situation of interaction.

Considering a dialogic view of speech-acts (Weigand 2000), in Vasilescu (2016: 324) I proposed a fourth unit, the interpract, defined as the concrete interactional unit instantiated in the adjacency pair / triangle [trigger – response – (follow-up)], in a real and temporary situation of communication. Interpracts pertain to the interpersonal level, and occur in the negotiation process of meaning and relationship between / among particular interlocutors. They imply both forward and backward, top-bottom and bottom-top local processes that generate meaning.

In this theoretical framework, I will analyze the speech act of refusal in order to set several macro- and micro-parameters that might enable unified cross-cultural descriptions and predictions regarding potential misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

2. REFUSALS: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the pragmatic literature, refusals are considered a subtype of commissives which commit the refuser to not performing an action (Searle 1969, 1975) or, in a dialogic perspective, they are seen as speaker's failure "to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor" (Chen and Zhang 1995: 121). Both definitions highlight a *differendum* between the response of the refuser and the expectations of the refusee. The pragmatic space that accommodates the negotiation between the speaker and the interlocutor is the site of a potential conflict, as refusals are the dispreferred option in the adjacency pair: "the negative counterparts to acceptances and consentings are rejections and refusals" (Searle and Vanderveken 1985: 195).

Interpreted in the framework of politeness theory, refusals appear to be inherently face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson 1987). The face saving strategies used by the refuser, on the one hand, mirror the relationship between the interlocutors, and, on the other hand, can measure the effects of the refusal on their current and future relationship. Mitigation is, most often, part of refusal strategies, although blunt refusals are not excluded.

As reactions to speech acts initiated by the interlocutor, refusals / rejections[2] have been described as the second term in various adjacency pairs: offer – refusal, invitation – refusal, request – refusal, and suggestion – refusal (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984). Maybe a few more could be added: question – refusal (to answer or rejection of the question's presuppositions), compliment – refusal (as modesty marker), expressive – refusal (reluctance to share a psychological state with the interlocutor), commissive – refusal (rejection of the interlocutor's involvement / commitment to a future action). Such adjacency pairs having refusals / rejections as a second term triggered by various speech acts are exemplified below (1–8).

[2] One might make fine-grained distinctions between refusals and rejections. For example, Ariadna Ştefănescu (email communication) suggested that one refuses *a proposal, a request, an invitation* considered by its initiator to be benefic to either of the two parties involved in interaction, while *ideas, opinions, initiatives, plans* or *advice* are rejected. What seems to make the difference is

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(1) A: Here, take some chocolate! / B: Thank you, but I'm on a diet.
(2) A: Let's have lunch together! / B: Sure, tomorrow would be great! Today I'm in a big hurry...
(3) A: Will you, please, help me with the essay? / B: Oh, I'm terribly sorry, but I don't know how to write it either…
(4) A: Maybe try this one? / B: No, it won't fit!
(5) A: Where have you been? / B: Let it be my secret!
(6) A: What a nice dress! / B: Oh, it's cheap, no big deal…
(7) A: I'm so worried! / B: Don't be! It's gonna be ok![3]
(8) A: I will fire him for that! /B: No, you won't… That's what you always say when you're angry!

Frequently, refusals are followed by the reactions of the refusee, who attempts to reduce face loss and mitigate the degree of imposition of the speech act (s)he had initiated. So it looks reasonable to conclude that, in the conversational triad [trigger – refusal – follow-up], two redressive actions are performed in order to mitigate face loss of the refusee: one by the refuser through strategies of positive or negative politeness, and the other one by the refusee himself, who, in the follow-up, may suppress the speech act (s)he had performed or, on the contrary, enhance it or object to the interlocutor's refusal, as exemplified below (9–15). Whether defensive or offensive, the follow-up signals A's initiative to negotiate the refusal.

(9) A: Here, take some chocolate! / B: Thank you, but I'm on a diet. / A: Sorry, didn't know that!
(10) A: Let's have lunch together! / B: Sure, tomorrow would be great! Today I'm in a big hurry. / A: Ok, go, go, go!
(11) A: Will you, please, help me with the essay? / B: Oh, I'm terribly sorry, but I don't know how to write it either… / A: OK! I've got it! You always say that but you always get high grades!
(12) A: Maybe try this one… / B: No, it won't fit! /A: If you say so…, but I know it fits you!

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the degree of relational involvement: refusals tend to be taken personally and emotionally, while rejections leave room for reason and argumentation. Speculating around this idea, I would say that refusals seem to be relationship-oriented, while rejections seem to be problem-oriented. If it is so, then cultural differences (relationship-orientation vs problem-orientation) might or might not shape semantic differences in terms, hence indicating a difference in the conceptualization of the two subtypes of speech acts. To put things clearer: in Anglo cultures (mostly problem-oriented), it would be acceptable to *refuse/reject/decline an invitation*, but not in Romanian (the Romanian culture is mostly relationship-oriented) *a refuza o invitație /*a respinge o invitație*, which might indicate a difference in conceptualizing refusals and rejections in the two cultures, which has consequences for lexicalizations. Nevertheless, one can say Engl. *to refuse/to reject a person*, as well as Rom. *a refuza o persoană / a respinge o persoană*, showing approximately the same semantic difference "to refuse a proposal coming from a person" / "to reject the person her/himself". Ariadna Ștefănescu's suggestion is inspirational, but for the purpose of the present paper I decided to treat refusals and rejections together, as representing one and the same superordinate speech act.

