

THAI WAYS OF SAYING 'NO' TO A REQUEST¹

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Abstract

This paper investigates what Thai speakers say when they prefer to reject a request and how they make their refusal less face-threatening. Five different situations including refusing a high status teacher, a low status housemaid, a close friend, a classmate, and a stranger are examined. The study has found that for Thai speakers, a teacher and a close friend are more difficult to reject than a low status, a classmate, and a stranger. Even though most of the respondents are not reluctant to reject people at further distance, they prefer to appear polite in refusing their requests. In the politeness model of Brown and Levinson (1987), a refusal is an act which threatens the requester's positive face. In Thai society where people place high value on 'being kind and helpful', an act of refusal might damage the refuser's self-image as well. It is hypothesized here that politeness strategies are used not only to save the requester's face but also to prevent the refuser him/herself from being considered unkind or unrefined.

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Introduction

The maintenance of smooth interpersonal relations is one of the Thai national characteristics (Komin 1998). It logically follows that Thai people would be hesitant to say 'no' when they are asked for help. The old saying *bua mây hây chám náam mây hây khùn*, which literally means 'when you pick a lotus, don't bruise it and don't stir up the water', indicates that when Thai speakers decide to carry out an act of refusal, they prefer to make it as face-saving as possible to avoid a bruised lotus or negative consequences. The present study aims at looking into how Thai speakers pick a lotus—the strategies Thai speakers adopt, when they perform a face-threatening act of refusal.

Based on the claim that Thai people are very responsive to social status differences (Bundhumedha, 1986), it is hypothesized that they select different refusal strategies according to the variables of status and social distance. Five different situations examined here include refusing a high status teacher, a low status housemaid, a close friend, a classmate, and a stranger. According to sociologists such as Komin (1990) and Smuckarn (1998), Thai people *kreeŋcay* 'are caring and considerate' to people in their *bunkhun* 'indebtedness / favor' network. Thus, it is likely that they are more reluctant to reject a teacher and a close friend.

Method

The data collection method here is adapted from Liao and Bresnahan (1996). The questionnaire includes short

descriptions of five different situations—refusing a high status teacher, a low status housemaid, a close friend, a classmate, and a stranger. The 110 participants are undergraduates at Chulalongkorn University, the majority female. They were asked to fill in what they would say to reject a request. They are also told that they might choose to say nothing.

It should be noted that the present study has some limitations. Some significant cues such as tone of voice, volume, hesitancy, etc. are missing because the responses are written. And since all the participants are university students—an educated group, the results in the present study might not apply to the other groups of Thai speakers.

Results and discussion

Rejecting a high status teacher

Teachers in former days were considered to be second to the parents in the *bunkhun* ‘indebtedness’ network (Bandhumedha, 1987:239; Smuckarn, 1998:166). Thus, students felt they must *kàtanyuu* or be grateful and respond to their teachers with proper gratitude. When a teacher made a request, a student felt s/he had an obligation to satisfy the request. However, the relation between teachers and students has changed somewhat (Bandhumedha, 1987). In the first situation, we examine whether or not students nowadays would give up their preferred activity for their teachers’ interest. The first scripted situation read:

1. Your teacher asks you to type a paper for her. You really have many things to do. What would you say?

Among one hundred and eight respondents who gave a valid answer, only four (3.70%) say ‘yes’ to the request. One of them writes, “Students cannot reject teachers’ requests.” The other one hundred and four respondents (96.28%) say ‘no’. While thirty three would refuse outright, seventy one offer to help later after finishing their work. The finding seems to suggest that Thai students today do not think they have to sacrifice their interest for their teachers’ benefit.

Offer to help	4	(3.70)
Reject the request		
-totally refuse	33	(30.55)
-postpone help	71	(65.73)

Table 1. 108 respondents and their responses to a request for help from a high-status teacher

Let us now consider the refusal strategies adopted by the one hundred and four respondents. Most of the respondents start their refusal with an apology and then a reason for refusing. Only three adopt the reverse form—a reason and an apology. A positive expression³ *yàak cà? chûay tèε...* ‘I would like to help but...’ is obviously dispreferred.

