

# Negotiating Frames Through Refusal Acts: A Pragmatic Analysis of Native/Non-native Speakers' Interactions in Problem-Solving Telephone Conversations

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to investigate frame negotiation and construction through a pragmatic analysis of the speech act refusal. This act serves as a marker of conflicting frames in Problem-Solving-Service Call (PSSC) interactions between native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English (NNS). Sixteen authentic PSSCs were recorded by eight NNS (Chinese) when they were talking to customer service representatives. A pragmatic analysis of moment-by-moment encounters of their interactions will, first, demonstrate how refusal acts trigger conflicting frames; second, how conflicting frames are further marked by structured linguistic items to indicate individuals' presuppositions, and third how conflicting frames are redefined through a co-constructing process. Instructional implications are provided to suggest frame knowledge building in second language learning activities.

**Keywords:** Frame analysis, refusal acts, conflicting frames, interactive frames, negotiation, structured lexical items, native/non-native speakers, telephone interactions, presuppositions.

## INTRODUCTION

As interaction between native speakers of English (NS) and non-native speakers of English (NNS) increases on a telecommunication level, speakers in the interaction are increasingly expected to communicate structurally and, to a certain extent, predictably based on time constraints and monetary concerns. Unfortunately, this predictability is embedded in interlocutors' speech and exists as implicit structures and patterns. Speakers rarely notice these structures and patterns unless things go wrong [1, 2]. Therefore, they cause conflicts and invite rejections and negotiations in interactions, which is typically observed in problem-solving telephone interactions. Each speaker presupposes certain expectations and hypotheses in moment-by-moment encounters in order to accomplish his/her objective of a particular interaction. The entire process of such interactions is basically directed to working on predictabilities, or frames, as this paper supposes, through negotiations. Interlocutors make efforts to change individual predictabilities or frames into a shared frame and seek solutions to the problem under discussion. When individuals' frames conflict with each other's, interlocutors start negotiating and redefining the frame knowledge brought into the context. Interlocutors apply different types of speech acts such as requests, refusals, and confirmations to negotiate frame conflicts, redefine frames, or co-construct new frames. The occurrence of the speech act refusal is frequently observed in Problem-Solving Service Call (PSSC) conversations, which has served as a significant trigger to reveal the process and content of frame negotiation and co-construction. Presuppositions, structured explanations and understandings, conflicts, and frame relevant knowledge

are all assembled together by this particular "performative act" [3] refusal. Before reporting the results of how this particular refusal act triggers the process and content of frame co-construction in interactions, it is necessary to define the term "frame" and state clearly the interactive meaning of "frame" in this study because it is a rather complex cognitive, theoretic, and linguistic term indicated by Ensink and Sauer [4].

A frame is a term introduced by Bateson [5] in an interactive sense of "play activity" in humans as well as in animals from an anthropological perspective because the "play activity" has rules and is categorized. Many researchers [1, 2, 4, 6-11] have studied interactive frames in different disciplines such as sociology, linguistics, and sociolinguistics. They have investigated types of interactional situations such as medical examinations [10] and emergency calls [11]. Among these researchers is Goffman [9] who first develops the term "frame" to investigate "the socially constructed nature of reality" [10] as he argues "definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events (...) and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify" (p. 10). Fuconnier and Sweetser [7] define frames as "structured understandings of the way aspects of the world function" (p. 5). Gumperz [2] emphasizes interactions as processes of conversational inference that implies the interactive sense of frame (p. 153). He further defines,

Co-occurrence expectations enable us to associate styles of speaking with contextual presuppositions. We regularly rely upon these matching procedures in everyday conversation. Although they are rarely talked about and tend to be noticed only when things go wrong, without them we would be unable to relate what we hear to previous experience (p. 162).

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When Tannen and Wallat and Ensink and Sauer [4, 10] conduct frame analysis of discourses, they have categorized frames and made a distinction between knowledge frames and interactive frames. The former refers to “the organization of knowledge and use of knowledge in our understanding” [4] or “participants’ expectations about people, objects, events, and settings in the world” [10] while the latter emphasizes that “participants in interaction need to share a sense of which kind of activity they are engaged in” (p. 4) [4] and “how speakers mean what they say” [10] in the activity.

The above researchers’ definitions of the term “frame” and types of frames have helped me understand well the participation of “subjective involvement” [9, 12] that refers to participants’ conceptions and self-conscious allocations of commitment “to transplant the participation arrangement that is natural in one social interaction into an interactional environment in which it isn’t”(p.153) to shape interactive frames. But they have not helped me establish a clear picture of the ways in which interlocutors contribute “subjective involvement,” especially when a conflicting frame happens, without examining certain governing pragmatic linguistic patterns. Is the “subjective involvement” randomly contributed or is it also structured in certain pragmatic form? This study supposes a pragmatic analysis of the speech act refusal marked as a trigger of conflicting frames would help answer the question and further reveal the ways by which this particular speech act calls upon pre-structured linguistic items for frame negotiation to achieve the “matching procedures” [1], re-define frames, or co-construct new frames.

An illustration of pragmatic analysis of frames was found in Bednarek’s [6] study of hearers’ (re-)constructed coherence of texts. She analyzed linguistic features contributed to coherence of a frame such as “definite/indefinite articles,” “pronouns,” “vague category identifiers” such as “and things,” “something/anything,” “and things like that.” This illustration is a valuable attempt of examining linguistic items and revealing their contribution to the formation of frames. The current study makes an alternative attempt to examine interactions instead of texts, particularly the function of speech act refusals, and closely analyze the ways in which this particular speech act serves as a trigger of conflicting frames and eliciting pre-structured lexical items out of “subjective involvement” to redefine and co-construct frames. A pragmatic analysis approach is employed because it is

“An emic, interlocutors’ perspective by paying close attention to the meanings that the co-participants make relevant to each other through details of their interactional conduct in the moment-by-moment unfolding of the interaction” [13]. Kasper [13] emphasizes that the significance of pragmatic analysis draws on speech act research and conversation analysis (CA) both approaches in an integrated fashion. This approach is supported by Scheff [14] who argues that “the CA of texts also makes inferences about events that occur within the speakers like discourse analysis” and “the texts that CA tends to use are much closer to standard, formal English because they are often strangers or at least equals, who are conversing about topics that are not highly specialized, with much of the necessary syntax and grammar”(p. 373).