[3] Reluctance to share emotions with the interlocutor might turn out to be the input for a subsequent speech act, here, encouragement of the interlocutor.

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(13) A: Where have you been? / B: Let it be my secret! / A: Oh, sorry!
(14) A: What a nice dress! / B: Oh, it's cheap, no big deal… / C: No, it's gorgeous!
(15) A: I'm so worried! / B: Don't be! It's gonna be ok! / A: Wouldn't you be worried?!
(16) A: I will fire him for that! / B: No, you won't… That's what you always say when you're angry! / A: It's gonna be different this time!

Strategies of refusal seem to be more than personal options. They are constrained both by social variables like gender, age, level of education, power, social distance, and by culture (Brown and Levinson 1987, Fraser 1990, Smith 1998).

An important contribution to the study of refusals is due to Beebe *et al*. (1990) who proposed an influential semantic taxonomy. The authors distinguished between semantic formulas (direct and indirect) and adjuncts. Under direct semantic formulas, two subclasses are listed: performative (*I refuse.*) and nonperformative refusals (*No!*). Indirect semantic formulas, which mitigate refusals, are statements of regret (*I'm sorry, but I really cannot...*); expressions of wish (*Oh, I wish I could, but...*); excuses, reasons, or explanations (*I do apologize, but I'm just leaving home, a good friend of mine is in hospital and needs me*); statements of alternative options (*I won't be able to come today, but tomorrow I'll be free*); conditions for past / future acceptance (*If you only told me before...*); a promise of future acceptance (*I'll definitely let you know next time*); a statement of principle (*I never do business with friends*); a statement of philosophy (*Your time has not come yet*); an attempt to dissuade the interlocutor (*I don't think it's wise to do that, you might regret it in the long run*); acceptance that functions as refusal (*OK! We keep in touch*); avoidance (*Well, I don't know what to say…*)[4]. As for adjuncts, which precede or follow refusals, the following four types were considered: statement of positive opinion / feeling of agreement (*Sure! It would be nice!*); statement of empathy (*Yes, I can understand how you feel, but…*); pause fillers (*Err...mmm...*); expression of gratitude / appreciation (*I am honored, but...*). Most often, two or more devices combine in more elaborated face work activities. I would notice that both in indirect semantic formulas, and in adjuncts, the refuser exploits the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance and manner (as defined in Grice 1975) in order to background the refusal itself and foreground a different speech act (a representative, a commissive or an expressive) that rejects some of the presuppositions in the speech act performed by the refusee.

The taxonomy proposed by Beebe *et al*. (1990) has been the common denominator for comparing refusal strategies from various cultural spaces. Several types of differences have been found, concerning the trigger of the refusal, the preference for direct / indirect refusals, particular verbalizations, specific aspects in certain types of interactions, preference for certain strategies, reasons of refusal. Here are some of the aspects that have been pointed out: the strategies of refusal were slightly influenced by the trigger, i.e., request or invitation, in the American population, not among the Japanese (Nelson *et al.* 2002); both Americans and Chinese used indirect refusals, but Americans used a larger number of direct strategies (compare Chen 1996; Honglin 2007; Yinling 2012); while Americans were equally indirect in all situations of refusal, the Japanese were more direct for lower status interlocutors, and more polite for higher status interlocutors (Nelson *et al.* 2002); Americans headed refusals to invitations by *thank you*, unlike the Japanese (Nelson *et al.*

[4] The types listed are those porposed by Beebe et al., but all the examples provided are mine.

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2002); in job interviews, the interviewers proved to use more literal strategies of refusal than expected, while refusals to unqualified applicants were more elaborated (Saeki and O'Keefe 1994); for Americans, the preferred strategy of refusal is [apology + indirect refusal + reason], while the Japanese are concerned with quickly finishing the interaction, which they perceive awkward (Liao and Breshnahan 1996); Asians consider situational factors and refuse small gifts in order to avoid the feeling of debt because reciprocity is a cultural norm, while Americans, who are not constrained by such a cultural norm, rely on attractiveness, internal motivations and dispositions in accepting or refusing small gifts; while Japanese offer gifts to increase personal reputation in the recipient's eyes, Americans offer gifts in order to make the recipient happy (Morris, Peng, 1994; Hong *et al*. 2000; Shen *et al*. 2011). Qualitative analyses have been often backed by quantitative analyses. What is problematic about these studies is their kaleidoscopic, fragmentary character, due to the absence of a unitary framework to allow principled comparisons.

