

DIRECT REFUSAL ACTS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE BASED ON THE NOVEL “GONE WITH THE WIND” AND ITS TRANSLATED VERSION “CUỐN THEO CHIỀU GIÓ”

*Tran Van Thuat**, *Thai Van Anh†*
Email: thuattv@hou.edu.vn

Received: 05/08/2024

Revised: 17/02/2025

Accepted: 26/02/2025

DOI: 10.59266/houjs.2025.542

Abstract: *The article explores direct refusals in English and their Vietnamese equivalents through a comparative analysis of the direct refusals in the novel “Gone with the Wind” by Margaret Mitchell and the Vietnamese translated version “Cuốn theo chiều gió” by Vũ Kim Thư. The study’s primary aim is to examine how refusals are expressed in English and how these expressions are translated into Vietnamese, considering linguistic differences. In order to achieve the set aims and objectives, descriptive and comparative methods are employed and supported by qualitative and quantitative methods with data including 87 direct refusals. The findings suggest that the core component that plays a central role in the structure representing direct refusals includes negative words and words with negative connotations. In terms of constructive methods, both languages commonly use negative words such as no, not, never, nothing, no interest ... in English and không, thôi, ... in Vietnamese. Besides, no data for the direct refusal acts with the nuclear as performative verbs were found. This research also provides valuable insights for language teachers, learners, and scholars interested in the intersection of language, culture, and communication.*

Keywords: *speech acts, refusal, direct refusal, Gone with the Wind.*

I. Introduction

While integration and globalization drive comprehensive development, a significant gap remains in the ability of most Vietnamese people to effectively communicate in English, a skill essential for participating in global affairs. Proficiency in communication goes

beyond mere linguistic knowledge; it also requires a deep understanding of social and cultural contexts.

As a vital speech act in everyday communication, refusal plays a central role in how individuals navigate interactions. There are notable similarities and differences in the way refusals are

* Hanoi Open University

† Post-graduate student, Hanoi Open University

expressed in English and Vietnamese. For learners of English as a second language (ESL) or Vietnamese as a foreign language (VFL), mastering refusal strategies is crucial for avoiding misunderstandings and ensuring smooth communication. Inadequate refusals, whether overly blunt or excessively evasive, can result in confusion or social discomfort.

Although several studies have analyzed speech acts in literary works, research focusing specifically on refusal acts remains scarce. This gap in the literature highlights the need for further investigation. Our study aims to fill this gap by examining English refusals and their Vietnamese equivalents in the bilingual text of “Gone with the Wind” by Margaret Mitchell and the Vietnamese translated version “Cuốn theo chiều gió” by Vũ Kim Thư. By doing so, we hope to provide Vietnamese learners with a clearer understanding of refusal strategies and their cultural nuances, enhancing both their language skills and cross-cultural communication. This research is particularly valuable as it addresses an essential yet underexplored aspect of language acquisition, offering insights into the practical use of refusals in real-world interactions.

II. Literature review

2.1. Overview of speech acts

Speech act refers to an action that is performed when making an utterance, for example, giving orders and making promises (Austin, 1962). Searle (1969) shares, “Speech acts are the basic unit of linguistic communication.”

Austin (1962) lists five categories of speech acts: *Verdictives*, *Exercitives*, *Commissions*, *Expositives*, and

Behavities. In addition, Searle (1969) proposes a taxonomy that there are just five basic kinds of action that one can perform in speaking: *Representatives*, *Directives*, *Commissives*, *Expressives*, and *Declarations*. Accordingly, refusals belong to *the expressive* category.

2.2. Refusal speech act

Refusals are one of a relatively small number of speech acts that can be characterized as a response to another’s act rather than as an act initiated by the speaker (Gass & Houck, 1999:2).

Refusals, according to Searle (1969), belong to the category of commissives because they commit the refuser to perform an action (in Félix-Brasdefer, 2008:42). Beebe et al. (1990) add that refusals can be used in response to requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions (in Scarcella, p. 55-73).

