

استراتيجيات قبول ورفض الدعوة من قبل طلاب اللغة الإنكليزية في جامعة البعث

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الملخص

يعالج البحث الحالي ظاهرتين من ظواهر التّواصل الاجتماعي ألا وهما القبول والرفض للدعوات. أجريت هذه الدراسة استناداً إلى نظرية اللباقة لكل من براون ولفنسن (1987) في محاولة لدراسة كميّة القبول والرفض لدى عيّنة من طلاب السنة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية في جامعة البعث، وتحديد الاستراتيجيات المختلفة التي يستخدمونها. تعدّ هذه الدراسة مهمّة لكلّ من المدرسين والطلّاب في جامعة البعث لأنّ قراءتها ستساهم في تعزيز طرائق التدريس التي يتّبعتها المدرسون ومهارات التعلّم لدى الطلاب. جمعت البيانات باستخدام استبيان يتضمّن أسئلة مفتوحة، وتمّ تحليل تلك البيانات اعتماداً على أجوبة الطلاب وتصنيف الاستراتيجيات التي تم استخدامها من قبلهم بالإضافة لكشف الاستراتيجيات الأكثر استخداماً وقد كشف التحليل أنّ معظم الطلاب قد فضّلوا استخدام استراتيجيات القبول المباشرة كما فضّلوا استراتيجيات الرفض الغير مباشرة ومن المأمول أن تكون نتائج هذا البحث ذات نفع للمهتمين بتعلّم أو تعليم اللغة الإنكليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات القبول، استراتيجيات الرفض، نظرية اللباقة، استبيان الأسئلة المفتوحة.

**Invitation acceptance and rejection
strategies employed by Al-Baath
University students of English**

Abstract

This paper addresses two phenomena of social interaction; namely, acceptance and refusal for eliciting invitations. It is conducted on the basis of the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). It attempts to study how a sample of fourth-year students of English at Al-Baath University in Syria performs acceptance and refusal acts. The data were collected by using a discourse completion task (DCT) and analysed depending on the classification of the strategies employed by the participants as well as investigating the most frequent strategies used by them. The analysis of the data revealed that most of the students preferred to use direct acceptance strategies and indirect refusal strategies. It is hoped that the findings of this paper would be useful to those interested in teaching/learning English for social interaction.

Key Words: acceptance strategy, refusal strategy, politeness theory, DCT open-ended questionnaire.

1. Introduction

Speech acts are acts performed by utterances such as giving orders, making promises, requesting, complaining, accepting or refusing (Austin, 1962). The most important thing about speech acts is their function in speech. It is not crucial what the speech acts represent 'officially', but how the conversationalists use them either directly or indirectly. Acceptances and refusals are significant because they play communicatively central role in everyday communication. In the present paper, the focus is on how Al-Baath University 4th- year students of English in Syria accept and refuse invitations in an attempt to investigate students' pragmatic awareness of dealing with such speech acts. In daily communications, or what Pfister (2010) refers to as rational conversations, people tend to avoid face-threatening acts, utterances or actions which threaten people's face, a person's public self-image, and instead manipulate both their verbal and non-verbal behaviour to avoid conflict (Aziz, 2000; Rohmah, 2006). Speakers express respect for people to whom they are talking and try to avoid offending them (Holmes, 1995). Accepting or refusing such any

speech act has a polite and impolite implication, for they have to do with face and thus politeness (Cheng, 2001; Ji, 2000). Brown and Levinson (1978) relate politeness to people's face; which has two aspects: positive (the need to be connected, to belong to a group) and negative (the need to be independent, not imposed on by others). That is why the present study is also focused on how social variables of power (P), distance (D), and rank of imposition (I) affect the participants' responses in accepting and refusing.

1.2. Significance of the study

The present paper contributes to the development of pragmatic competence and awareness of the learners of English generally and students of English and linguistics especially since it gives them an insight about communicating clearly and successfully with native speakers of English and dealing with different everyday life situations in accepting and refusing various speech acts politely without offending the others' face in the target language. It also provides the predominant possible forms and strategies of acceptance and refusal for different occasions in English from which learners may benefit.

1.3. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate and classify the strategies employed by fourth-year students of English at Al-Baath University in Syria for accepting and refusing invitations in different situations through answering the following research questions:

1) What are the strategies used for invitations acceptance by Al-Baath

University fourth-year students of English?