In what follows I propose a four level definition and description of refusals that might enable unified cross-cultural comparisons and predict potential intercultural misunderstandings.

3. REFUSALS REVISITED

Interpreting refusals in Mey's terms (pragmeme – practs – allopracts), I will also refer to Kecskes' "Dynamic Model of Meaning" (2008, 2010, 2013) in order to explain the communicative process "from both the speaker's and the hearer's perspective" and capture "the dynamism of speech communication in which interlocutors attempt to fit their language to a situation or context that their language, in turn, helped to create in the first place" (Kecskes 2008: 397-398).

3.1. Refusals: the pragmeme

Within the [trigger – refusal – (follow-up)] triad (cf. adjacency pair, Sacks *et al.* 1974), the interlocutors [A – B – A] negotiate both content and relationship.

When speaker A initiates a trigger for a potential refusal, (s)he encodes a personal version of a future state of affairs in the propositional content and assumes some speaker-hearer kind of mutuality in relationship, which allows the conversational offer[5] to be made. Accordingly, A's conversational offer might be represented as:

A: trigger: [CONTENT: a version of the world] $\wedge$ [RELATIONSHIP: mutuality]

B's direct refusal (like *No* or *I refuse*) would simultaneously invalidate the content and the relationship assumed by A, causing face loss of the latter. In order to mitigate face loss, B resorts to indirect refusals or adjuncts, as coined by Beebe *et al*. (1990).

Mitigated refusals can be viewed as complex moves based on a content – relationship split: on the one hand, B aims at presenting A's version of the world – [the

[5] I use conversational offer generically, for all the types of speech acts that might trigger a refusal as second term in the adjacency pair.

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content] – as objectively not valid due to A's temporary wrong assumptions or assessment of the context; on the other hand, B acknowledges the interpersonal relationship assumed by A and presents it as valid and shared. Because of the content – relationship split (s)he operated, B puts only the content under the scope of refusal, keeping relationship under the scope of acceptance. The speech act thus performed by B does not show on the surface structure of discourse as a refusal properly, but as an underspecified speech act. Hence, the various forms of mitigated refusals might be represented as:

B: underspecified SA: (NO) ∧ [CONTENT INVALIDATORS] ∧ [RELATIONSHIP VALIDATORS]

No can or cannot show on the surface structure of discourse; alike, the presence of both content invalidators and content validators is optional, as either one can be absent in various verbalizations of the refusal. Performing the underspecified speech act, B puts A in a position to invest the speech act with illocutionary force himself / herself. Ultimately, B's underspecified speech act looks more like an indirect appeal to shared empathy, making A responsible for accepting or refusing empathy. It seems that A and B actually negotiate the roles of the refuser and the refusee, with B trying to control A's emotional response and indirectly persuade him / her accept the content / relationship split.

A has two options: either to read B's response as an invited self-correction and act accordingly by withdrawing his / her expectations concerning B's future behavior in the real world, actually annulling the conversational trigger himself / herself; or to reject the language game proposed by B, hence sealing B's response as a refusal. A's follow-up indicates how A actually interpreted B's underspecified speech act: as an implicit directive (appeal to empathy) or as a refusal properly, triggering some kind of negative emotional response.

A: follow-up: [CONTENT: presuppositions withdrawal] ∧ [RELATIONSHIP: empathy]
A: follow-up: [CONTENT: presuppositions preserved] ∧ [RELATIONSHIP: emotionally challenged]

A's emotional reaction, overt or covert, more or less intense, impacts on A – B relationship to various degrees, depending on the broader context of interaction.

No matter how it is verbalized or negotiated, a refusal is a refusal. The social norm favors mitigated refusals, which are likely to be performed in unmarked situations of communication; direct, not mitigated refusals tend to be interpreted by the interlocutor(s) as impolite, conflictive or aggressive, and their conversational functions go beyond simple non-commitment.

To conclude: the pragmeme of refusal is an underspecified speech act based on the content – relationship split: (NO) ∧ [CONTENT INVALIDATORS] ∧ [RELATIONSHIP VALIDATORS]. The interlocutors negotiate the roles of the refuser and refusee, shifting focus from content to relationship, i.e., shared empathy. The parentheses indicate that any of the three components might be deleted and any resulting combination might show on the surface structure of discourse.

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3.2. Refusals: the practs

The pragmeme of refusal is instantiated as practs validated in a given community of practice (for community of practice, see, for example, Eckert 2006). Practs are constrained by cultural variables, on the one hand, and by contextual variables, on the other hand. The former will be called macro-parameters; the latter will be called micro-parameters. Macro-parameters determine the range of selection among micro-parameters.

