

STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY

(STRATEGI PERMOHONAN MAAF YANG DIGUNAKAN OLEH PELAJAR DI SEBUAH UNIVERSITI DI MALAYSIA)

Wan Nurul Fatimah Wan Ismail
Nurul100@Perak.Uitm.Edu.My

Khairunnisa Mohd Daud
Khair208@Perak.Uitm.Edu.My

Nurul Nadwa Ahmad Zaidi
Nurul3437@Perak.Utm.Edu.My

Abstract

A language is learned as a tool of communication inside and outside of a classroom to carry out meaningful communication. To convey meaning, language is used to carry out various actions which are called speech acts such as apologizing. Making an apology is a part of communicative competence. This study investigates the strategies used by students in a Malaysian university when apologizing. A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire is used in this research. Ten situations were included in the questionnaire and the respondents were required to write their apology for each situation. The data were analyzed based on CCSARP model (Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns) by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). This study found that most students use the expression of regret such as “Sorry” or give an explanation for their mistakes. The significance of this study is to highlight the strategies used to apologize that need to be taught to students.

Keywords: *apology, apology strategies, speech act, communicative competence.*

Abstrak

Bahasa dipelajari sebagai alat berkomunikasi di dalam dan di luar kelas untuk menjayakan komunikasi yang bermakna. Untuk menyampaikan maksud, bahasa digunakan untuk melaksanakan pelbagai perlakuan yang dikenali sebagai lakuan bahasa seperti permohonan maaf. Memohon maaf adalah sebahagian daripada kompetensi komunikasi. Kajian ini mengkaji strategi memohon maaf yang digunakan oleh pelajar university di Malaysia apabila mereka memohon maaf. Satu soal selidik yang mengandungi Tugas Penyempurnaan Wacana (TPW) digunakan di dalam kajian ini. Kaji selidik ini mengandungi sepuluh situasi dan responden dikehendaki menulis permohonan maaf mereka berdasarkan setiap situasi. Data kajian dianalisa berdasarkan model CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns) oleh Blum-Kulka et.al. (1989). Kajian ini mendapati bahawa majoriti pelajar menggunakan ungkapan penyesalan seperti “maaf” atau memberi penjelasan bagi kesalahan mereka. Kepentingan kajian ini adalah untuk memberi pencerahan tentang strategi-strategi permohonan maaf yang perlu diajar kepada para pelajar.

Kata kunci: *permohonan maaf, strategi permohonan maaf, lakuan bahasa, kompetensi komunikasi.*

GBSE Journal 2017

Introduction

Graduates employability has become a major concern among graduates and universities. With the increasing number of enrolment in tertiary education and the increasing unemployment rate, it has become harder for graduates to secure an employment (Kim, 2012). With limited job opportunities, only the graduates with high employability have a brighter future. According to McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), individual factor that includes attributes like basic social skills is one of the factors influencing graduates' employability. Meanwhile, according to Lay and Arnold (2012), communication skills and personality are some of the attributes which employers seek in future employees. Robles (2012) listed the top 10 soft skills which business executives perceived as most important; integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic. Communication and courtesy were listed as some of the most important skills in the list. These attributes are especially important in maintaining positive relationship not only between colleagues, but also between the employees and their respective clients.

Apologizing is a speech act that performs the act of apologizing with the use of certain language forms. Besides showing that the speaker is sorry or regretful, apologizing helps to maintain good relationship between the parties involved. An apology is made when the apologizer

means to repair the damage done unto the relationship with the addressee. According to Holmes (1995), an apology is a speech act to remedy the wrongdoing that the apologizer is responsible for, which in turn will save the social relation between the apologizer and the addressee. It is a speech act intended to save the addressee's face but threatens the speaker's face as it shows the speaker's willingness to humble herself or himself (Khaled, 2011) Living as a social being, one must be able to communicate effectively. Whenever there is an argument or if one is at fault for acting in certain ways, the offender must apologize. However, misunderstandings can happen if an apology is not properly made or if the addressee feels that the apology is not sufficient. Therefore, language teachers or lecturers should incorporate apology strategies when teaching English.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the apology strategies that university students use the most and the strategies they use the least when making an apology. Through the findings, better understanding of the apology strategy employed by the respondents can be acquired. Thus, language teachers can pay more attention in teaching the apology strategies that are less frequently used than the others.

Research Questions

1. What are the apology strategies employed the most by university students in Malaysia?
2. What are the apology strategies employed the least by university students in Malaysia?