2) What are the strategies used for invitations refusal by Al-Baath University fourth-year students of English?

2. Literature review

The concept of speech acts was first developed by Austin (1962), who identified three different features of speech acts: (1) *locutionary*, (2) *illocutionary*, and (3) *perlocutionary* acts. A *locutionary act* refers to a literal meaning of an utterance; an *illocutionary act* refers to an intended meaning of an utterance; and a *perlocutionary act* is the actual effect by saying something. Speech acts can also be realized directly or indirectly, but they are frequently carried out indirectly in our

everyday communication to soften the force of the act (LoCastro, 2012). When a speech act is performed indirectly, and thus the linguistic form does not explicitly represent the speaker's actual intention, an addressee needs to infer the intended meaning of the speaker's utterance. According to Searle (1979), acceptance and refusal fall under the 'commissive' speech acts, for they commit the speaker (and sometimes both the speaker and the addressee) to some future action. Unlike refusals which are viewed as face threatening acts, acceptances are beneficial to the addressee, and reflect the speaker's compliance with the addressee's wants and desires and maintain their face wants that they are accepted in the society. Searle and Vanderveken (1985, p.194) define acceptances as "commissives which are responses to certain very restricted classes of directives and commissives". Socially speaking, in response to invitations, offers, or requests, acceptance or agreement is usually preferred and rejecting or refusing is not. The act of refusal can be seen as a face-threatening act for the listener, and often realized through indirect strategies with a great deal of mitigation and/or delay

within the turn or across turns. Acceptance or agreement, however, tends to be used in direct language without much delay, mitigation, or explanation. The speech act of acceptance occurs when a speaker reacts with pleasure whereas the speech act of refusal takes place when a speaker reacts with displeasure or disapproval. Refusal is a face-threatening act to the inviter, offerer, or requester, because it contradicts their expectations, and is often realized through indirect strategies. Therefore, unlike acceptance, it requires a high level of pragmatic competence. To produce face-threatening acts without proper justifications implies disrespect. So, prefacing face-threatening acts with apologetic formulae and justification or explanation marks a higher degree of politeness. Refusal is characterized as an act by which a speaker refuses to engage in an action proposed by the interlocutor. For example, in refusing to an invitation to go out, one might say, "*Sorry, I have an exam tomorrow*". A response to refusal can be expressed either directly, (e.g. *No, I can't.*) or indirectly, (e.g. *I'd love to, but I can't.*). An indirect response to refusal may increase the degree of complexity, as the speaker has to choose the

appropriate form or forms to soften the negative effects of a direct refusal (Felix-Brasdefer, 2008). Refusals may be mitigated by giving reasons (*e.g. I have to do my assignment*), expressing regret (*e.g. I'm so sorry*), or promising future acceptance (*e.g. I hope I can make it next time*). Refusals can also be accompanied by expressing positive remarks or feelings (*e.g. Congratulations on your promotion. I am very happy to hear that but...*), an expression of gratitude (*e.g. Thanks for your invitation*), an expression of willingness (*e.g. I'd love to but...*). Overall, refusals are complex speech acts which require not only long sequences of negotiation and cooperative achievements, but also "face-saving manoeuvres to accommodate the noncompliant nature of the act" (Gass and Houck, 1999, p.2). According to Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory (henceforth B & L), the speech act of refusal is one of the face threatening acts in communication. While offers, invitations, suggestions and requests pose a threat to the hearer's negative face by impeding their independence, refusals poses a threat to hearer's positive face by implying that their wants are not desirable. In this case, the person who refuses encounters a

specific challenge. In order to be polite, they need to save their negative face as well as mitigate the threat their refusal pose to their interlocutor's positive face. Consequently, in order to "save face", speakers employ various strategies to negotiate the interaction with their interlocutor (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62-68). B & L define face as 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself' (1987, p.61). They claimed that individuals have two types of face: positive and negative. *Positive face* was defined as: 'the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others,' and *negative face* as: 'the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others' (p. 62). Moreover, they argued that face underpinned two forms of politeness: *negative politeness*, which involves strategies directed at saving the negative face of a person (one's desire to freedom of action and non-imposition), whether it is the speaker's or the hearer's; and *positive politeness*, which involves strategies directed at saving the positive face (one's desire to be liked, admired, and related to in a positive way) of the speaker or the hearer. Negative politeness is 'the formal politeness

that the notion ‘politeness’ conjures up, but positive politeness [is] less obvious’ (p. 62). Ideally, in everyday interaction, people aspire to maintain each other’s face, since everyone’s face is dependent on each other.