In the book “English Speech Act Verbs”, A. Wierzbicka (1987) stated that refusal belongs to the FORBID group, which consists of the following verbs: forbid, prohibit, veto, refuse, decline...

In the Vietnamese dictionary “Đại Từ Điển Tiếng Việt”, some verbs concerning refusal in Vietnamese are interpreted as follows:

Chối: *to negate what has been done, received, or what has taken place even if it’s true [7;380]*

Từ chối: *not to take something that has been offered to you [7;1578]*

Từ bỏ: *to renounce, to give up something, to leave somebody, especially. Somebody you are responsible for with no intention of returning. [7;1785]*

Cự tuyệt: *to refuse definitely or a decisive act so as not to accept action. Or*

a thing is given to you. [7;491]

In summary, refusal is an individual's response or action to not accept or disagree with a request, offer, or situation. It usually occurs when the person disagrees, does not want to participate, or is unable to meet another person's request.

2.3. Classification of refusal strategies

Beebe et al. (1990) established a Taxonomy of Refusals that delineates three direct refusal strategies and eleven indirect refusal strategies applicable to the execution of refusal speech acts. The three direct strategies include: (1) performative, (2) non-performative, and (3) negative willingness ability. Conversely, the eleven indirect strategies consist of: (1) expression of regret, (2) wish, (3) excuse, reason, or explanation, (4) presentation of alternatives, (5) conditions for future or past acceptance, (6) promise of future acceptance, (7) statement of principle, (8) philosophical statement, (9) efforts to dissuade the interlocutor, (10) acceptance that serves as a refusal, and (11) avoidance. This taxonomy will serve as the analytical framework for the data collected in this study.

2.4. Direct refusal act (DRA) in English and Vietnamese

DRA is an act that clearly expresses the intention of refusal, rejecting a request or invitation by using the surface structures of language. The listener (L) directly receives the refusal intention without any difficulty or consideration from the speaker (S).

For example:

S: Would you like some water?

L: No no! I'm f-fine. (Direct refusal) (9, p.164)

In English and Vietnamese, an utterance of direct refusal usually consists of a nuclear which expresses the refusal of intention, negative words, and development.

E: **Negative word NO + Nuclear + Development**

V: **Từ phủ định KHÔNG + Thành phần cốt lõi + Thành phần mở rộng**

For example:

S: Let's go for a drink.

L: No, **I can't**. I'm busy now.

Đi uống chút gì đi.

Không. Mình không đi được. Mình bận.

I can't = Mình không đi được is the nuclear which goes with *No*.

I'm busy now with the development of the utterance.

2.4.1. The nuclear

The nuclear is the key part of the refusal utterance, which plays the role of the main speech act. It can be a complete utterance or combined with NO and the development. The nuclear can consist of performative verbs showing the meaning of refusal, such as refuse, deny, decline..., etc.; negative words, such as NO, NOT, NEVER; or negative words with affixes, such as IM-; IN-; -LESS; etc...

For example:

- Can you finish the homework?

- No. It's **impossible**.

~ *Cậu có thể làm xong bài tập không?*

- Không. **Không thể được**.

2.4.2. *The development*

The development can be used to minimize the degree of face-threatening acts of the interlocutors when there is a refusal in their utterance. The development consists of minimizing elements as ‘yes, but...’; ‘Sorry, I ...’ ‘It’s very kind of you, but...’.

For example:

- Let’s go for a drink. **-Yes, but I can’t go now. I’m busy.**

~ *Đi uống chút gì đi. - Ừ, nhưng bây giờ mình không đi được. Mình bận rồi.*

‘Yes, but ... I’m busy.’ is used to minimize the degree of face-threatening acts when the listener hears the refusal of nuclear ‘**I can’t go**’ from the speaker.