After examining the above discussions of “frame,” a working definition of an interactive frame in this study is defined as a structured understanding of an interactive event to achieve a set of shared expectations and the formation process of the set of shared expectations which is not just “dynamic” [10] but more importantly is negotiated and co-constructed between the involved interlocutors particularly. This definition also explains the meaning of conflicting frames in this paper, which is adapted from Ensink’s [15] statement of conflicting frame, “People initially do not agree which frame is the appropriate one. The solution is ordinarily a frame shift. One frame is in operation and one chooses to release that frame and to agree instead on a different one” (p. 71). Conflicting frames happen in interactive events and requires both interlocutors’ contribution of frame knowledge and frame negotiation to achieve a frame shift.

Telephone conversations are selected for frame analysis purposes, first because, little research has examined telephone conversations from a frame analysis perspective and second, the nature of telephone conversations requires rich linguistic exchanges instead of conversation cues that occur more often in face-to-face conversations. Frequent linguistic exchanges within the limited time of a telephone conversation are assumed to disclose what is exactly structured in interlocutors’ minds and how structured items are negotiated through interlocutors’ collaborative “subjective involvement.” This assumption has found support in Schegloff’s [16-17] statement that telephone situations are co-constructed by both interlocutors because he argues that the routine look of phone conversations is an outcome achieved through participants’ collaborative work. Researchers such as Luke and Pavlidou [18] and Yotsukura [19] also state that phone conversations are highly structured. These researchers have identified the structure implied in telephone conversations. From their analysis, it is not difficult to infer that structure and routine embedded in each interlocutor’s mind may make communication problematic if any necessary interactive engagement is missing. Tracy [11] studied the emergency service requests between citizens and calltakers on the phone and conducted a frame analysis. She labeled the relationship between citizens and calltakers as “public service frame” and “customer service frame.” She found that the calltakers’ interactional frame is different from citizens’ interactional frame. Since the frames between NS’s interaction are different, what about the frames between NSs and NNSs in a non-face-to-face interaction? The interlocutors, in such situations, speak different first languages and grew up in different social-cultural contexts, heavily relying on linguistic exchanges. They need more efforts and attention to make each individual’s “presuppositions”\* [20], structured understandings in real interactions appreciable, observable, and understandable to the other. They have to negotiate interpersonal relationships including conflicts and interactive interpretations, labeled by different researchers as “paintings” [4] or “alignments” [9, 10] to understand what each frame or sub-frame contains in interactions such as PSSC scenarios.

## MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Sixteen PSSCs between eight NNSC (Chinese) and eight NSs were collected. NNSC, who gave written consent to the researcher before recording the conversations and obtained

**Table 1. 16 Problem-Solving-Service-Calls**

Scenario #	Type of Service Calls	Scenario #	Type of Service Calls
1	Bank Account	9	Dental Insurance 2
2	Bank Promotion	10	Mail-in Rebate
3	Cable Service	11	Online Shopping 1
4	Car Insurance	12	Online Shopping 2
5	Credit Card 1	13	Package Pick-up
6	Credit Card 2	14	Phone bill
7	Credit Card 3	15	Wireless Phone 1
8	Dental Insurance 1	16	Wireless Phone 2

oral consent from the NSs whom they were calling at the beginning of making their PSSCs. They initiated the calls to customer service in such venues as insurance companies, telephone companies, banks, post offices and various retail stores as indicated in Table 1.

Each caller recorded two scenarios within two to three weeks. All scenarios were truly authentic and were labeled as PSSCs because the eight NNSCs did have problems with the service they received such as concerns about insurance premium increases after a car accident, concerns about mail-in rebates, etc., so they had to make a call and attempt to find solutions to the problems. The data collection took about three months to complete. The eight callers were selected based on their English proficiency: paper-pencil based TOEFL test scores of 600 plus and length of stay in America for three or more years. They were all senior graduate students. These criteria have contributed to the purpose of pragmatic analysis of the co-constructing interaction process between NNSs and NSs across the 16 PSSCs situations because the situations need high levels of language proficiency to negotiate service. The data were transcribed by the researcher who adapted transcribing codes from Luke and Pavlidou and Kasper [18, 13]. A professional transcriber re-evaluated the transcripts.

## RESULTS: REFUSAL ACTS AND STRUCTURED LEXICAL ITEMS

Whenever a disagreement, doubt, conflict, or unexpected interpretation happens in the PSSC interactions, interlocutors either try to clarify it, elaborate it, or negotiate it. This observation has found agreement in Bednarek's argument [6] that "frame-conflicts trigger lengthy explanations and cause contradictions or questions" (p. 693). Types of interpretations, elaborations, questions, and negotiations have not simply

come from interlocutors' intuitive, random, and irregular understandings of the situation. The current author argues that they are actually pre-structured, pre-organized, and pre-programmed in the form of frames because interlocutors who construct them come from different levels of institutions and social realities that govern their presuppositions and shape their responses. A close pragmatic analysis indicates that the responses represent various structures and patterns, which is what this paper proposes. The responses including presuppositions, interpretations, negotiations, and elaborations are framed. They are triggered by particular speech acts such as refusals to reveal the disagreement and conflict before interlocutors could co-construct a new frame, third or modified frame. The speech act refusal standing out in the data is marked as the trigger of frame negotiation and co-construction because it represents differences between the two interlocutors' presuppositions and conflicts between frames. It reveals the gap between mutual expectations, makes the structured presuppositions emerge, and elicits immediate elaborations, interpretations, even further revisits from the responsible speaker.

In this results section, four patterns will be analyzed carefully and fully to demonstrate the ways in which refusal acts serve as a marker of conflicting frames triggering negotiation and co-construction of new frames. The four patterns are a) Direct Refusals Marked by Negators; b) Direct Refusals Marked by Direct Requests; c) Indirect Refusals Marked by Indirect Requests; and d) Indirect Requests Marked by Confirmation Requests. Each pattern will be illustrated with four supporting examples. Refusals are defined by varieties of linguistic patterns such as direct and indirect requests because they imply negation of what is heard and said affirmatively.

Patterns of "hanging together" linguistic items will also be analyzed to demonstrate that lengthy explanations and immediate responses to refusals are not random but structured and routinized. Linguistic items are structured because they are selected by particular institutions and are understood in certain expected ways. They are encoded in speakers' presuppositions and responses.

### DIRECT REFUSALS MARKED BY NEGATORS

When Tannen [21] discusses the evidence of expectations in a frame, she argues "In general, negative statement is

<sup>1</sup>Presuppositions in a pragmatic sense emphasizes mutual knowledge and shared expectations about an international context, which matches the outcome of co-construction in frame negotiation in this paper because presuppositions, the term, proposed by the philosopher, Robert Stalnaker and was clearly defined in pragmatics by Mey [20].