3.2.1. *Macro-parameters: cultural variables*

Adopting Hofstede's model of cultural variation (2010), the dimensions that seem directly connected to the practs of refusal are collectivism / individualism, power distance and masculinity / femininity. The continuum collectivism – individualism captures the degree at which members of society define self-image in terms of *I* or *we*, reflecting self-centeredness or group-orientation. The opposition group independence / group dependence is connected to degrees of group loyalty and responsibility. While members of individualistic cultures are self-reliant and make independent choices, in collectivistic cultures failure to meet group expectations is a source of shame and face-loss. The power distance continuum reflects the way in which societies deal with inherent inequalities among individuals: the degree at which the less powerful members of society perceive and accept hierarchies and social distance. The masculinity – femininity continuum highlights the values that shape and motivate activities and relations: competition, achievement, success, and aggressiveness opposed to generosity, caring for others and quality of life. In Hofstede's model, countries are comparatively scored on each dimension of variation.

A challenge for intercultural pragmatics would be to determine how cultural variation affects the performance of each type of speech act, refusal in this particular case, and to correlate country scores for each relevant dimension with expected behaviour in performing a specific speech act.

3.2.2. *Micro-parameters: social variables*

Relying on the data extracted from cultural comparisons in the literature on refusals (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, Kinyo 1987, Bardovi-Harling 1991, Tickle 1991, Chen 1996, Huang amd Honglin2007, Liao and Bresnahan 1996, Beckers 1999, Gass and Houck 1999, Saeki and O'Keefe 1994, Sadler 2001, Nelson *et al.* 2002, Tanck 2003, Yao 2003, Kwon 2004, Al-Kahtani 2005, Felix-Brasdefer 2006, Honglin 2007, Shen *et al.* 2011, Yinling 2012, among others) and on conjectures from Hofstede's model of cultural variation (2010), I will hypothesize several micro-parameters which might yield cross-cultural differences in performing refusals.

The aim of my research is a theoretical one: to fix the parameters and micro-parameters relevant for cultural comparisons in point of preferred conceptualizations, social evaluations, verbal and nonverbal cross-cultural patterns of refusal. Nevertheless, I found it useful to back my theoretical hypotheses with empirical research, no matter how limited it might be at this theoretical stage of investigation. Hence, I verified my bibliography based information through a brief empirical research by applying a questionnaire (see a revised form of the questionnaire in the Annex) to a group of 100 students at the Faculty of Letters

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in Bucharest, in April 2016[6]. Their answers showed both group resemblances and individual differences that partly coincide with cross-cultural differences previously observed by researchers. At this stage of my research, I used the questionnaire-based observations to make conjectures about the micro-parameters that potentially determine cultural variation of the practs of refusal. I used the parameters thus inferred to design a grid (under **4.** below) to be applied to samples of respondents from different cultures / communities of practice and yield data for cultural comparisons.

Micro-parameters

a) *Cultural perceptions of refusal*. This micro-parameter is meant to capture how members of a culture perceive situations in which they would rather refuse the interlocutor's conversational offer than accept it. The micro-parameter might take one of the three values: (i) interlocutors perceive refusal situations as awkward, relationship threatening and try to avoid the topic or concede to accept the offer despite personal desire or full commitment; (ii) interlocutors perceive refusal situations as stress situations and try to cope with them by attentively evaluating the context in order to construct the best response to satisfy both personal desires, and interlocutor's needs; (iii) interlocutors feel free to refuse and do not hesitate to do so, prioritizing personal drives. This micro-parameter does not predict how speakers verbalize refusals, but their attitude towards

[6] The empirical research has been carried into 3 phases so far, a forth one being further needed. During the first phase, the topics I questioned were derived from the main issues discussed in the literature of refusals. I aimed at obtaining some empirical evidence and input from native Romanian speakers in order to evaluate how such data fit into the big picture of refusals as previously researched by scholars addressing this issue. It was a questionnaire "in the mirror", which put the respondents both in the position of the refuser and the position of the refusee. The initial 30 questions elicited answers of various types: answers chosen from a given set of possible answers, tasks of arranging given answers according to the preferred hierarchy, free answers, micro written discourse completion tests. Each question also invited personal solutions / comments (others than the ones listed) to check whether unpredicted solutions occurred. The questions involved social observation, self-observation and assessment. The second phase consisted of discussions with the students around the questionnaire and their answers, which revealed that the questionnaire needed corrections. Hence, in the third phase, a new questionnaire was compiled (the one in the Annex). At the same time, I interpreted students' answers against the theoretical background developed in the literature and the framework of analysis adopted for the present article. The aim of the empirical research based on the questionnaire was not to draw conclusions on the preferred patterns of refusal in the Romanian culture, but to extract relevant information that might prove useful for the intended grid of parameters and micro-parameters. Therefore, using existing theoretical discussions and empirical evidence, I elaborated the grid under 4. The continuation of the empirical research requires further adjustments of the questionnaire in order to reflect all the dimensions in the grid (some of them not covered by the existing questionnaire) and to test each dimension through a larger number of questions. The data collected by applying the newly refined questionnaire to a relevant sample of native speakers might produce data about patterns of refusal in the Romanian culture. My hypothesis is that applying the same questionnaire to native speakers from various cultures could produce useful output to be further used for cross-cultural generalizations and predictions of intercultural misunderstandings. As I have already mentioned before, for the theoretical purpose of this explorative article I stopped after the third phase of the empirical research.