III. Methodology

3.1. *The setting of the study*

Gone with the Wind is a romantic drama and the only novel written by Margaret Mitchell. It is set in Jonesboro and Atlanta, Georgia during the American Civil War (1861 – 1865) and Reconstruction, and follows the life of Scarlett O’Hara, from the utmost luxury to absolute starvation and poverty, and from her innocence to her understanding and comprehension of life.

3.2. *Methods of the study*

The main objective of the study is to explore how refusals are articulated in English and how these expressions are translated into Vietnamese, considering the linguistic nuances between the two languages. Therefore, the primary methods of this study are descriptive and comparative, complemented by both qualitative and quantitative approaches,

along with techniques for data collection and analysis.

The descriptive method is employed to examine how refusal acts are expressed in English and Vietnamese, using data extracted from the bilingual novel *Gone with the Wind*.

The comparative method is used to analyze the differences in the use of direct and indirect refusals in both English and Vietnamese, based on the bilingual text of *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, translated by Vũ Kim Thư.

Supporting qualitative and quantitative methods will be applied for data analysis. Once the data is collected, it will be categorized and analyzed to facilitate a comprehensive description and comparison, which will form the basis of the study’s conclusions.

3.3. *Data collection and data analysis*

Regarding material selection, the authors use the copyrighted book of the bilingual “Gone with the Wind” by Margaret Mitchell and its Vietnamese-translated version, “Cuốn Theo Chiều Gió”.

The data collection and analysis process has been carried out in four major steps to achieve these aims and the stated objectives.

- Firstly, collect all the data on refusal acts in English and Vietnamese from Margaret Mitchell’s bilingual novel *Gone with the Wind*.

- Secondly, the data must be analyzed and categorized in detail in terms of types and means of refusals.

- Thirdly, analyzing, and comparing the means of refusal acts in English with reference to Vietnamese.

- Finally, discussing the findings and suggesting some implications for learning and teaching refusals to Vietnamese learners of English.

IV. Means of direct refusal acts (dra) in english compared with Vietnamese

In the novel “Gone with the wind,” there are 87 sentences express direct refusal acts, accounting for 51,5% of the total number of refusals, which will be seen clearly in the following table.

Table 1: Finding of DRA in English compared with Vietnamese

Means of direct refusal acts		English		Vietnamese	
		P	F	P	F
The direct refusal act with the nuclear	The direct refusal acts with the nuclear as performative verbs	0	0	0	0
	The direct refusal acts with nuclear as negative words	35	40.23	34	39.08
	The direct refusal acts with negative words, and the nuclear	7	8.05	8	9.20
The direct refusal acts include the nuclear and development	The direct refusal acts with the development as reason or explanation	27	31.03	27	31.03
	The direct refusal acts with the development showing regret	3	3.45	3	3.45
	The direct refusal acts with the development showing agreement	5	5.75	5	5.75
	The direct refusal acts with the development expressing goodwill in the form of giving thanks	10	11.49	10	11.49
TOTAL		87	100%	87	100%

4.1. The DRAs with the nuclear

4.1.1. The DRAs with nuclear as negative words

(1): Butler: - It is quite warm in here, he said. ‘No wonder Miss O’Hara is faint. May I lead you to a window?’

Scarlett: - **No.** (6, p.171)

Butler: - Ở đây nóng quá, cô O’Haraa mệt là phải. Tôi có thể dẫn cô tới cửa sổ.

Scarlett: - **Không.** (5, p.174)

The conversation took place between Rhett Butler and Scarlett. Scarlett had never thought of meeting Rhett Butler again, who had mocked her in the library at Ashley’s house. She thought, among millions of people in the world, she could not meet this disgusting person. She sank down into the chair. Melanie thought she was tired. He offered to lead Scarlett to the window to help with the heat.

The initiating act of the text conversation above is an offer. It can be seen that Scarlett was refusing Rhett’s offer (*lead to a window*). In both English and Vietnamese, this is the direct refusal act with the nuclear - negative word “NO”. In Vietnamese, it is expressed by the equivalent word “KHÔNG”. Scarlett gave the clear-cut refusal to Rhett’s offer.