A study on the speech act of acceptance is that of Jawad & Habeeb (2013). It tackled the problem of how people respond to and accept invitations and offers as politeness phenomena in the societies of collectivistic (Arabic) and individualistic (English) cultures. Their study also attempted to categorize the various strategies used by the speakers of the two languages. It was found that there were universal strategies such as ‘thanks’, ‘congratulation’, ‘Expressing pleasure’ and so on whereas other strategies were found to be culture-specific. Thus, each language provides its speakers with expressions that can be understood and appreciated by people who share the same socio-cultural background.

A major study carried out by Beebe et al. (1990) compared the refusals produced by native speakers of Japanese and native speakers of English, using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The

participants of the study were 20 Japanese speaking in Japanese, 20 Japanese-speaking in English, and 20 Americans speaking in English with the aim of investigating pragmatic knowledge in refusals to a higher-, equal-, and lower-status interlocutors. Findings showed that six Japanese speakers of English and native speakers differ in three areas: the order of the semantic formula, the frequency of the formula, and the content of the utterances. Beebe et al. (1990) have categorized different components of refusal strategies such as direct, indirect refusals and adjuncts. Direct refusals are precise and clear in meaning (*e.g.*, “*No, I can’t come tonight*”) while indirect refusals include mitigation devices, such as justification statements, to save the hearer’s positive face. In addition, adjuncts are remarks used to mitigate refusals, but could not stand alone to function as a refusal such as thanks/ gratitude/ appreciation expressions.

3. Methodology and data collection

The main instrument that was used to collect data in this study was a discourse completion task questionnaire (DCT). The DCT was created in an open-ended questionnaire form. Using the DCT is suitable for

quantitative research in that it enables the researcher to work with frequencies of realisation patterns and their relation to the manipulated variables (Nurani, 2009). The DCT of this study consisted of six situations for the purpose of eliciting invitations acceptance/refusal. The contexts of the questionnaire situations were selected to fit university students' lifestyles, (e.g. responding to a professor's request, to a classmate's request for class notes, to a family member/relative or friend's invitation/offer/request etc.). Moreover, the social variables (power, distance, and the ranking of the imposition) were manipulated.

The sample chosen for this study includes fifty fourth-year students of English at Al-Baath University in Syria. The DCT open-ended questionnaire was tested on five fourth-year students of English to clarify if there were any ambiguous words or questions. The collected data were classified according to the acceptance and refusal strategies, and were analysed according to participants' responses, and their responses are divided into a number of strategies by matching words, phrases, or sentences that met a particular semantic

formula or strategy. Each acceptance and refusal response might be comprised of one or more semantic formula. In addition, the frequency of the semantic formulas was counted and determined. All the frequency results obtained from the participants were converted to percentages. The analysis of the findings depends on the simple analysis of the difference in percentages (Cohen et al., 1986, p.68). This is done by providing the rate of occurrences of each strategy in each situation and the percentages of each strategy across all the situations.

4. Results and discussion

Situation1

(accepting an invitation to a football match from a relative)

The collected data from this situation have revealed that the participants employed six acceptance strategies: performative verbs (39), direct “yes” (15), expression of thanks (21), justification statements (4), expressing pleasure (22), and conditional acceptance (3). The use of performative verbs was found to be the most frequently employed strategy. This most frequent strategy was

accompanied by other supporter strategies. For instance, expressions of thanks and pleasure make the hearer recognize the appreciation of the speaker to their invitation; thus, using them along with performative verbs indicates that the speaker cares for the hearer's positive face. Moreover, giving a justification and making conditional acceptance were the least frequent strategies, and they indicate that the speaker cares for and maintains their negative face regardless of the hearer's positive face.