Pragmatic presupposition differs from semantic presupposition because it goes beyond what is true or false supposed in a sentence and inquires metapragmatically into ways an utterance is understood in the context of the language users' common ground. He further argues that 'shared' or 'mutual knowledge' that conversation presupposes is not always given; indeed, only through conversation are we able to build up this knowledge, to supplement it and to refine it. In this way, the hidden pragmatic presuppositions may be brought out into the open. Presuppositions require a collective, sometimes even metapragmatic justification (p.188).

made only when its affirmative was expected" (p. 44). This statement indicates that interlocutors in the interaction have conflicts in expectations. These conflicts may come from the same frame or from different frames. A frame analysis of the data shows that conflicting frames occur frequently in the PSSCs. They were first triggered by the pattern of direct refusal acts marked by negators such as "no," "without," "doesn't," or "don't." Interlocutors use these negative lexical items directly to assemble what they want to refuse and what they are expecting to be confirmed by the other interlocutor. These negative items consistently reappear in the data to trigger frame conflicts and frame negotiation.

The first illustration of the pattern happens when the NNS customer (C) in the Bank Promotion Scenario called the NS customer service representative (R) in the bank to check a promotion that allows customers to receive a promotional bonus and requires customers to use the debit card to make five purchases within one month (See transcribing codes in Appendix).

### Example 1

1. C: ... my wife got a letter said if she spent more than five times 20 bucks in=
2. R: Purchases (-). Right, each purchase has 20 dollars or more
3. C: but I didn't get the letter That's why I I want to call to make sure whether this is eligible for me or not
4. R: <If she doesn't use her card, you use yours>=
5. C: No no I didn't use hers she uses=
6. R: No you don't She doesn't use hers (.) Those who are sent people don't want to use their cards (.) You use your card, right (↑)
7. C: Right.

This example of frame conflict agrees with the misunderstanding example analyzed by Ensink [15] illustrating a conflicting frame between "austern father and mimicry austern trainer" (p.73). Both interlocutors have different frames in mind about the same linguistic item "use." In the example, line (L) 3 to L7 demonstrate the process of the formation of a new frame after the structured understanding is negotiated between C and R. The linguistic features in L3 such as "make sure whether ... or not" is a request that implies a presupposition that C has about how the request regarding the promotion will be answered. Followed by this request is a response in L4 that indicates a frame about activation of cards to make purchases from a service provider's perspective, particularly the customer service representative. R thinks that C understands the meaning of "use" in his frame, so he continues to say "you use yours." Immediately, the customer kicks in his frame triggered by a *refusal* with repeated and emphatic negatives "no, no I didn't use hers ..." in L5 to start the negotiation process. This refusal response reveals C's frame that he did not use his wife's card to make purchases from a customer's perspective or customer's frame. If we interpret this as a misunderstanding, we cannot completely explain the situation because C knows the salient meaning of the lexical "use." Therefore, two frames are conflicting: R's frame with C's frame about the same lexical "use." C supposes that R thinks he used his wife's card to

make purchases but R supposes that C activated his card to make purchases. Their presuppositions do not match, so they continue to negotiate and construct as L6 and L7 indicate. The mismatch between the two frames was triggered by the refusal act and negotiated to co-construct an agreed frame, "don't want to use." This new frame is not the original frame in each of their minds because both of them added new meanings or "subjective involvement" into the shared frame.

A second illustration explains not only direct refusals trigger lengthy explanations but also elicit structured understandings and responses. In the Car Insurance Scenario, C was very concerned about the police report because she knew the accident was not her fault.

### Example 2

1. C: Ok, and, the first I had my car taken a picture yesterday=
2. R: The adjuster emailed me and he said 'sent that picture in the file' but they're not there, so I emailed him back and said 'can you please' you know 'put them in the file' I haven't looked at the picture yet cus you know they are not here yet
3. C: Ok, they don't say the police will report yet ↑
4. R: I haven't received the police report, let me see
5. C: Do you know whether there is a police report involved or not ↑
6. R: It says in one place It says yes that the police came up to the scene and put his note It is not known We don't know whether there is an actual police report I keep calling the other person almost every day and they don't have an answer machine They are never home

C called and provided some information about what she did for the accident in L1. R did not wait until C finished the description and started giving details of the routines that are structured by her insurance company to respond to customers' requests in L2. The lengthy explanations and technical descriptions demonstrate the routinized knowledge in R's mind. The structure is marked by such institutionalized items "adjuster," "picture," "file" because it is not difficult to infer that when these terms occur in the same picture, they frame a police report of a car accident. This analysis has seen support from Goffman's frame analysis of social events, "an aspect of an activity itself is organized – especially activity directly involving social agents" [22]. C in L3 used a refusal triggered by "don't say" a direct negation to negotiate the frame given by R in L2. As a result, R took an action, "let me see" to give more accurate information about the police report. This action could be marked as the beginning of a frame co-construction, which is what C was negotiating. The "don't say" refusal act (L3) leads to the co-construction of the mutual understandable frame in L6. Without this direct refusal act, R could not have offered the detailed explanations about the police report that C was concerned about.

Scheff [14] argues that "a frame can be represented by a word, phrase, or proposition" in context. This is also true in negotiating conflicting frames triggered by direct refusals marked by the negators in this study. At the beginning of the Car Insurance Scenario, C wanted to get a permission to record the conversation. So she asked.

**Example 3**

1. C: I wonder whether I can have the conversation with you recorded =
2. R: Oh you want the transcript ↑
3. C: No I just want to record it with a little machine in my hand
4. R: Oh (.) Sure You wanna record it That's fine

The conflicting frame triggered by the refusal act lies in the single word “transcript” in *L2*. R responded immediately as indicated by the immediate realization cue “Oh” and assumed that C wanted the “transcript” because as it is commonly observed that customer services record conversations for training purposes as they claim. So R activated her structured understanding of recordings that are about transcripts she already recorded. C refused the frame with a direct refusal “no” in *L3* and gave explanations about what she meant about recordings. The negotiation took only one turn for each of the two. R showed a little hesitation as “Oh” with a short pause indicates in *L4*. Immediately, she realized the transcript means “C will record it using her own recorder.” The transcript frame co-constructed by both of them was different from the frame of “transcript” discussed in *L2*.

Different words with certain part of phonemes overlapping could also elicit frame conflicts. In the fourth example of this pattern, C wanted to find out the telephone number of a dental provider, but the “number” frame conflicted with the “remember” frame.