3 Liao and Bresnahan (1996) use the term ‘positive expression’ to refer to the English “I would like to help but...” while Goldschmidt (1998) prefers the term “will-ingness but”. In the present study, the term ‘positive expression’ is adopted to refer to the Thai expression *yàak cà? chûay tèε...*

And nobody chooses a strategy of a direct 'no' in this situation.

(1) - (4) are examples of different formulas adopted in refusing a teacher.

(1) an apology + a reason

nũu tōŋ khǒtōt
I must ask for forgiveness

duây khâ? nũu phimđiit
also pol. I type

mây pen
not be
'I'm sorry. I cannot type.'

(2) an apology + a reason

khǒtpràthaanthōt khâ? ʔaacaan
ask for forgiveness pol. professor

nũu kamlaŋ tham ʔaan
I progressive do work

dùan yũu khâ?
urgent progressive pol.
'Ma'am, I'm sorry. I have something urgent right now.'

(3) a positive expression + a reason

phǒm yàak cà? chuây ʔaacaan
I want will help professor

kháp tɛɛ chũanĩi phom
pol. but now I

mây wâaŋ ləəy
not free

'I would like to help but right now I really don't have time.'

(4) a conditional yes ('yes' + a condition)

khâ? ʔaacaan khâ?
pol. professor pol.

nũu khǒt phim ʔaan khōŋ
I ask type work of

ʔaacaan lǎŋcàak tham
professor after do

ʔaan nũu sèt ná? khâ?
work I finish fin. pol.

'Yes, ma'am. But may I type your paper after doing my work?'

an apology + a reason	87 (83.65 %)
a reason (no apology)	6 (5.76 %)
a positive expression	4 (3.84 %)
a conditional yes	5 (3.84 %)
a reason + an apology	3 (2.88 %)

Table 2. Formulas of refusals adopted by 104 respondents who rejected the request

The most popular form of refusal in Japanese and Chinese is also an apology and then a reason. According to Liao and Bresnahan (1996:724), the popularity of the formula is due to the fact that the speaker wishes to end the unpleasant interaction as soon as possible. They note further that the positive expression, 'I would like to help but...' which is a typical form of refusal in American English⁴ is not widely used in Chinese because Chinese speakers are

afraid that it might force them to satisfy the request. As Table 2 shows, positive remarks are dispreferred in Thai as well. Whether Thai speakers share the same concern as Chinese speakers is not confirmed. But according to the respondents I interviewed, a positive remark is dispreferred because it makes a refusal sound hypocritical.

As for ninety respondents, to make an act of refusal to a high-status teacher more polite, they state an expression of apology. Sixty-four also utter the address form /ʔaacaan/ ‘professor’ with the politeness marker /khâʔ/ or /khráp/. Six different forms of apology are presentend in Table 3.

Notice that most of the respondents who state an apology choose the form *khǎʔthôot* which can also be used with equals and people of lower status. This indicates that students today do not feel they have to show high regard for their teachers. The form *khǎʔthôot* upgraded with *cinjin* ‘really’ sounds more polite. Yet it can also be used with people of equal status. The forms *kràapkhǎʔthôot* and *khǎʔpràthaanthôot* which are used only with high status individuals, are chosen by only about 20 % of the respondents.

1. khǎʔthôot + khâʔ/khráp	58.88%
I ask for forgiveness + pol.	
2. khǎʔthôot + <u>cinjin</u> + khâʔ/khráp	17.77%
I ask for forgiveness + really + pol.	
3. khǎʔ <u>pràthaa</u> n ⁵ thôot + khâʔ/khráp	15.55%
I ask for forgiveness + pol.	
4. <u>kràap</u> ⁶ khǎʔthôot + khâʔ/khráp	4.44%
5. tōŋ+kràap+khǎʔàphay + <u>pen</u> + <u>yàaŋmâak</u>	1.11%
must + I ask for forgiveness + be + much	
6. khǎʔàphay + cinjin	1.11%
I ask for forgiveness + really	

Table 3. Six forms of apology adopted by ninety respondents

Let us move on to the reason of refusal. One hundred respondents, or about 90% of those who would refuse, provide eleven different reasons.