(refusing an invitation to a football match from a relative)

The collected data from this situation have revealed that the participants employed nine refusal strategies: direct strategies such as direct "no" (16), negative ability/willingness (21), indirect ones such as justification (31), regret (25), wish (4), lack of enthusiasm (3), and promise for future acceptance (8), and adjuncts such as gratitude (10) and positive opinion/ feeling/ agreement (8). Statements of justification were found to be the most frequent strategy. This indicates that the speaker cares for the hearer's positive face and tries to mitigate the face-threatening act by giving

the hearer a justification which could be a reason, an explanation, or an excuse. The most frequent strategy was statement of regret to indicate that the speaker cares for the hearer's positive face, and tries to save their negative face by mitigating the refusal.

Situation 2

(accepting an invitation to a graduation party from a classmate)

The collected data from this situation have revealed that the participants used various strategies whether they are direct strategies such as performative verbs (43) and direct yes (11), or indirect ones such as expressions of thanks (9), pleasure (15), and justification (2), and adjuncts to acceptance such as congratulating expressions (12). This indicates that the speaker tends to appreciate the hearer's invitation and express their pleasure. The most frequent strategy was the performative verbs, and the less frequent one was giving a justification for accepting. Expressing pleasure and congratulation were accompanied the performative verbs to support the acceptance.

(refusing an invitation to a graduation party from a classmate)

The collected data from this situation have revealed that the participants employed nine strategies: direct strategies such as direct “no” (11), negative ability/willingness (31), indirect ones such as justification (31), regret (21), wish (6), lack of enthusiasm (2), and adjuncts such as gratitude (3), congratulating (11) and positive opinion/ feeling (2). Statements of justification and negative ability/willingness were found to be the most frequent strategies. This indicates that the speaker maintains the hearer’s positive face and tries to mitigate the face-threatening act by giving the hearer a justification which could be a reason, an explanation, or an excuse. Statements of regret indicate that the speaker also cares for the hearer’s positive face and tries to save their negative face.

Situation 3

(accepting an invitation to a seminar from a professor)

The collected data from this situation have indicated that the participants employed seven strategies for accepting an invitation from

a professor. These strategies are direct such as performative verbs (37) and direct “yes” (10), and indirect such as justification statements (8), expressions of pleasure (13), expressions of surprise and admiration (3), and invoking the name of God (1), and adjuncts such as thanks/ gratitude/ appreciation expressions (29). The most frequent strategy was performative verbs, and this indicates that the speaker is clear and accepts the invitation directly without complimenting or exaggerating. Invoking the name of God expresses that the speaker is not sure whether they will come or not. Expressing surprise and admiration reveal that the speaker tries to indicate respect for the hearer’ positive face, and expressions of pleasure indicate that the speaker is glad for being invited by the hearer.

(refusing an invitation to a seminar from a professor)

The data collected from this situation have revealed that the participants employed seven strategies for refusing an invitation from a professor: direct such as performative verbs (3), direct “no” (7) and negative ability/willingness (26) and indirect one such as justification (37), regret (28), wish (11), and adjuncts such as gratitude (5). Giving

a justification was found to be the most frequent strategy by the participants of this study since the inviter was a professor, the invitee tried to indicate their appreciation for the hearer's positive face. Expressions of regret and willingness indicated that the speaker cares for the hearer's positive face. Gratitude was found to be the least frequent strategy in this situation and support the refusal act.

Situation 4

(accepting an invitation to a trip from a friend)

The collected data from this situation have revealed that the participants used seven strategies for accepting an invitation from a friend whether they are direct such as performative verbs (30), direct "yes" (7) or indirect such as justification (6), expressing pleasure (33), counter question (2), and conditional acceptance (2) and adjuncts such as gratitude/thanks/appreciation expressions (8). The most frequent strategies were found to be the use of pleasure expressions and performative verbs. This indicates that the speaker has a close relationship with the hearer, and they accept the invitation directly and indicate their appreciation to the hearer's invitation. The least frequent

strategies were the use of conditional acceptance, in which the speaker tells the hearer that they will accept the invitation if something happens, and the use of counter question in which the speaker provides the hearer with some questions such as “When?, Where?, Who is coming?”. This indicates that the speaker tries to get more information.