**Example 4**

1. R: What number did you call ↑
2. C: Remember ↑
3. R: Yeah
4. C: No I don't remember, that's why I'm asking
5. R: For the dental you want the number ↑
6. C: Yeah
7. R: Just hold on

R asked “What number did you call?” C thought she was wondering whether he remembered (*L2*) what number he called before. He identified the conflict and checked by using a question tone of “remember?” in *L2*. R confirmed “remember” in *L3*. Apparently, each of them was talking about something presupposed in each of their minds. One was using “number” and the other was using “remember.” The direct refusal triggered by the double negatives “no” and “don't” in *L4* marks the start of negotiation and exchange of the conflict frame about “remember and number.” *L5* shows the result of frame co-construction. The lexical “number” with stress in the line resolved the conflict. In such a situation, C presupposed that R was asking whether he remembered the number he called last time. But R might not have the number right in front of her and her mind was on “number” instead of “remember.” She did not pay attention to the question “remember?” so she responded with a “Yeah” in *L3* that is consistent with her thinking of “number.” This also explains that she did not give any explanations but checked “For the dental you want the number?” in the following line.

**INDIRECT REFUSALS MARKED BY INDIRECT REQUESTS**

The second pattern triggering conflicting frames is an indirect refusal marked by indirect requests. These indirect requests imply that interlocutors have certain negative feeling or uncertainty about their concerns. They refuse this feeling implicitly and need to make a request to remove this uncertainty. Therefore, this action initiates explanations, elaborations, and further negotiations. Also, the linguistic items assembled by this speech act refusal “hang together” [23] in the explanations, elaborations, and negotiations to structure the frame and shape the frame. In other words, the explanations are, to a certain extent, expected. This pattern occurs frequently in the data and will be fully illustrated by the analysis of four examples.

The following interaction is taken from the Mail-in-Rebate Scenario. C purchased a cell phone and understood that he would be reimbursed with a 150 dollar mail-in-rebate. He called the customer service to check that. Unfortunately, R checked and responded.

**Example 5**

1. R: The rebate is only for 100 dollars
2. C: (Laugh) [very tricky very tricky
3. R: It said on the top]
4. C: Very tricky
5. R: Well↑ it isn't if you read through (.) It do:es give I mean you signed up at the bottom and dated it↑

The stress in *L1* is an indication that denies the presupposition made by C. C's repetition of “very tricky” in *L2* and *L4* is a linguistic marker of an indirect refusal and “it is an effective device in making the point of a story” [21] or a frame. It further indicates “an expected action failed to take place” [21]. This repetition serves as a trigger of indirect negotiation that is followed by the response “it isn't” with suggestions starting with “if” in *L5*. The laugh and repetition of “very tricky” in *L2* also show that C had no choice but accepted the structured fact that was constructed by the initiator of the rebate of 100 dollars. R offered her explanations patiently and politely by responding “it said on the top,” “if you read through” and “you signed up at the bottom and dated it?” All of these utterances have indicated that R's responses are routinized and organized because her patience and slow pace indicated in the responding utterances “Well ↑ it isn't if you read through (.)” has betrayed it.

The next illustration of this pattern is about negotiating insurance premium, which also elicits structured lexical items to “hang together” and shape interlocutors' responses.

**Example 6**

1. C: If the other party didn't provide the party's information GEICO still wants to pay for pay for the accidents Will there be anything on my account ↑
2. R: Well raise your insurance ↑
3. C: Yeah (.) Something like that ↓
4. R: Well (.) It's gonna depend on how much You know If we do pay anything It' gonna depend on how much and

that ah that's actually underwriting decision When your policy is gonna renew the underwriting department they will look at that and they will look at your history

*L1* shows that the if-lead "didn't provide" structure is an indirect refusal followed by an indirect request "something like that" in *L3*. The pattern triggered the lengthy explanations and elaborations in *L4* and was marked as frame knowledge of "raise insurance" in *L2*. This "raise insurance" frame contained rich referential information structured and governed by concrete institutionalized lexical items or "framing devices" [4] such as "underwriting decision/department," "policy," "renew," and "look at your history" as indicated in *L4*. These "framing devices" are possible to be generalized and routinized in the responses to discussions about raising insurance when another customer has general requests. They hang together to "form part of each other" and to structure the content of raising insurance this sub-frame within the macro insurance institutional frame [14].

"Framing devices" have found further agreement in Credit Statement negotiation scenarios. They are also assembled by the same pattern: indirect refusals marked by indirect requests. The indirect request made in *L1* below indicates an implied refusal of what C knows about the statement.

#### Example 7

1. C: My question is that I got a bill recently from Express says ah that the balance is 9, 10 dollars 90 cents But I remember the last bill I got from Express it said I I have about 9 dollar credit So I don't know whether you already=
2. R: Ok (.) I'm happy to explain We actually sent you out a refund check We sent that refund check out on May 5<sup>th</sup> and it was cashed on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May There was a purchase done in the store for 5.40 for a knit top on 16<sup>th</sup> Another on the 17 for another knit top
3. C: Emm
4. R: So the balance it says the two knit top

The responses provided in *L2* were immediate and were again framed by certain institutionalized lexical items. R gave the facts about the credit and did not use any negative markers in the entire explanation, but the responses showed that C's original hypothesis was rejected. The detailed explanations were marked by structured linguistic items such as "refund check," "cashed," "purchase," "stores," "date," "balance," and "name of the commodity." These lexical items hang together as framing devices to structure the understanding of this encounter and paint the picture of a bill statement frame because the analysis has found truth in Goffman's [22] assertion, "linguistics provide us with the cues and markers through which such footings, helping us to find out way to a structural basis for analyzing them" (p.157).

#### Example 8

Indirect refusals and indirect request occur in the same utterances and become part of each other to indicate the combined meaning of rejection and request. The following three turns are taken from the Mail-in-Rebate Scenario in which C thought he would receive a 150 dollar mail-in-rebate but actually it was only 100 dollars. This is a valid

illustration of how these two acts work together to negotiate frame conflicts.