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1. I’m very busy/I have so many things to do. | 39 |
| 2. I have no time. | 16 |

⁵ *pràthaa*n (of a prince) ‘to give’
⁶ *kràap* literally means ‘to pay obeisance to a person of high status such as a Buddhist monk, a teacher, etc. It is also put in front of a verb as an honorific. The form *kràap* + a verb is used only with a higher status. person..

⁴ It is found that in American English the most popular form in giving a negative response to favor asking is also a positive remark (Goldschmidt, 1998: 148).

3. I have papers to turn in (this week/next week).	15
4. I have some urgent business.	11
5. I have some important business.	7
6. It's not convenient.	5
7. I have something to do.	4
8. I cannot type.	2
9. I have an exam coming	1

It appears that 25% do not bother to find specific reasons. They say they have no time, they have something to do, or it's not convenient for them. However, the other 75% try to appear more polite. Some provide specific reasons such as having to prepare for an exam or having papers to turn in. Some claim they really have no choice but to say 'no' for that time period because they have something urgent or important.

Rejecting a lower status individual

In Liao and Bresnahan (1996), a younger sister is selected for the case of refusing a person of lower status. However, in some Thai families, a younger sister is not considered to be of a lower status. Thus, in the present study, a housemaid is chosen since the status relation seems to be clearer. The situation read as follows:

Your maid asks you to take her to a concert because she does not know how to get there. You would rather not go.

What would you say?⁷

Four respondents would offer to take their maid to the concert while the other one hundred and six would not have difficulty refusing. Seventy-nine out of one hundred and six (about 72%) would completely refuse their maid's request. Eighteen (16.36%) promise to take her next time. Eight (8.16%) offer to do something else such as call a taxi, ask the maid next door to go along, or buy a concert ticket.

Offer to help	4 (3.63)
Reject the request	
-totally refuse	79 (71.81)
-postpone help	18 (16.36)
-offer other types of help	9 (8.16)

Table 4. 110 responses to a request for help from a low-status housemaid

From Table 1. and 4., there is no significant difference when we compare the number of those who refuse and the number of those who comply with the request in the two situations. A distinction which seems to be crucial here is that in refusing a teacher, 65% of those who say 'no' offer to help later whereas in refusing a maid, most of the respondents (71%) prefer a complete refusal. This difference lends some support to the hypothesis that a high status teacher is more difficult to reject than a low status housemaid.

⁷ The situation is very unlikely in Thai society before industrialization in the 80s and might be implausible in some societies. Yet it is possible in Thai society today that a maid would ask her employer to do her a favor.

Another remarkable difference between the two situations is in strategy selection. In refusing a high status teacher, about 87 % of those who refuse state an apology. In refusing a housemaid, on the other hand, only nineteen out of one hundred and six respondents (17%) adopt an expression of apology. The forms of apology chosen in refusing a low status individual are as follows:

1. khǎwtôot + ná?/dûay/thii	11
I ask for forgiveness + fin./also/once	
2. khǎwtôot + ná?+ cá?	3
I ask for forgiveness + fin.+ pol. (used with equals or low status)	
3. khǎwtôot + ná? + khá?/krâp	2
I ask for forgiveness + fin. + pol.(used with equals or high status)	
4. khǎwtôot + ciŋciŋ	2
I ask for forgiveness + really	
5. thôot+ thii	1
I ask for forgiveness (colloquial) + once	

Table 5. Forms of apology stated in refusing a low-status housemaid

While a statement of apology is not widely adopted, providing a reason for refusing appears to be a preferred strategy in this situation. Ninety-six respondents(87%) give ten different reasons for refusing.