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refusing. Conclusions might point to other-centered, relationship centered, self-centered attitudes in refusing. Culture specific emotions in refusal situations are generated, positive or negative, of various intensity, self-centered or other-centered.

b) *Probability of refusal*. The way in which members of various cultures evaluate the content of conversational triggers and react by accepting or refusing them is influenced by two factors: (i) the costs – benefits balance and (ii) the degree of imposition.

Every speech act implies costs and benefits for all the interactans involved. An analysis of the conversational move [offer – refusal – follow up] in terms of the costs-benefits balance predicts differences among types of triggers and probability of refusal. Triggers display the following internal structure: offer [costs for A, benefits for B]; suggestion [costs for A, benefits for B]; compliment [costs for A, benefits for B]; invitation [costs and benefits for A, costs and benefits for B]; request [benefits for A, costs for B]; question [benefits for A, costs for B]. Closely connected to the internal structure of the trigger, the default hierarchy of potential refusal, from high to low, looks like: requests > questions > (invitations) > suggestions > (invitations)[7] > offers > compliments. Cultural norms potentially modify the prototypical hierarchy and rank triggers differently on the continuum.

In accepting or refusing, interactants weigh the propositional content for degree of imposition and social / personal consequences: prototypically, the higher the degree of imposition is, the higher the probability of refusalis. The degree of imposition might be viewed in direct relation to what the members of a culture consider to be "free goods" – "expensive goods" – "prohibited goods" – "taboos"[8]. Beyond culturally predefined costs, personal costs and relational costs are highly important in performing refusals.

c) *Refusal expectancy*. Refusal expectancy refers to A's expectations to be refused by B. The basic values for this micro-parameter are refusal accepted / refusal denied, regulating situations when the refuser is or is not allowed to refuse. Prototypically, the refusal is accepted in cases of relational (a)symmetries. Refusal expectancy is theoretically higher in symmetrical relationships and lower in asymmetrical relationships. Cultures differ in point of the social markers of asymmetry (organizational hierarchy and social distance as shaped by age, gender, education, social position) and interpersonal markers of asymmetry (degree of intimacy, interpersonal attraction, relational debt, prudence, equity), respectively.

d) *Self-positioning in interactions*. Cultures might differ in terms of speaker's self-positioning in interactions with various interlocutors, specifically weather the cultural norm

[7] Depending on the propositional content, invitations might rank before or after suggestions.

[8] Types of goods are classified according to social norms of morality and / or their intrinsic social / personal value: "free goods" are not problematic to request and offer in most common relationships; "expensive goods" need a special configuration of the relationship between the interlocutors engaged in the verbal transaction, the interactant who asks for something and the interactant who accepts / refuses to offer; "prohibited goods" are banished to be asked for, so a refusal would be the natural consequence of the social value of the good; taboos are goods not to be asked for, silenced by the ethical values of a society. For example, in modern societies, host's sexual offer of his wife to a guest or a lonely traveler is a taboo, while in some Eskimo and Aleut communities, Indian tribes or nomadic tribes in Namibia it tends to be a more or less „expensive good". It has been reported that borrowing cars among American student would rather be at least an expensive good, if not a free one, while for Romanian students it is a prohibited good "one should never ask a colleague to lend him / her his / her car! Buy yourself a car if you need one!".

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is modesty or self-assertion. In cultures where the norm is modesty, fake refusals (not sincere) might occur when the refuser perceives the offer of the interlocutor as creating an interpersonal debt or implying what the refuser assesses to be "undeserved goods, undeserved generosity, embarrassing to accept". In Romanian rural communities (and not only) for example, an invitation (to lunch, for example) / an offer (of a present, for example) is first refused, the refuser waiting for the interlocutor "to insist" and repeat the invitation / the offer twice or three times before being accepted.

e) *The attribution system*. According to the attribution theory (Gordon and Graham 2005), individuals tend to attribute causes to events that occur in the world. Such causes are judged along three dimensions: [internal / external], [controllable / uncontrollable], [stable / unstable] (Heider 1958, Fiske and Taylor 1991, Weiner 1992). Cultures differ in point of their members' making attributions in various situations of interaction. Reading the various strategies of refusal (presented by Beebe *et al*. 1990) in terms of the attribution theory, it seems that speakers aim at presenting the cause of refusal as [external, uncontrollable, unstable]. Under this assumption, refusals are expected to show cross-cultural differences in point of the strategies adopted, if necessary, by the refuser to manipulate the refusee attribution process and direct it to inferring [external, uncontrollable, unstable] causes of refusal. Accordingly, a cross-cultural description would specify what are the most powerful content invalidators and the most efficient relation validators, respectively, the ones that are most frequently used by the interactants.

To increase cross-cultural relevance of refusal strategies as presented by Beebe *et al*. (1990) (see above under **2.**), I propose a re-categorization of the strategies proposed by the authors as strategy types and strategy tokens. Types are relevant for practs, tokens are communicatively synonymous, so relevant for allopracts (**3.2.3.** below). Intonation is an important element in shaping mitigated refusals.