(refusing an invitation to a trip from a friend)

The collected data from this situation have indicated that the participants employed eight strategies for refusing, direct such as performative verbs (2), direct “no” (12) and negative willingness/ability (26), indirect such as justification (31), regret (19), wish (8) and promise for future acceptance (2), and adjuncts such as gratitude expressions (5). The most frequent strategy was giving a justification, and this indicates that the speaker mitigates the face-threatening act by giving a reason, an excuse or an explanation. The least frequent strategy was the use of promise for future acceptance, and this indicates that the speaker provides the hearer with future possibility in order to save the hearer’s positive face.

Situation 5

(accepting an invitation to workshop from a lecturer)

The collected data from this situation have indicated that the participants employed five strategies for accepting. The most frequent strategies were the use of performative verbs (28) and pleasure expressions (22).

This means that the participants accept directly and showed their appreciation for such an invitation. Also, the use of direct “yes” (15) indicates that the participants accept directly. The least frequent strategy was giving a justification (7). Expressions of thanks, gratitude, and appreciation (24) are accompanied the performative verbs and support the acceptance.

(refusing an invitation to a workshop from a lecturer)

The collected data from this situation have revealed that the participants employed seven strategies for refusing an invitation from a lecturer. Some of these strategies are direct by using performative verbs (4), direct “no” (10), and negative willingness/ability (27), and the other ones are indirect such as giving a justification (34), the most frequent strategy, statements of regret (18), statements of wish (3), the least frequent strategy, and gratitude expressions (8) which are adjuncts to the refusal act.

Situation6

(accepting an invitation to an engagement party from a family member)

The collected data from this situation have revealed that the participants employed six strategies for accepting an invitation from a family member: direct such as the use of performative verbs (44), the most frequent strategy, which is a direct strategy, indirect strategies such as justification (5), expressing pleasure (24), and adjuncts which accompanied the direct strategies to support the acceptance and indicate the appreciation to the invitation such as expressing congratulations (5), pause fillers (2) and Gratitude expressions (5).

(refusing an invitation to an engagement party from a family member)

The collected data from this situation have revealed that the participants employed nine strategies for refusing an invitation from a family member by using direct strategies such as direct “no” (12), negative willingness/ability (29), and indirect strategies such as justification (32), regret (10), wish (6), lack of enthusiasm (8), set condition for future acceptance (4), and adjuncts such as congratulating (8), gratitude expressions (3) for making the refusal. The most frequent strategy was the use of justification to save the speaker’s negative face and the

hearer's positive one. The least frequent strategy was the use of gratitude expressions that supports the refusal and indicates the appreciation of the invitation.

The above-mentioned lines and tables have indicated the acceptance and refusal strategies and their occurrence across the six situations.

Table 1., and 2., indicate the frequency and the percentage of acceptance and refusal strategies across all the given situations.

Table 1. The frequency and percentage of acceptance strategies

Acceptance Strategy	No.	%
Performative verbs	221	39,04%
Direct "yes"	58	10,24%
Thanks/ Gratitude/ Appreciation	96	16,96%

Justification	32	5,65%
Pleasure	129	22,79%
Congratulation	17	3 ,00%
Conditional Acceptance	5	0,88%
Counter Question	2	0,35%
Pause Fillers	2	0,35%
Surprise/ Admiration	3	0,53%
Invoking the name of God	1	0,17%
Total	566	16,52%

Table 1. indicates the occurrence of acceptance strategies across all

the given situations that were employed by 4th-year participants in different everyday life situations and from different people. Direct acceptance is the most frequent strategy, and then expressions of pleasure, thanks/gratitude/appreciation, justification, and congratulation were used by participants to support the direct acceptance and indicate that the speaker maintains the hearer's positive face.

Table 2. The frequency and percentage of refusal strategies

Refusal Strategy	NO.	%
Direct "no"	68	10,04%
Negative Willingness/Ability	160	23,63%
Performative verbs	9	1,32%
Justification	196	28,95%
Regret	121	17,78%
Wish	38	5,61%

Congratulation	19	2,80%
Lack of Enthusiasm	18	2,65%
Set Condition for Future Possibility	9	1,32%
Gratitude	34	5,02%
Positive Opinion/feeling	5	0,73%
Total	677	19,76%

Table 2. indicates the occurrence of refusal strategies across all the given situations that were employed by 4th-year participants in different everyday life situations and from different people. Giving a justification was the most frequent strategy, the speaker tends to save their negative face by giving the hearers excuses, reasons, or explanation in order not to offend the hearer's positive face. The use of negative willingness/ability verbs was also used by the speaker and by using them, the speaker tries to refuse the invitations indirectly and save their negative face.