1. I would rather not go.	33
2. I don't have time.	30
3. I have something urgent to do.	12
4. I have an appointment.	5
5. I'm not feeling well.	5
6. I have an exam coming up.	5
7. Mother won't allow me to go.	2
8. It's better to watch the concert on TV.	1
9. I have to take care of my sister.	1

The real reason 'I would rather not go' is apparently the most popular even though it is more face-threatening than the others. About 31% of the respondents avoid the real reason but do not bother to find something specific. They prefer 'I don't have time,' which is somewhat vague. However, the other 42% try to appear polite by claiming external factors or things they cannot control such as having an exam, being sick, etc.

There are three strategies found in refusing a housemaid but not in refusing a teacher. Eight respondents adopt a direct 'no'. They reply with *mây pay ròok* or *mây pay la?* 'No, I won't go'. Twenty-seven prefer giving a suggestion. They suggest that the maid ask a friend to go along *pay chuan phuân sǐ?* 'Ask your friend' or *thammay mây chuan phuân là?* 'Why don't you ask your friend?' The fact that a plain 'no' and a suggestion to a higher status person are highly face-damaging explains why these two strategies are not adopted in refusing a teacher. While stating a direct 'no' and providing a suggestion are included in the twenty-one refusal

strategies proposed by Liao (1994), giving permission is not. Permission might not be a common refusal strategy, but it is possible here since a maid generally asks for a permission to go out. There are two respondents who reply with *chǎn hây thǎə pay kàp phư̄an* 'I give you permission to go with your friend.' The permission implies a rejection of the request.

Refusing a classmate and a close friend

We have examined two different status situations. Let us now compare two social distance situations. Situation 3 and 4 read:

Your classmate (3)/close friend (4) who is regularly absent from class asks you to meet with her/him in order to study for the coming exam. You would rather study by yourself at home. What would you say?

To verify the hypothesis that a close friend is more difficult to reject, let us first count those who refuse and those who comply with the request in the two situations.

<u>refusing</u> <u>a classmate</u>	<u>refusing</u> <u>a close friend</u>
- completely refuse the request	
59 (53.63)	26 (23.63)
- postpone help	
25 (22.72)	43 (39.09)
- offer other types of help	
25 (22.72)	32 (29.09)
- offer to help part of the time	
1 (.90)	6 (5.45)
- comply with the request	
----	3 (2.72)

Table 6. 110 respondents statements in response to a request for help a classmate and a close friend

From Table 6 more than half of the one hundred and ten respondents say 'no' to their classmate's request and nobody offers to help full time. In Situation 4 by contrast, only one fourth completely refuse to help their close friend. The strategies of postponement and offering other types of help appear to be more popular. About 40% would offer to help their friend after having done their work while about 30% would offer to lend lecture notes, clarify the parts their friend did not understand, or have a discussion over the phone. There are three who write "cannot refuse a close friend" and offer to help full time, saying *dâay sǐ?* or *dâay lǎəy*. Six show they are willing to study with their friend but only for a short while. The finding supports the hypothesis that a close friend is more difficult to reject than a classmate.

However, when we count expressions of apology and reasons for refusing, there seems to be no significant difference between the two situations. The

two forms of apology used in the two situations are *khǎwthôot* 'I ask for forgiveness' and *khǎwthôot ciŋciŋ* 'I ask for forgiveness + really'. The other form *thôot*, which is more casual, is adopted in refusing a close friend but not in refusing a classmate.

	Refusing a classmate	Refusing a close friend
an apology	45.45%	41.12%
a reason	82.72%	81.30%

Table 7. Use of forms of apology and reasons of refusal

	Refusing a classmate	Refusing a close friend
khǎwthôot + náʔ		
/dúay	88%	68.18%
khǎwthôot + ciŋciŋ	12%	22.72%
thôot + náʔ	----	9.09%

Table 8. Forms of apology adopted in the two situations

(7) - (10) are examples of different formulas adopted in refusing a close friend.