A. Literal refusals (tokens: *No, I refuse / I won't* etc.)
B. Non-literal refusals (used alone or in combination with literal refusals)
1. Content invalidators (used alone or in combination with relation validators)
   (i) Asserting / implying objective impediments (tokens: reasons of refusal; explanations; proposing alternatives; conditions for future / past acceptance; promise for future acceptance; an attempt to dissuade the interlocutor)
   (ii) Exploiting modality (tokens: use of modal verbs; *I wish I could*; statement of principle; statement of philosophy)
   (iii) Adopting a decision-making behavior (tokens: avoidance, pause fillers, delay of response; insincere acceptance, not followed by the subsequent behavior)
2. Relationship validators (used alone or in combination with content invalidators). Intonation seems an important element in projecting emotion in discourse.
   (i) Projection of positive emotions directed to the interlocutor (tokens: expression of positive opinion or feelings of agreement, gratitude, appreciation, enthusiasm, etc.)
   (ii) Projection of negative self-directed emotions (tokens: excuses, expressions of regret, frustration, disappointment for not being able to commit to…, self-blame, etc.)

The manipulation of the attribution system correlates with the pract strategically selected by the refuser or with the combination of several practs.

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f) *Techniques of argumentation and persuasion*. Within the [trigger – refusal – follow-up] triad, the refuser enacts a local process of argumentation and persuasion, which has been generally dealt with in terms of three culturally constrained variables: (i) the presence / the absence of *no* as part of the complex move of refusal, (ii) the syntax (= relative order) of content invalidators vs relationship validators, and (iii) speaker's option for creativity vs formulaic language. The literature reviewed reports that some cultures avoid direct *no*-s, while others do not exclude them; in some cultures content invalidators come first, while in others, relationship validators are fronted; the degree of creativity instead of formulaic language might be evaluated as a token of sincerity, hence more persuasive in some cultures, while, on the contrary, formulaic language might be culturally expected in interaction. An inventory of refusal clichés would be the basis for such comparisons.

To conclude: practs, as contextual instantiations of the pragmeme of refusal, show macro- and micro-parametric variation. The macro-parameters that shape practs are to be found at the intersection of three cultural dimensions: collectivism / individualism, power distance and masculinity / femininity. The micro-parameters that constrain practs are: perception of refusal, probability, expectancy, self-positioning, attributes construction and local processes of argumentation and persuasion by choosing from several available strategies of literal / non-literal refusal. The role of intonation has been underestimated so far.

3.2.3. *Refusal: the allopracts*

Allopracts are individual contextual choices made from a pre-defined set of options, which underlie practs. Probably, the most difficult task for both cultural and cross-cultural approaches is to distinguish between practs and allopracts. In the specific case of refusals, the strategies proposed by Beebe *et al*. (1990) were currently assimilated to practs and used to conclude on cultural differences. The data collected by various researchers seem to be of limited trust due to the small number of respondents, the problematic relevance of the population sample, and the small number of variables tested in each study. Quantitative data did not show highly significant differences among cultures. Beyond these inconveniences, the most problematic aspect seems to be the lack of criteria to distinguish between practs (as transpersonal contextual choices) and allopracts (as personal contextual choices). See also Wolfson *et al.* 1989. According to the recategorization I proposed above (**3.2.**), types underlie practs, while tokens underlie allopracts, together with the temporary content-form association as judged appropriate by a specific speaker at a specific time of interaction with a specific interlocutor, in accordance with their conversational history (for conversational history see Golopenția-Eretescu 1980).

Within the clear-cut oppositions literal vs non-literal, content invalidators vs relationship validators, the criteria I used to distinguish between practs and allopracts are: interlocutor-oriented vs self-centered (B.1.i vs B.1.ii), punctually solving the communicative *differendum* vs delaying the solution (B.1.i and B.1.ii vs B.1.iii). The allopracts listed under practs seem functionally equivalent, and their selection seems to depend on the conversational history of the interactants and on specific on-spot deliberations.

3.2.4. *Refusals: the interpract*

The interpract that arises in the local process of negotiation between the interlocutors is the joint solution interlocutors co-construct to the *differendum* created between the trigger performed by A, B's refusal, and A's follow-up. The interactants cooperate / fail to cooperate in order to temporary suppress the principles of politeness and subordinate face

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work to the principle of empathy. The interpract thus co-constructed by the interactants can be coined "mutual empathy management" and it depends on the interlocutors' intention or ability to perform by interactionally adjusting allopracts to cultural available practs of the universal pragmeme of refusal.