4.1.2. The DRAs with negative words and the nuclear

(2): ‘Miss. Pittypat: - Oh, Melly, do you think I’d better write Henry a note and ask him to speak to Captain Butler?’

Melanie: - **No, I don’t,** said Melanie (6, p.224)

Miss. Pittypat: - Melley, cháu có thấy cô cần phải viết cho Henry bảo chú ấy nói với thuyền trưởng Rhett không?

Melanie: - **Không, cháu không muốn vậy.** (5, p.228)

The conversation took place between Melanie and Miss. Pittypat. The people of Atlanta read the letter written by Dr. Meade. The letter did not identify anyone, but the words alluded to Rhett. Dr. Meade thinks that Rhett is profiteering. The people of Atlanta all chased Rhett, except for Miss. Pittypat and Melanie. She suggested that Melanie write Henry a note and ask him to speak to Captain Butler. The initiating act of the text conversation above is a suggestion. It can be seen that Scarlett was refusing Miss Pittypat's suggestion (*write Henry a note and ask him to speak to Captain Butler*). This is the direct refusal act with the negative word "NO" and the nuclear "I DON'T". In both English and Vietnamese, the direct refusal acts include negative words and the nuclear to express the speaker's clear-cut refusal. In Vietnamese, it is expressed by the equivalent word "KHÔNG".

4.2. The DRAs include the nuclear and development

4.2.1. The direct refusal acts with the development as reason or explanation

(3): Mrs. Merriwether: - Pitty, we need you and Melly tonight to take Mrs. Bonnell's and the McLure girls' places.

Pitty Pat: - **Oh, but**, Dolly, we can't go. (6, p.156)

Bà Merriwether: - Pitty, chung tôi cần cô và Melly tối nay thay vào chỗ bà Bonnell và mấy con nhỏ McLure.

*Pittypat: - **Ồ, nhưng** chúng tôi không thể đi được. (5, p.159)*

The conversation took place between Mrs. Merriwether and Pittypat. Mrs. Merriwether and Elsing arrived when Melanie, Ms. Pittypat, and Scarlett were taking a nap, which surprised them very much. Mrs. Merriwether said Mrs.

Bonnell's children had measles, Ms. McLure's girls went to Virginia, and Dallas McLure was injured. They needed Pitty and Melly to replace Mrs. Bonnell and the McLure girls.

The initiating act of the text conversation above is a request. It can be seen that Pittypat was refusing Mrs. Merriwether's request (*need Pittypat and Melly tonight to take Mrs. Bonnell's and the McLure girls*). In both English and Vietnamese, this is the direct refusal act with the development expressed agreement "OH" with Mrs. Merriwether's request, but there is a reason "BUT" for not being able to agree. They wanted Mrs. Merriwether to understand that her request was reasonable, but they were not able to comply. In Vietnamese, it is expressed by the equivalent word "Ồ" and "NHƯNG".

4.2.2. The DRAs with the development showing regret

(4): Archie: - Miz Wilkes sont me to work for you," he said shortly. He spoke crustily, as one unaccustomed to speaking, the words coming slowly and almost with difficulty. "M' name's Archie."

Scarlett: - **I'm sorry** but I have no work for you, Mr. Archie. (6, p.328)

Archie: - Lão nói cộc lốc như người không quen nói, từng tiếng chậm chạp và khó nhọc bật lên: "Bà Wilkes sai tôi sang làm việc cho bà. Tôi tên là Archie."

*Scarlett: - Ông Archie, **rất tiếc** tôi không cần người. (5, p.332)*

The conversation between Archie and Scarlett took place at Frank's house. Scarlett was pregnant with Frank but still often exposed herself in public, operating the sawmill. Scarlett gave birth, and Frank was very proud to be a father. On that occasion, Frank forbade her from going

out in this dangerous situation. She was very upset and told Melanie. Melanie was very worried and asked Archie to drive for Scarlett. Archie was mountain-born. For all his dirty, ragged clothes, there was about him, as about most mountaineers.