1. C: Ok so that is a \$150 mail-in rebate↑
2. R: Let me take a look here (...) I have a 100-dollar rebate↓
3. C: 100 dollars↑I:: the the letter I got from you have a sign (.) have this sentence 'the only equipment purchase discount of 150 dollars has been provided for you in exchange for activating bla bla bla (.)' Why is (.)100 ↑

"100 dollars" in a question format in *L3* marked another indirect refusal and triggered negotiations. C had a presupposition: 150 dollars. When he heard it was 100 dollars, he was surprised as the emphasized "100 dollars" with the rising tone in *L3* and the broken starter of the utterances "I:: the the..." revealed. He started negotiating by the request implied in the indirect refusal that triggers the lengthy explanations of his frame (*L3*). The broken utterance "I:: the the letter..." indicated his frame did not match what he expected. He was trying to explain how he framed this and where his frame came from in order to make his frame clear to R, but R was trying to negotiate this by using her frame that is the customer service frame stipulated by the contract. Therefore, the indirect negation marker with an emphatic brief indirect request, "100 dollars?" is a trigger of negotiating frames because the old frame in mind conflicted with the new frame.

#### DIRECT REFUSALS MARKED BY DIRECT REQUESTS

The third pattern emerged from this pragmatic analysis of the data is direct refusals marked by direct requests. This pattern tells that the user employs straight-forward, "on-record" [24] strategies in revealing conflicting frames. Interlocutors employ direct requests to express rejections and negation of the meaning or understanding that disagree with what he or she is trying to make.

The first example to illustrate this pattern is the conflicting frame of "home delivery" happening in the Package Pick-Up Scenario. C made a direct request to demonstrate that he was not able to hear what R said about "home delivery."

#### Example 9

1. C: What. Excuse me I can't hear you=
2. R: You can't hear me >I said (.) that is a FedEx package home delivery (.) home delivery delivers packages any time during the day time We don't have like a particular time that the driver will be there<

"What" and "excuse me" were markers of making a direct request. C continued to negotiate by using a straight-forward refusal utterance, "I can't hear you." This refusal triggered the next line's detailed and slow-paced explanations about the content of a home delivery frame. The stretched slow speech and lengthy explanations to accommodate C's request was the outcome of co-construction of the frame knowledge of "home delivery." The content of "home delivery" supplied by R was actually governed by the frame structured by FedEx as Ensink and Sauer [4] stated "the content of discourse necessarily is 'displayed' from some point of view." This point of view is FedEx, the ship-

ping company's frame. FedEx structured the content knowledge or the "matching procedures" of "home delivery" that requires interlocutors' "subjective involvement" to make sense of it through negotiations triggered by direct-refusal-with-direct-requests acts.

A second example further illustrates that C uses this pattern to question whether she would have to take any financial responsibilities after a car accident.

#### Example 10

1. R: But if if we do pay something which you know that's not I'm not saying we're gonna pay something If it's in the end, we do It's gonna depend on how much we pay
2. C: Even if I'm not guilty for that ↑
3. R: Well (.) That's the thing We have to do the whole investigation
4. C: Ah
5. R: You know as far as I'm concerned you are not
6. C: Ok

In *L1*, R provided elaborations and interpretations about how to work out the situation about the accident out of her frame "depends on how much they pay." C made a direct rejection with a direct request in *L2* by "Even if I'm not guilty for that" to negotiate and elicit a definite answer to her concern because she knew she was not guilty and should not take any financial responsibilities. This is also what she framed and hypothesized as indicated in the entire scenario. They have exchanged the content of the frame embedded in their individual minds back and forth. *L3* and *L5* are the outcome of the co-construction of the redefined frame.

#### Example 11

NNSCs in the PSSCs using direct refusals marked by direct requests to negotiate conflicting frames and identify frame knowledge have demonstrated their awareness of missing certain unstated knowledge and attempted to learn it through negotiations. This analysis is a valid illustration of what Tannen and Wallat [10] stated, "the only way anyone can understand any discourse is by filling in unstated information which is known from prior experience in the world (p. 60)."

In scheduling a package pick-up time, R asked C whether he lived in an apartment complex with a security gate by saying.

1. R: Are you in a get-it in a get-it community↑ Is it a get-it community ↑ It's something we have to have like a code to get in
2. C: What↑
3. R: The apartment where you are is a get-it for me Like you have to have a code before you can get in the building↑
4. C: Yeah they have a door right ↓

In *L2*, C started the negotiation process by applying the lexical item "What" in an emphatic and request form. Likely, C does not have the frame of a "get-it-community." The frame and frame knowledge about this type of community is

missing from his knowledge. He has to initiate a co-constructing process before he can continue the conversation. Therefore, R, in *L3*, provided further "paintings" and "instances" (illustrative examples, descriptions, and evidence of the content) [21] in the frame of "get-it-community" in her mind to make it accessible to C.

#### Example 12

The following example explains how people are framed by "tracking numbers" in Online-Shopping Scenarios. C wanted to find out the accurate tracking number to follow the status of his online order. The tracking number in his account with the online store did not work in the UPS system, therefore, he called.

1. C: But the problem is that emm the tracking number was invalid according to the UPS system
2. R: Emmmm cause I looked at I just pulled it up I'm looking right at it
3. C: Ok
4. R: So hmmm the email that you were sent hmmm Do you want me to give it to you over the phone the a the tracking number↑
5. C: I just wanna make sure the tracking number is a good one because the one I've I've got in my account for this folder is a I mean it's it's it's invalid according to UPS So I'm not sure if you got a different one or a you know
6. R: Ok Well emmm I I'm em looking right at it and hm I'm pulling up UPS information I don't know if you want that tracking number or—

The back-and-forth turn-taking negotiations in this example were started by the negator "invalid" in *L1*, which is coded as a direct refusal in this analysis and followed by a direct request in *L5*. R was trying to help C. Unfortunately, R was framed by the routinized "paintings" of the frame given in the system and did not help C find a new tracking number. R was framed with common knowledge of a frame finding tracking numbers for customers from the system. Therefore, she kept saying she was looking right at it (the system) and pulling up UPS information in *L6*. The lexical UPS and tracking number became "part of each other" and shaped the structure of the UPS frame that was pre-programmed in R's mind.

#### INDIRECT REFUSALS MARKED BY CONFIRMATION REQUESTS

The fourth pattern emerged from the analysis of frame conflicts is indirect refusals with confirmation seeking requests. In such a pattern, interlocutors do not deny the explanations directly but use self-identifiable terms to seek confirmation that imply an indirect refusal of the given information. It seems that in the interlocutor's knowledge frame, the new lexical item provided by the other interlocutor has not been connected with the particular frame that both interlocutors are situated in.

#### Example 13

The first illustration shows that people in the same situation may use different linguistic codes to describe the same

concept. This difference is not because they do not share the same linguistic code but because they are from two different perspectives and frames. In the Wireless Phone Service Scenario 2, C gives an indirect refusal marked with a confirmation request to exchange conflicting frames about “confirmation code.”