4. THE GRID

The aim of this theoretical approach was to design a grid that enables comparisons of refusals across cultures and to assess the interpract that arises in various intercultural situations of interaction. The discussions under **3.** above lead to the following configuration:

PRAGMEME$_{\text{REFUSAL}}$
(NO) $\wedge$ (CONTENT INVALIDATORS) $\wedge$ (RELATIONSHIP VALIDATORS)

PRACTS$_{\text{for THE PRAGMEME OF REFUSAL}}$

MACRO-PARAMETERS				
		CULTURE A	CULTURE B	GAP TO BRIDGE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
INDIVIDUALISM				
POWER DISTANCE				
MASCULINITY				
MICRO-PARAMETERS				
PERCEPTION OF REFUSAL	AVOIDANCE			
	STRESS			
	FREE			
	OTHERS (TO BE SPECIFIED)			
PROBABILITY OF REFUSAL	COSTS-BENEFITS HIERARCHY			
	FREE GOODS			
	EXPENSIVE GOODS			
	PROHIBITED GOODS			
	TABOOS			
EXPECTANCY OF REFUSAL (ASSYMETRY MARKERS)	SOCIAL HIERARCHY			
	AGE			
	GENDER			
	EDUCATION			
	SOCIAL POSITION			
	INTIMACY			

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	ATTRACTION			
	RELATIONAL DEBT			
	PRUDENCE			
	EQUITY			
	OTHERS (TO BE SPECIFIED)			
SELF-POSITIONING	MODESTY			
	SELF-ASSERTING			
NEGOTIATION OF ATTRIBUTES	LITERAL			
	OBJECTIVE IMPEDIMENTS			
	EXPLOITATION OF MODALITY			
	DECISION MAKING STRATEGY			
	POSITIVE EMOTIONS PROJECTION			
	NEGATIVE EMOTIONS PROJECTION			
	INTONATION TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH EMOTIONS			
ARGUMENTATION AND PERSUASION	NO			
	RELATIVE ORDER			
	CLICHÉES			

ALLOPRACTS$_{\text{for the PRACT OF REFUSAL}}$

LINGUISTIC FORMS WHICH ENCODE TYPES OF TOKENS	CULTURE A TOKENS (TO BE EXEMPLIFIED)	CULTURE B TOKENS (TO BE EXEMPLIFIED)	GAP TO ADDRESS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
Literal refusal			
Objective impediment			
Exploiting modality			
Decision making strategies			
Projection of positive emotions			
Projection of negative emotions			
Others			

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INTERPRACT: EMPATHY MANAGEMENT

INTRACULTURAL COMMUNICATION	INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
To be assessed in terms of interpersonal relations	To be assessed in two stages: a) Mutual adaptation to cultural differences b) Interpersonal relations

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present paper proposed a description of the speech act of refusal in the framework pragmeme – pract – allopract (Mey 1999, 2002, 2009, 2010), enriched with Kecskes's dynamic model (2008, 2010, 2013), and supplemented with a fourth unit, coined the "interpract" (**1.**). The aim was to provide a grid for the intra-cultural characterization of refusals that might be further used as a unitary frame for unified cross-cultural comparisons and better predictions of misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

The pragmeme of refusal is part of a complex conversational move, organized as the triad: [trigger – refusal – follow up]. The pragmatic space generated within this triad is the site of content and relationship negotiation between the interlocutors. Literal, direct refusals invalidate both content and relationship, might provoke face loss to the refusee and relational conflict. For this reason, speakers rather resort to non-literal, mitigated refusals in order to invalidate only the content of the conversational offer, but to validate relationship with the interlocutor. The local process of negotiation becomes a matter of persuasion: the refuser aims at making the refusee initiate self-correction by appealing to empathy. This characterization applies universally (**2.1.**). The pract of refusal is culturally and socially constrained by macro-parameters mapped onto micro-parameters. It is at this level where cross-cultural comparisons appear relevant (**2.2.**) and are to be used for predictions in intercultural communication. Interactants' precise content–form matches within the range allowed by the culturally specific pract(s) produce allopracts, which are relevant on the interpersonal level and represent speakers' free options (**2.3.**). Interactants' ability to perform allopracts that adequately reflect their specific relationship and the current purpose of conversation leads to successfully coping with the *differendum* in the adjacency triad through mutual empathy management.

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Annex
Tentative unified questionnaire for cultural output