(7)
khǎwthôot ciŋciŋ
I ask for forgiveness really

náʔ wáy raw thamjaan
fin. hold I work

sèt kòon náʔ
finish before fin.
'I'm really sorry. Wait till I'm done with my work.'

(8)
raw khǎw thamjaan khǎwŋ
I ask work of

raw hây sèt kòon
I finish before

lêew khôy maa tiw
then then come tutor

kan thiilǎn
together after
'Let me finish my work. Then we can study together.'

(9)
khǎwthôot náʔ cáʔ
I ask for forgiveness fin. pol.

chǎn yan ʔaan mây than
I not yet read not in time

thâa thəə mii khamthǎam
if you have question

kôw thǎam chǎn daây
ask I be able to

náʔ
fin.
'I'm sorry. I haven't finished reading. But if you have any questions, you can ask me.'

(10)
thópthuan dûaykan nitnuw
review together a bit

kôo daây
be able to
'We can study together for a while.'

Let us now turn to the reasons of refusal stated by about 80% of the respondents. There are ten reasons for refusing provided in the two situations.

<u>Refusing</u>	<u>Refusing</u>
<u>a close</u>	<u>a class-</u>
<u>friend</u>	<u>mate</u>

- | | | |
|---|----|----|
| 1. I haven't finished reading myself./ I don't quite understand the lectures either. (I'm afraid I won't be of any help.) | 55 | 49 |
| 2. I cannot concentrate when studying in a group. (I'm afraid I won't be of any help.) | 4 | 6 |
| 3. Both of us will enjoy chatting. So, it's better for you to study alone. | 1 | 5 |
| 4. I have an appointment. | 3 | — |
| 5. I have other exams coming. | 2 | — |
| 6. My mother/sister would like me to help with the housework. | 1 | 3 |
| 7. I promised my mom to be home. | 1 | 1 |
| 8. I have no time. | 12 | 5 |
| 9. It's not convenient. | 2 | — |
| 10. I would rather study alone. | 10 | 18 |

Notice that we might arrange the ten reasons into four groups. Those who adopt 1, 2, and 3 claim that they refuse to study together for the sake of the requester. Since they don't understand the lectures well or they cannot concentrate when studying in a group, they are afraid they won't be of any help. As for those who state 4, 5, 6, and 7, they claim external factors—things they cannot control. Some say they have exams coming while some have to help their mother or sister. Those who choose 8 and 9 seem to prefer vague excuses. The last statement in 10 is the real reason as the description goes and may be the least face-saving.

The favourite in both of the situations is apparently the reasons in 1. This might be because they make the refusal less face-threatening. The assertion that the refusal is for the requester's benefit is a strategy of positive politeness (Brown and Levinson 1978). Even though the requester knows it is not sincere, the refuser still shows s/he tries to minimize the threat to the requester's face and maintain smooth interpersonal relation. It is also hypothesized here that the strategy is used not only to save the requester's face but also to protect the refuser her/himself from being considered *mây mii naám cay* or unkind. According to Komin (1990, 1998), Thai people place high value on "being kind and helpful" and do not want to look ungenerous to others. Therefore, an act of refusal not only threatens the requester's face but can also damage the refuser's self-image.

As for the other excuses, external fac-

tors and vague reasons seem to be preferred in refusing a classmate. In refusing a close friend, on the other hand, the real yet face-threatening reason is preferred.