1. C: Yeah I want to pay it right now
2. R: Sure 41.62 and ah.h. the approval code number (↑) 028063=
3. C: 0 (...) Would you say that again (↑)
4. R: 028063
5. C: 028063, the confirmation number right (↑)
6. R: Yeah ok (.) You also receive a receipt in the mail

R used “approval code” in *L2* instead of “confirmation number” as C knew in her frame about customer service payment procedures, so she used a repetition request “the confirmation number right?” to show that she used different lexical item to refer to what R has in the frame of payment language. R used the phrase “approval code” and presupposed that C had this knowledge, but actually C was not sure and used a substitute term “confirmation number” to verify her understanding and gain shared expectations. Seemingly, they simply used two different linguistic terms to indicate the same concept. Further analysis tells that they may have come from two different frames about making confirmation. R thought about giving the approval to C while C thought about being confirmed by the customer service representative.

#### Example 14

A second illustration is taken from the Bank Promotion Scenario 2. C wanted to check, for his wife, whether she had to pay something if she did not use her debit cards three times a month, so he asked.

1. C: ... If we don't spend the card three times a month we have to pay some money right↑
2. R: A \$1.50 Right ↓ Service charges a \$1.50 If you don't use your card three times to make a in a month to make a purchase ↓
3. C: Ok Ok So that means we have to spend three times either as a debit or credit card↑
4. R: Correct ↓

The indirect refusal in *L1* was marked by a polite structure “if ... don't” with a confirmation seeking request that used a rising tone of “right” at the end. This indirect request triggered R's detailed responses and confirmation in *L2* and *L4* marked by a clear falling tone. R's repeated explanations were organized by such lexical “framing devices”: “service charge,” “card,” “duration,” and “purchase” particular to the bank promotion frame. C was trying to build up his frame of bank promotion by inserting the frame knowledge given by R to his understanding of a bank promotion frame in *L3*. The lexical items he used such as “debit card” or “credit card” were indications of knowledge he was constructing through interactions on bank promotions.

#### Example 15

This next illustration of this fourth pattern, indirect refusal with confirmation request, shows that a frame conflict could also happen in conceptualization of locations.

1. C: So cus I'm a student so I always go to school in the day time That's why I want to schedule a pick up=
2. R: <So you want to pick it up when FedEx Ground coming up>↑
3. C: Ohhhh yeah ↓ So if you can redo some other time (.) we can make an appointment↑ I can wait for you too ↓

In the Package-Pick-Up Scenario, the presupposition was that R thought C wanted to schedule a time to pick up his package at home but actually C wanted to schedule a time to pick it up from the post office that was implied in the “Ohhhh yeah” (*L3*). The falling tone used in “yeah” tells that C realized there is a conflict between their individual frames. The emphatic lexical “too” employed in *L3* further indicates this conflict. R's frame was demonstrated in this confirmation utterance : “So you want to pick it up when FedEx Ground coming up.” “Pick it up when FedEx Ground coming up” represents the structure of FedEx package delivery: FedEx delivers packages to the residence's door. The recipient signs the receipt when necessary, and receives it. The presupposition C had was that he had to schedule a time to pick it up from a location specified by FedEx since he missed all of the attempts FedEx promises to deliver. The negotiation is whether FedEx could change its frame and make an extra attempt as indicated in *L3* to deliver the package.

#### Example 16

Indirect refusals marked by confirmation request will further be illustrated by the following excerpt taken from the Wireless Phone Service Scenario 2. The lengthy explanations provided by R again show that certain lexical items serve as “framing devices” to shape interlocutor's understanding. The conflict happens about some confusion with the bill that is billed for two months about the new phone service C applied.

1. C: Oh.h. so actually two months just 12 dollars together (↑)
2. R: Let's take a look (.) let me get your other bills too
3. C: Ok Thank you
4. R: .hh (↑) 10 dollars here and 2 dollars here (talking to herself) (.) Ah (↑) ok (.) You know what he sort of credited you (...) ok yeah what do you what's gonna happen (.) You're gonna receive a credit on your next statement because you are charged 10 dollars from the month for the month of Feb. until 10th of Mar. (.) but he only credited you 2 dollars because you called on the 11th of Feb (.) so you can get 8 dollars credit back
5. C: Oh I see that's why not deducted all together They were separated

The presupposition brought in by C is exhibited in *L1* and is employed in an indirect request form with a confirmation request. “So” is the marker of this indirect request to elicit confirmation from R. The action taken by R to examine the bills in *L2* supports this analysis. The lengthy explanations demonstrated in *L4* are technical and connected with each other defining the particular frame of phone bills. Such lexical items as “credited,” “receive a credit,” “credit back,” “charged,” and “statement,” are again “framing devices” and

routinized elements that govern the event of phone bill negotiation. C was trying to reinterpret and demonstrate her understanding of the frame and the routinized lexical items by using “deducted,” and “separated.”

## DISCUSSION

A pragmatic analysis of conflicting frames confirms my hypothesis that the speech act refusal plays a significant role in triggering lengthy negotiations and provision of structured knowledge to clarify conflicts and attempted to co-construct shared frames to mutual expectations in problem solving interactions. The four refusal-act-driven patterns analyzed above have demonstrated the ways in which NNSCs and NSs attempt to solve problems and deal with frame conflicts in real interactions. Routinized lexical items “hang together” to structure frames and shape the conventional understanding of “paintings” and “match procedures” in each frame, for example, “transcript frame,” “use frame,” “community frame,” etc. as analyzed in the results section.

Fig. (1) below illustrates the conceptualization of the process of this pragmatic analysis of conflicting frames triggered by refusal acts.

The Figure depicts the process of negotiating conflicting frames and co-constructing new frames in an interactive event. Interlocutors employ refusal speech acts and structured lexical items that are located in the biggest box to attempt frame shift negotiation. The brackets used represent frames. The two arrows on each side of the Figure show the direction of the negotiating process. The two boxes on both sides indicate the entire process happens in an interactive setting and conflicting frames need redefining and co-co-constructing.