1. **What have you noticed around you?** □ people rarely refuse each other; □ it largely depends on the person to be refused; □ it depends on the situation (when, where, why); □ it depends on the costs implied in case of acceptance; □ people often refuse each other, they voice out their will at once; □ there is no social norm concerning refusals; □ Other ….....
2. **How would you assess your behavior?** □ you rarely refuse someone; □ it largely depends on the person to be refused; □ it depends on the situation (when, where, why); □ it depends on the costs implied in case of acceptance; □ I just speak out my will, no problem □ I really don't know; □ Other…….....
3. **How do you feel when you refuse somebody?** □ I feel embarrassed, I wish I did not have to refuse; □ Embarrassed and I tell that to my interlocutor; □ Embarrassed, but, after all, this is it; □ Well, I will find a way to mask my refusal, to make it sound less a refusal; □ I have the right to refuse anybody, anytime, right? □ Other……
4. **How do you feel when somebody refuses you?** □ I feel embarrassed / ashamed / disappointed / frustrated / uncomfortable, I didn't expect that, people should be nice to each other ; □ I don't feel comfortable, but I try to understand; □ I don't feel comfortable, but this is it, it is normal to be refused sometimes; □ I'm not sure what I feel, but, of course, *yes* would have been better than *no*; □ No problem! His / her right to refuse! □ Other…….
5. **Whom is it harder to refuse? Make a hierarchy within each subclass (1 = the hardest)**: a) □ a family member; □ a good friend; □ a colleague; □ a neighbor; □ a stranger; □ I make no difference; □ other……; b) □ a professor; □ a boss at work; □ a hierarchically inferior employee at work place; □ I make no difference; □ other…….; c) □ an older person; □ a younger person; □ a person of the same age; □ I make no difference; □ other……. ; d) □ a person you care about; □ a person you feel indebted to; □ a person that could offer you a reward later in life; □ I make no difference; □ other…….
6. **Whom would you expect less to refuse you? Make a hierarchy within each subclass (1 = the least)**: a) □ a family member; □ a good friend; □ a colleague; □ a neighbor; □ a stranger; □ I make no difference; □ other……; b) □ a professor; □ a boss at work; □ an inferior at work place; □ I make no difference; □ other…….; c) □ an older person; □ a younger person; □ a person of the same age; □ I make no difference; □ other……. ; d) □ a person you care about; □ a person you feel indebted to; □ a person that could offer you a reward later in life; □ I make no difference □ other……..
7. **Which of the following is harder for you to refuse/reject? Make an hierarchy (1 = the hardest):** □ an offer; □ an invitation; □ a request; □ a suggestion; □ to answer a question; □ a compliment; □ to share emotions with the interlocutor; □ interlocutor's commitment to a future action; □ other…….
8. **When do you expect less someone to refuse you / to reject what you expressed? (1 = the least).** When: □ you make an offer; □ you make an invitation; □ you make a request; □ you make a suggestion; □ you ask a question; □ you pay a compliment; □ you share your feelings / emotions with the interlocutor; □ you express commitment to a future course of action; □ other……
9. **During the decision making process (when trying to make up your mind whether to refuse or to accept) what is the most important thing you take into account? Make a hierarchy (1 = the most important)** □ the relationship with the interlocutor; □ potential negative effects of accepting / refusing; □ your life principles / values; □ the costs of doing / acting as requested; □ I don't like people to control my life and tell me what to do; □other..
10. **When somebody refuses you, what do you think is the most probable reason?** □ I was tactless, as usual; □ I was tactless this time; □ I was not lucky this time!; □ Bad luck, like

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always! ; □ (S)he generally refuses people for no special reason!; □ (S)he must have had his / her reasons to refuse me this time; □ (S)he was in a bad mood; □That's him / her; □ other……

11. **Under what circumstances <u>would you accept</u> something although you wish you refused?**.....
12. **Under what circumstances <u>would you refuse</u> something although you wish you accepted?**.....
13. **Why would you refuse a gift although you wish you accepted it?**.....
14. **How often would you behave as described under 11 and 12? Tick only 1 answer**: □ almost never; □ rarely; □ sometimes; □ quite often; □ very often; □ comment……..
15. **When somebody invites you somewhere / offers to help you or to do something for you, would you refuse him / her only because you are shy?** □ yes; □ no; □ other reason why you would refuse him / her although you wish you accepted?.....
16. **What is the best way to refuse somebody?** □ directly; □ directly, but politely; □ I wish I could be direct, but I choose the indirect way to avoid negative consequences; □ indirectly and I feel embarrassed for not being able to attend his / her needs; □ other……
17. **What exactly do you feel when someone <u>refuses you?</u>**.....
18. **What exactly do you feel when you <u>refuse someone</u>?**.....
19. **What do you think about people who are not able to say *no*?**.....
20. **What do you think about people who refuse tactlessly?**.....
21. **What are the effects of a refuse on the refuser? Fill in the table**

POSITIVE EFFECTS	NEGATIVE EFFECTS

22. **What are the effects of a refusal on the refusee? Fill in the table**

POSITIVE EFFECTS	NEGATIVE EFFECTS

23. **Is a refuse influenced by the way in which the interlocutor made the request / offer /…. (tact, giving solid reasons, imploring, threatening, etc.?)** □ a lot; □ pretty much; □ somewhat; □ not really; □ not at all
24. **Write down how you would refuse; specify if you would accept even if you didn't feel like it:**
    Your mother, who asks you to help her with the housework:…….
    Your colleague, who invites you to her birthday party:…….
    Your little brother who wants you to help him with his homework:……..
    Your superior/professor, who offers you a coffee……
    Your grandpa who asks you to lend him a large sum of money……
    Your friend who asks you to lend him your car……..
    Your neighbor who offers to clean the yard for you……..
    [….]
25. **Imagine that your colleague asks you to lend her your lecture notes.** Comment on the situation. Would you give her your note book? Under what circumstances? Why? Why not? How would you think about her asking your notebook?.....

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