There are two types of acts found in refusing a close friend but not a classmate. One is a request. Two respondents ask their close friend not to be upset with their refusal by saying *yàa kròot kan nǎ?* and *yàa kròot nǎ?* 'Please don't be upset (with me)'. I consider the statement a positive politeness strategy because it shows that the speaker cares about and wants to maintain friendly relations. The other type is a face-threatening act of disapproval. In a comparative study on American and Chinese refusals (Liao and Bresnahan 1996), it was found that 49.06 % of the American subjects would teach their classmate a lesson whereas only 2 of the Chinese subjects would do so, saying 'You shouldn't have been so'. Most of the Chinese subjects try not to teach their friend a lesson even though they think what the friend did is not right. In the present study, only two would attempt to teach their close friend a lesson but none would criticize the classmate. The finding supports the claim made by Komin (1990) that Thai people avoid criticizing not just superiors but also those of equal status.

Refusing a stranger

Being cut in front of in a ticket line or pushed when trying to get on a bus is not an uncommon experience for Bangkokians. An observation made by Nithi Iawsiwong (1998) in *Matichon* magazine is that Thai people are not

sùtpháp 'polite' to people they do not know because they do not feel *kreeŋcay*. This statement suggests that a stranger is perhaps the easiest to reject in Thai mentality. Let us look into how Thai speakers respond to a stranger's request in situation 5. The situation read as follows:

5. In a public restroom, while you're combing your hair, a stranger standing next to you asks if s/he could borrow your comb after you finish using it. You would rather not lend anyone your personal things. What would you say?

In this situation, postponement or offering an alternative does not seem to be possible. The respondents have to either say 'yes' or totally refuse. In the study, one respondent would comply with the request, saying *chǎənkha?* 'you're welcome to use it'. The respondent writes: 'It's no big deal. We may wash the comb later or throw it away. Refusing is more difficult.' There are other four respondents who also do not know how to refuse. However, they would not say 'yes'. One of them says that she would just walk away and try to show that she is really in a hurry. The other one hundred and five respondents, on the other hand, do not seem to have this difficulty. They would completely refuse the request.

The formulas of refusal adopted by the one hundred and five respondents are as follows:

an apology+a reason	6(60.9%)
a reason	2(26.6%)
an apology	6 (5.7%)
a reason+an apology	2 (1.9%)
a positive remark+a reason	2 (1.9%)
a direct 'no'	1 (0.9%)

Table 9. Different formulas adopted in refusing a stranger

Similar to the other situations, the most widely adopted formula here is an apology and a reason for refusing. The reverse form—a reason for refusing and an apology, a positive remark, and a direct 'no' are obviously not in favor.

(11) – (13) are examples of three different formulas adopted in refusing a stranger.

(11) an apology + a reason

khǎǒthôot náʔ khàʔ
I ask for forgiveness fin. pol.

phǒodii nát
coincidentally have an appointment

phũan wáy
friend
'I'm sorry. I have an appointment with a friend.'

(12) a positive expression + a reason

yàak hây náʔ khráp tèe
want give fin. pol. But

phǎm pen rôok pǐwnǎŋ
I be disease skin
'I would like to lend it to you but I have skin disease.'

(13) a direct 'no'

đichăn mây hây yuuum khàʔ
I not give lend pol.
'I won't lend it to you.'

Seventy-three of those who would carry out an act of refusal (70%) state an apology. Sixty-eight choose the form *khǎǒthôot* with the politeness particle *khráp* or *khàʔ*. The other five upgrade an apology with the intensifier *ciňciň* 'really'. Ninety five respondents (90%) give the stranger a reason for refusing. The six different reasons stated are as follows:

1. My comb is not clean. 24 (25.3%)
2. I have scurf./I have skin disease. 22 (23.2%)
3. I prefer not to lend my personal things to anyone. 22 (23.2%)
4. I have an appointment.
I have got to go./
I'm in a hurry. 16 (16.8%)
5. It's my friend's. 11 (11.6%)
6. You don't need it.
Your hair looks nice. 1 (1.1%)

Like situations 3. and 4., the most preferred strategy in this situation is to claim that the refusal is for the requester's benefit. Since my comb is not clean/I have skin disease, I'd better not lend it to you. Claiming something they cannot control is the second favorite. Twenty-seven claim they are in a hurry and the comb does not belong to them. These reasons might sound fake. Nonetheless, they make the refusal less face-threatening. However, there are twenty-two (about 23%) who choose to be straightforward. As the description

goes, the reason is a statement of principle: ‘I would rather not lend my personal things to anyone.’