A central pattern that runs across the four identified patterns and the analysis is that the refusal act, no matter it is

coded as direct or indirect refusal serves as a trigger to negotiate conflicting frames. It marks and cues conflicting frames. When a conflicting frame happens, interlocutors in the interaction are unwilling to let it pass because the refusal act communicates the illocutionary force [3] that requires both participants in the interaction to revisit or continue examining the frame to mutual expectations or mutual awareness [14]. Negators such as “no,” “not,” and “without” and direct requests such as “what,” “Even if I’m not guilty of that” and indirect requests such as “100 dollars?” and “very tricky” occur repeatedly in the data and are coded as markers of refusals. It seems that both interlocutors have applied these markers and negative devices effectively to negotiate and co-construct frames that are acceptable to both conversation participants. The speech act refusal plays a trigger role in starting the process of identifying the conflicts, clarifying the conflicts between frames, and restructuring a frame that might be more commonly shared by both participants. The analysis of the frame of “use” in Example 1 has provided a valid and powerful illustration of how the customer’s frame of “use” conflicts with customer service representative’s frame of “use.” This analysis finds agreement in Tannen’s [21] argument of conflicting frames, “Each frame entails ways of behaving that potentially conflict with the demands of other frames” (p. 67). The refusal act “no, no” calls upon lengthy explanations about what each means in their frame and reveals the potential conflicting cognitive and social aspects. Consequently, both NS and NNSC structure a shared frame about the word “use” that refers to those customers who do not want to use their debit cards to make purchases.

Apparently, there is an association between types of refusal and types of requests. If the refusal is direct while if the refusal is indirect, the requests become indirect. However, no matter in

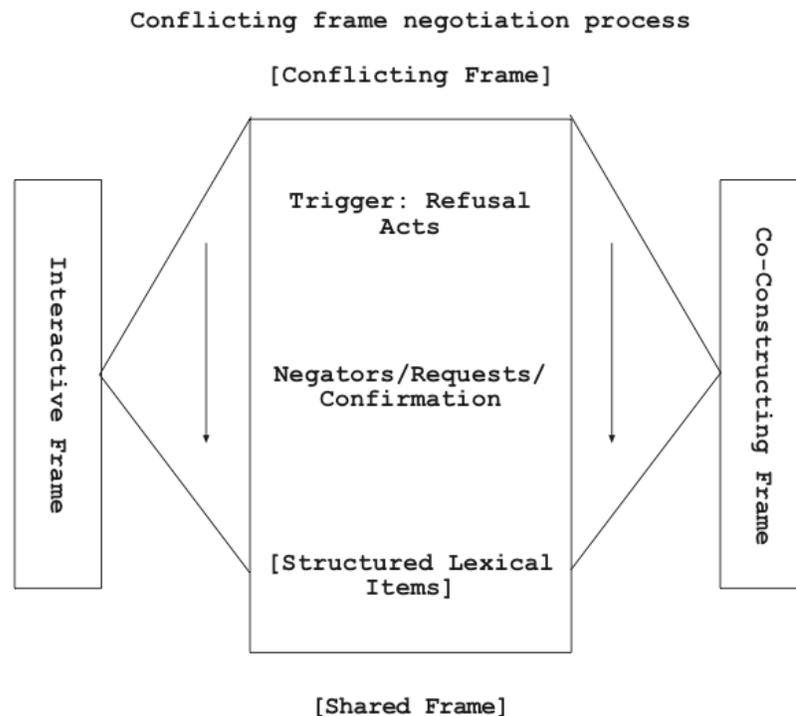


Fig. (1). Conflicting frame negotiation process

what form the refusal acts function in the analysis, they have elicited structured referential knowledge and institutionalized understanding of the macro picture or “macro frame” [14] that governs this knowledge, “paintings,” and content. The analysis also shows that indirect refusals seem to be used more often than direct refusals to negotiate frame change. This pattern may explain some Chinese cultural differences in negotiating conflicting frames. For example, indirectness is often observed in the Chinese oral and written discourse. Yu [25] studied sociolinguistic features of the speech act compliment in which he compared and contrasted native Chinese’s performance with American English speakers’ performance. He found, “indirectness in Chinese discourse tends to consist of a “because ... therefore” structure, rather than a “therefore ... because” structure (p. 101). Native Chinese use this structure often in making requests. Earlier, Chase [26] discussed “how language shapes our thoughts.” He argued, “a Chinese speaker does not possess an unshakable confidence that he is totally right and that his opponent is totally wrong. Observe that this is not a moral judgment, but structural in the language.” (p. 32). Though more scientific evidence is needed to prove this thought-related linguistic pattern, the argument does offer a cultural explanation to the finding that Chinese speakers are not so confrontational in expressing refusals in negotiating conflicting frames. Researchers such as Watanabe [27] and Holtzer [28] noticed that some cultures are more confrontational in interactions but others are nonconfrontational such as Japanese culture. Chinese culture, to a great extent, also belongs to the non-confrontational culture because of the Confucian influence.

Chinese cultural differences are further demonstrated in other more recent speech act studies by researchers such as Lee [29] and Yu [25, 30]. In written requests, Lee [29] found that native Chinese tend to use more direct request strategies and requestive hints when they write to Chinese teachers (p. 70). Yu [25, 30] found compliment responses given by the Chinese using Chinese are more likely to be rejections than acceptances that are more likely to be observed in the Chinese in America (p.112). These cultural observations offer solid explanations to the performance that Chinese participants in this study have demonstrated. The participants are more indirect in making English requests, which is different from the ways by which native Chinese make requests to Chinese teachers in their home country. This observation could be explained by the participants’ more than three years of living experience in the US. However, the finding being indirect when giving refusals is culturally bound. Their Confucius minds ask them to avoid face-threatening acts [24] and being indirect or being “grey” (ambiguous) in giving refusals [26, 29, 30].

Further more, explicit negators such as “no” and “without” follow direct and explicit refusals in a reoccurring pattern as observed in this data. The pattern of direct refusals mingled with indirect requests is rarely observed in the data.

This analysis has also shown that lengthy explanations and interpretations provided by customer service representatives in the frame negotiation process are not random and not irregular. They are structured by internally-connected or conventionally “hanging-together” [23] lexical items to shape the way they provide responses and reveal the “perspective” [4] from which they come from. Such lexical items as “pol-

icy,” “underwriting department,” “checking history,” and “renew” when they hang together make it very possible for the reader to categorize them into an expected event or scenario if you are asked to do so. They are lexical framing devices. Illustrations of lexical items analyzed in other scenarios such as Package Pick-up, Credit Card Statement, Wireless Phone Service, and UPS, also hanging together in frames, indicate that participants’ “subjective involvement” in interactive frames, though depending on situations, demonstrates structured participation and pre-programmed contribution because “conversations have conventional expectations” about [2] interactions and this convention is encoded in routinized lexical items as identified in this study. It is not difficult to infer that such lexical items, when they hang together, are institutionalized to create a structure for a particular event and elicit participants’ structured understanding of the created event. They “hang together” to form a pattern that is the frame proposed in this study because they support a non-random but expected way of understanding an event or a situation. These expected understandings of situations have derived from the mechanism of these “hanging together” lexical items. They construct an internal image of what it means by frame and how they are connected internally. This analysis agrees with the argument that structures are a mental representation and conceptualization of a situation [9].