5. Conclusion and recommendations for further research

The analysis of the data led to some major conclusions. First of all, almost all 4th-year students of English chose to employ several strategies in several situations. This choice was based on the given situations. For instance, accepting/refusing from a family member is different from accepting/refusing from a professor. Additionally, combinations of direct/indirect strategies and adjuncts formed the most commonly used strategy such as using congratulation expressions along with direct/indirect acceptance strategies as well as gratitude ones along with refusal strategies. Thirdly, it was noticed that in all the given situations, the participants of this study showed a great care for the hearer's face regardless of the people to whom they are talking. Furthermore, the most frequently used strategies for acceptance were the direct acceptance verbs and pleasure expressions, and the most frequent used strategies for refusal were the use of giving justification, regret statements and negative ability/willingness verbs across all the given situations. To conclude, the findings showed that the participants pay much attention to keeping the harmony in their social

relationships by attempting to save the hearer's face. In fact, this research is of great importance for both teachers and students of English at Al-Baath University. On the one hand, teachers can get an insight into how students perform the speech acts of acceptance and refusal to invitations in conversation, and whether they encounter any difficulty in performing them. This research allows teachers to find out the weaknesses of their students and deal with them properly. On the other hand, this study is significant for students as it helps them improve their conversation skills in accepting and refusing invitations. All in all, teachers should help students master the pragmatics of English and teach them how to perform speech acts as one important area of pragmatics. Future research is required to investigate whether there is an influence of age on the way of accepting and refusing. Additionally, this study was carried out in general without taking the gender of the participants into consideration. Therefore, future researcher is required to investigate the way males and females accept and refuse to look at whether gender has an influence on the choice of strategies.

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Examples from the participants responses:

Acceptance strategies
<p>Yes, I will accept your invitation. Yes, of course. I will come. Yes, I will be so happy because I'm so tired after the exam. Yes, I will do my best. Yes, please. I'm so excited. Yes, I'm grateful for your invitation. Yes, I will be glad for being there. Thank you, it's my pleasure. Thanks professor, I will participate. It's really an important seminar. Cool! Let's go together. Thanks a lot. It's really an important workshop for me. Congratulations on your brother's graduation! I will come for sure. Sure, congratulations to her! Cool! I'm not busy, and I can go with you. Oh! Really! I will come. Congratulations! Thank you so much! I will try to attend the party. That's nice! It will be a wonderful party. Wow! Congrats! I will certainly be there. It's an honour to be a part of such a workshop. Surely, it will be my honour. Yes, but it's better if it's not at home. Okay! Why not! I will attend. Count me in! Okay! I will come because I like these activities so much. Wow! What a surprise! I really need such a trip. Let's go. Umm! That's cool. I will go because I want to have some fun. I will try to come if God will! Congratulations! I will be on time. I have nothing to do on Thursday so I can accompany you. Yes, of course. If it's not a hustle.</p>
Refusal Strategies
<p>I'm afraid I can't. My schedule is so messed up. Congrats! I'll try my best to come, but I think I won't. Oh, I wish I could go with you dear, but I can't. Sorry, I'm not interested in football games. I'm not sure that I will attend.</p>

Sorry I have other plans on Thursday.

Sorry, I can't.

No, thanks. I don't like such parties.

No, I can't. It will be too late.

I can't come. Congratulate your brother on my behalf.

My apologies professor! I wish I could participate, but I have an appointment.

I'm sorry. Forgive me. I can't come because I have another date.

Oh! I'm not into parties. I can't go with you.

I don't like noisy party.

I'm really sorry. I would love that, but I really can't. Congrats!

Unfortunately, I can't because I have another date.

It's so kind of you, but I have many jobs to do at the same time.

I can't accept your invitation because I'm really busy.

I'm honoured by the invitation, but I don't think I can't attend because I have a lot of things to do.

I don't like trips.

If I have time, I will come.

I can't participate. I'm not interested in such workshops.

No, I refuse that.

I'd love to, but I'm really busy. Thanks for the invitation.

I wish I could but I have many tasks to do.