The findings indicate that even though Thai speakers do not have difficulty refusing a stranger, they prefer to appear polite when saying ‘no’. Since the concept of *kreeŋcay* does not apply here, it is hypothesized that the motivation is not to save a stranger’s face but to protect the refuser her/himself from being considered unrefined even though they have to say they have skin disease!

Conclusion

In Thai mentality, a teacher and a close friend are more difficult to reject than a low person status, a classmate, and a stranger. The findings lend support to the hypothesis that Thai people feel *kreeŋcay* when interacting with people in their *bunkhun* ‘indebtedness/favor’ network such as parents, teachers, and senior relatives, as well as close friends. However, the observation that about 30% of the respondents would completely refuse the teacher’s request suggests that the relation between teachers and students in Thai society has changed somewhat. Today, students do not feel they have to sacrifice their interest for teachers’ benefit.

The teacher receives most of the expressions of apology whereas the housemaid is the least likely to receive an apology. Among the requesters of different social distance, the close friend is the most difficult to reject but the least likely to receive an apology. The stranger, by contrast, is the easiest to reject but the most likely to get an apology. To put it

another way, even though most of the respondents are not hesitant to reject people at further distance, they prefer to appear polite in refusing them. The reason might be to protect themselves from being considered unrefined rather than to save the requester’s face since the concept of *kreeŋcay* and smooth interpersonal relations do not apply when the requester is a stranger. The findings also show that an observation made by Nithi Iawsiwong (1998) that Thai people do not appear polite to strangers does not apply to educated groups.

	offer help	com- pletely refuse	post- pone help; offer an al- terna- tive; help part of the time
<i>requester</i>			
<i>a teacher</i>	3.70%	30.55%	65.73%
<i>status</i>			
<i>a housemaid</i>	---	71.81%	28.18%
<i>a close friend</i>	2.72%	23.63%	73.63%
<i>social</i>			
<i>a classmate</i>	---	53.63%	46.36%
<i>distance</i>			
<i>a stranger</i>	0.9%	99.09%	not pos- sible

Table 10. Respondents statements in response to a request for help in the five situations

refusing a high status teacher	90 (87%)
refusing a low status maid	19 (17%)
refusing a close friend	44 (41.12%)
refusing a classmate	50 (45.45%)
refusing a stranger	73 (70%)

Table 11. The distribution of those who use expressions of apology in the five situations

Makthavornvattana (1998) points out that Thai speakers use *khǎo-thôot* 'I ask for forgiveness' and *sǎacay* 'I'm sorry' as remedial interchanges after an offense. Yet in the present study, none of the respondents adopt the form *sǎacay* 'I'm sorry'. My conclusion here is that *sǎacay* might be used as an expression of apology when one has done something offensive or has made a mistake but it cannot be used in refusing a request. Saying *sǎacay* when we cannot satisfy a request can be taken as a sarcastic remark.

Various forms of 'I ask for forgiveness' are adopted by the respondents. *khǎo-thôot* is used in every situation whereas *thôot* which is more colloquial, is chosen only in refusing a low status maid and a close friend. It should be pointed out that the high status forms — *kràapkhǎo-thôot* and *khǎoprà-thaanthôot*— are adopted by only 20% of the respondents in refusing a teacher. This suggests that today students do not feel they have to show high regard for their teachers.

In Japanese and Chinese, people apologize first and then offer a reason. Positive remarks, which are popular in English, are rarely found. (Liao and Bresnahan 1996) Thai speakers prefer the same formula of refusal as Chinese and Japanese speakers. The reverse form—a reason + an apology and a positive remark are not widely adopted. A direct 'no' is used only by a small number of respondents in refusing a maid and a stranger.

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