The purpose of this analysis is not just to identify pragmatic patterns of negotiating conflicting frames but also provide instructional implications for English as Second Language (ESL) learning and teaching. The four emerged patterns show that the miscommunications between NNSs and NSs have not derived from NNSs’ insufficient language proficiency as it is commonly supposed. The illustrations of “use” in Example 1, “remember for number” in Example 4 and conceptualization of “home delivery” in Example 9 demonstrate that frame differences or frame conflicts also contribute to miscommunications. It seems such type of miscommunication or misconceptualization happens more often with advanced learners as the analysis shows. The finding may imply that relative advanced ESL learners need more frame knowledge because many of them most likely already have basic conversational skills. To further apply the understanding of conflicting frames to ESL classrooms, ESL instructors are encouraged to raise learners’ awareness of this type of miscommunications through classroom practices and distinguish misunderstandings or miscommunications that are caused by lack of language proficiency or by frame conflicts. For example, instructors could create language learning activities by using authentic interactional scenarios that have multiple-turn-negotiations between two speakers. Students could be asked to listen to the interactions and analyze linguistic items that the two speakers use to negotiate back and forth in order to answer such questions: Are the negotiations because of their language deficiency or are they coming from the fact that the speakers have different understandings and perspectives in each of their minds, etc.? A moment-by-moment analysis of the linguistic items is recommended because it will help ESL learners to identify the trouble source of the lengthy negotiations and tell exactly the differences between misunderstandings caused either by language deficiency or frame conflicts. The analysis process could further help instructors diagnose ESL learners’ exact trouble source of comprehending interactions. Consequently, future instruc-

tional activities could be designed to target on improving specific comprehending skills such as understanding framed words or events instead of improving general listening or reading skills as they are commonly observed in ESL classroom teaching. These suggestions are consistent with the most recent argument of examining knowledge-based processes in L2 readings [31] by a schema theory-driven approach, which is an alternative approach to frame analysis. In the research, Nassagji [31] stated explicitly frame is another term for schema and the approach identifies different levels of meaning representations, and different procedures relating to these levels, the most important is knowledge that has different sources, linguistic or conceptual, may involve different processes (p. 101). The instructional suggestions provided above are constructed by considering difference processes, frame and frame knowledge analysis processes. This data-driven approach offers application implication to Nassagji's [31] theoretical recommendation of the schema-theory driven approach to second language learning.

The research also suggests that scenarios and events are most possibly structured and organized by certain frames. To understand frames, it is necessary to pay instructional attention to frequently "hanging together" lexical items and organize language learning by frame learning, frame negotiation or frame deconstruction. Instructors could choose a scenario such as banking and use a bottom-up approach to create a list of "hanging together" new words (e.g. teller, deposit, deposit slip, account number, amount, signature etc.) without telling students this scenario is about banking. Then, students could create role-plays and conversations. Instructors could gradually and naturally relate the words to each other to facilitate students to understand how the words hang together to structure a banking frame or the subframes within this macro banking frame.

The research further implies instructional insights for overcoming the difficulty that ESL learners often face and feel frustrated with while talking on the phone. The deframing processes of linguistic items suggested in the discussions and implied in the analysis of the phone conversations (for example "tracking numbers" in example 12, "approval code" in example 13) in the study could lead ESL learners to develop a better understanding of turn exchanges on the phone. As identified from the analysis, the problems on the phone do not always originate from ESL learners' deficiency in the language. They may derive from the lack of frame knowledge of certain events or they may have not conceptualized in the expected frame as the other speaker on the phone expects.

Another finding through this analysis reveals that the refusal act triggers NNSCs' learning of new frames and frame knowledge, e.g. "get-it-community," "home delivery," "police report," "approval code," etc. This finding demonstrates the characteristics of interaction between NSs and NNSs are different from a native to native interaction. NSs may have helped NNSCs understand some conventionalized frame knowledge because one purpose of people's communication is to talk about language or is a metalinguistic communication [5, 27, 32]). The lengthy explanations and interpretations have helped restructure NNS's understanding of institutional frames.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, it is argued, first, a pragmatic analysis of non-face-to-face conversations will demonstrate the relationship between the speech act refusal and conflicting frames negotiation and new frames construction, and second, the linguistic cues and markers used in the lengthy explanations and interpretations are structured and pre-programmed in interactive frames. A pragmatic analysis of conversations works and the paper has fulfilled its purpose if the reader is willing to accept this approach. I conclude this paper by making three speculative remarks.

Frame analysis has a solid theoretical foundation in discourse analysis. The analysis of conflicting frames is mostly conducted in discourse analysis instead of pragmatic analysis. This data-driven pragmatic analysis of speech acts study adds new meaning to frame analysis. It defines the structure of conflicting frames that is marked by refusal speech acts and is possibly to be marked by other speech acts. This analysis further demonstrates that speech acts play an indispensable and contributive role especially in interactive frames [10, 11, 15].

This pragmatic analysis also contributes to the understanding of telecommunications that has increasing importance in our daily life and displays pedagogical implications by revealing linguistic patterns and markers that "hang together" to shape frames. Pedagogical practices in language teaching could follow the organization of frame knowledge to structure instructions and classroom activities or to explore the internal-connection between frames. It also offers insights in understanding relatively advanced ESL learners' miscommunications that may come from frame conflicts instead of simply from language deficiency.

Readers may want to ask whether the negotiating patterns bear any cultural implications since the participants are a group of Chinese students. It does to a certain extent as it is discussed. The researcher, however, is confident that this study offers new insights in studying conflicting frames in non-face-to-face interactions from a speech act analysis perspective and suggests alternative instructional venues facilitating ESL learning and teaching.

## APPENDIX

### Transcribing Conventions

The numeric numbers used before each line of interactions indicate the numbered line.

Ah.h.h indicates an audible intake of breath, number of "h" means impression of length

= latching

(...) longer pauses (untimed)

(.) a dot enclosed in brackets indicates a short pause

. falling tone

Word underlined syllables indicate extra stress

↑ Raised arrows perceived as raised pitch

↓ Arrows pointing downwards perceived as reduced pitch

(:) stretched syllable or consonant, number of colons = impression of length

---- connected sentence without finishing the turn

< > utterance or utterance part perceived as being produced greater speed than the surrounding talk

> < utterance or utterance part perceived as being produced slower than the surrounding talk

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