The initiating act of the text conversation above is an offer. Both in English and Vietnamese, this example used the DRA with development showing regret "I'M SORRY". In Vietnamese, it is expressed by the equivalent word "RẤT TIẾC".

English response: **I'm sorry** (statement of regret), but I have no work for you, Mr. Archie. (negative willingness ability)

Vietnamese response: *Ông Archie, rất tiếc* (statement of regret) *tôi không cần người.* (negative willingness ability)

4.2.3. *The DRAs with the development expressing goodwill in the form of giving thanks*

(5): - The young captain: - If there's anything more I can do - Rhett: - **No, thank you.**

~ *Viên đại úy trẻ: - Có cần tôi gì nữa thì... - Rhett: - Thưa không, cảm ơn Đại úy.*

The conversation took place between the young captain and Rhett. Scarlett had to go to Atlanta to borrow Rhett to save Tara. Rhett was extremely wealthy, but at that moment, he was in jail. Scarlett put on makeup and visited Rhett to borrow some money. The captains in Rhett's prison cell pulled the chair to invite Scarlett to sit. A moment later, the captains went out, and the young captain asked Rhett if he needed anything.

The initiating act of the text conversation above is an offer. This is a

direct refusal act with the development expressed goodwill in the form of giving thanks: "NO" + "THANK YOU". In Vietnamese, it is expressed by the equivalent: "THƯA KHÔNG" "CẢM ƠN". Acknowledgments are the standard way of communicating in every language. In this conversation, Rhett thanked him for wanting to get along with the young captain when he gave refusals to the young captain. This shows his courtesy.

The above examples from the novel "Gone with the wind" are the typical examples illustrating the means of DRA between English and Vietnamese. It is clearly seen that to respond in English and Vietnamese have the same form and the same language functions.

V. Conclusion

The aim of this study is to examine English refusals and their Vietnamese counterparts by analyzing the novel *Gone with the Wind* and its Vietnamese translation, *Cuốn theo chiều gió*. Through statistical analysis of refusal acts in both versions, the study investigates how different types of requests influence the forms and strategies of refusal. By focusing on 87 direct refusal acts, the study compares 5 English dialogues with their Vietnamese translations.

This research targets explicitly the explicit expression of refusals through direct refusal acts, examining the surface-level language used to convey refusal intentions. The primary components of these acts include lexical verbs signaling refusal, negative words, and terms with negative connotations. When supplemented with additional elements, these core components help mitigate social threats and enhance politeness in communication. In English, refusals

often rely on negation verbs such as “refuse,” “decline,” “forbid,” and “deny,” while in Vietnamese, terms like “không, thôi, chẳng, and chả” fulfill similar functions. Both languages utilize negative words to structure refusals, with English incorporating words like no, not, never, and nothing, while Vietnamese employs terms such as “không, thôi, chẳng, and chớ”. Notably, Vietnamese offers a wider range of negative words compared to English, requiring speakers to choose the most contextually appropriate term, such as không, không thể, or không được.

This study’s findings offer theoretical and practical implications for teaching refusals in English, especially for Vietnamese learners.

Academically, the study contributes to the understanding of refusals by comparing English and Vietnamese strategies. This can help improve the teaching of refusals in English to Vietnamese students.

Firstly, teachers should make students aware of refusal strategies in both Vietnamese and English, emphasizing their appropriate contexts. This will help students become more confident in interacting with native English speakers by understanding how to use refusals effectively in real-life conversations.

Secondly, teachers need to provide students with comprehensive knowledge of refusals in both languages to improve their communication skills. This can be done through modern teaching methods, such as technology integration, and context-based activities. Teachers should focus on social factors like status, distance, and gender when teaching how to refuse in different situations.

Finally, teachers should offer students ample opportunities for communication through activities like role-playing or conversation. This will encourage creativity and help students practice refusals in English more naturally.

While the study provides valuable insights, it also has limitations. The primary limitation lies in the data source, which is derived predominantly from Gone with the Wind and its Vietnamese translation. This may result in a lack of real-world contextual data. Furthermore, the study does not explore non-verbal refusal acts, which are integral to everyday communication. Non-verbal cues like head shakes, shoulder shrugs, hand waves, and walking away carry significant meaning in refusals. Future research should delve into these non-verbal strategies to provide a more holistic understanding of refusal acts in communication.

References

- [1]. Austin, J. L. (1965). *How to do things with words*. OUP.
- [2]. Beebe, L. M., Takahashi, T., & Uliss-Weltz, R. (1990). Pragmatic transfer in ESL refusals, In: R. C. Scarcella, E. Anderson and S.D. Krashen (Eds.), *On the Development communicative competence in a second language*. Newbury House Publishers. 55- 73.
- [3]. Gass, S. M., & Houck, N. (1999). *Interlanguage refusals: A cross-cultural study of Japanese-English*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- [4]. Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2008). Perceptions of Refusals to Invitations: Exploring the Minds of Foreign Language Learners. *Language Awareness* 17(3).195-211 DOI: 10.1080/096584 10802146818

- [5]. Margaret, M. – Vũ Kim Thư dịch (2012). *Tiểu thuyết Cuốn theo chiều gió*. NXB Văn Học.
- [6]. Margaret, M. (1988). *Gone with the wind*, Macmillan.
- [7]. Nguyễn, N. Y. (1999). *Đại Từ Điển Tiếng Việt*. NXBGD Hà Nội.
- [8]. Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- [9]. Sidney Sheldon. (1985). *The Naked Face*. Grand Central Publishing.
- [10]. Wierzbicka, A. (1987). *English Speech Act Verbs*. Academic Press.

HÀNH VI TỪ CHỐI TRỰC TIẾP TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT DỰA TRÊN TIỂU THUYẾT “GONE WITH THE WIND” VÀ BẢN DỊCH “CUỐN THEO CHIỀU GIÓ”

Trần Văn Thuật[‡], Thái Vân Anh[§]

Tóm tắt: Bài viết này khám phá hành vi từ chối trực tiếp trong tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt thông qua việc phân tích, so sánh các hành vi từ chối trực tiếp trong tiểu thuyết “Gone with the Wind” của Margaret Mitchell và bản dịch tiếng Việt “Cuốn theo chiều gió” của Vũ Kim Thư. Mục tiêu chính của nghiên cứu là xem xét cách hành vi từ chối được diễn đạt trong tiếng Anh và cách các biểu thức này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, có tính đến sự khác biệt về ngôn ngữ. Để đạt được các mục tiêu đó, các tác giả sử dụng phương pháp mô tả và so sánh, phân tích 87 phát ngôn từ chối trực tiếp. Kết quả cho thấy thành phần cốt lõi (nuclear) đóng vai trò trung tâm trong cấu trúc từ chối trực tiếp bao gồm các từ phủ định và các từ có hàm ý phủ định. Về cấu trúc, cả hai ngôn ngữ thường sử dụng các từ phủ định như “no, not, never...” trong tiếng Anh và “không, thôi, ...” trong tiếng Việt. Bên cạnh đó, chúng tôi không tìm thấy dữ liệu nào về việc diễn đạt hành vi từ chối trực tiếp với hạt nhân là động từ thực hiện (performative verb) như “refuse/ từ chối”. Nghiên cứu này góp phần cung cấp kiến thức về cách dạy và sử dụng hành vi từ chối cho giáo viên, người học ngôn ngữ và các học giả quan tâm đến sự giao thoa giữa ngôn ngữ, văn hóa và giao tiếp.

Từ khóa: hành vi lời nói, từ chối, từ chối trực tiếp, Cuốn theo chiều gió.

[‡] Trường Đại học Mở Hà Nội

[§] Học viên cao học, Trường Đại học Mở Hà Nội