Literature Review

In the past, language teaching was linked to several different methods. Some of the methods are; the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audiolingual Method. Both methods pay great attention to the form in which the language is used, i.e. the grammatical aspect of the language. Afterwards, methods and approaches to language teaching seemed to focus more on the communicative aspects of a language. A language user must be able to communicate using the language and fluency is considered more important than accuracy. The Direct Method and Communicative Language Teaching are some of the methods which conform to this principle (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Communicative competence

A language is learned as a tool of communication inside and outside of a classroom to carry out meaningful communication. This is referred to as "communicative competence" which Hymes (1972) views as having the ability to communicate appropriately with others in a speech

community (as cited in Wu, 2008). Communicative competence allows us to know the how and when to use the grammatical competence in certain situations (Finnegan, 2012). For example, saying “It is raining” might simply mean to inform the hearer of the rain, while it can also mean to ask the hearer to close the window. In certain culture, saying this utterance can be a more polite way to ask for help rather than giving a direct instruction.

Speech acts

According to the Centre for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) (2016), a speech act is an utterance with different communicative functions in different situations. Widdowson (1978) states that one of the aspects of language is one’s performative ability that allows people to undertake meaningful communication. In real life conversations, sentences that we utter bring different meaning and purposes even though they are syntactically or grammatically similar. To convey meaning, language is used to carry out various actions which are called speech acts. Speech acts are the actions which are performed through language such as apologies, greetings, requests, complaints, invitations, compliments, or refusals. There are six types of speech act as listed by Finnegan (2012, p.304);

1. *Representatives – represent a state of affairs: assertions, statements, claims, hypotheses, descriptions, suggestions. Representatives can generally be characterized as true or false.*
2. *Commissives – commit a speaker to a course of action: promises, pledges, threats, vows.*
3. *Directives – intended to get the addressee to carry out an action: commands, requests, challenges, invitations, entreaties, dares.*
4. *Declarations – bring about the state of affairs they name: blessings, hirings, firings, baptisms, arrests, marrying, declaring mistrials.*
5. *Expressives – indicate the speaker’s psychological state or attitude: greetings, apologies, congratulations, condolences, and thanksgivings.*
6. *Verdictives – make assessments or judgments: ranking, assessing, appraising, condoning.*

Apology strategies

When apologizing, several strategies can be employed. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) listed the apology strategies which include an Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (sorry, excuse me), an expression of responsibility for the offense, an account for the cause of the offense, and an offer

of repair. Banikalef and Marlina (2013) adapted Olshtain and Cohen's strategies and added three more strategies, which are arrogance and ignorance, blaming something else, and swearing.

The studies of apology strategy were usually done to compare the strategies used in different cultures. Malay and Arab students were found to be using different apology strategies, especially among male students. Malay male students were found to be using more explanation strategy than Arab male students probably because Malay males are always reluctant to admit their mistakes (Nurul Jamilah, 2013). In comparing Turkey students and native speakers of English, it was found that their L1 can influence their use of apologies. The most common apology strategies used were the use of IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device) together with EXPL (An explanation of an account) (Istifçi, 2009)

There were also studies investigating the use of strategy of apology employed by university students. Tunisian university students uses statement of remorse in when apologizing if the offended are a close friend, someone who's old or someone who has power in affecting the offender's future. Some of them chose to deny their responsibility and shift the responsibility to others as their apology strategies. Other less-used strategies included self-castigation, offer of repair, intensification, minimization, humor, blaming the victim, and invoking Allah's name (Khaled, 2010).

Jordanian EFL university students used the primary apology strategies on statement of remorse, accounts, compensation, promise not to repeat offense, and reparation besides using non-apology strategies such as blaming victim and brushing off the incident as unimportant to relieve themselves from the blame. In addition, female students tend to use non-apology strategy that directs to the avoidance of the discussion of the offense while male students used the ones that lean to blaming the victim (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006).

Methodology

A total of 30 respondents which includes 15 male and 15 female respondents were involved in this study. The respondents were chosen using the convenience sampling method. The tool used to elicit the responses is a questionnaire which is similar to a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). DCT was used in Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). This study uses the DCT that Maslida, Marlyna and Muhammad Fadzeli (2011) adapted from Blum-Kulka (1984). This tool requires the respondents to read and understand ten situations to which they have to write their apology based on each situation. The ten situations involve different offenses made at a cafeteria, library, lecturer's room, hostel and faculty. These places are places that a student is familiar with. The offenses vary from returning books to lender late, ringing mobile phone in the library, parking a car at the staffs' parking lot, calling someone by mistake and so on (see appendix). The respondents were asked to write their responses to the situations as honest and natural as they can.

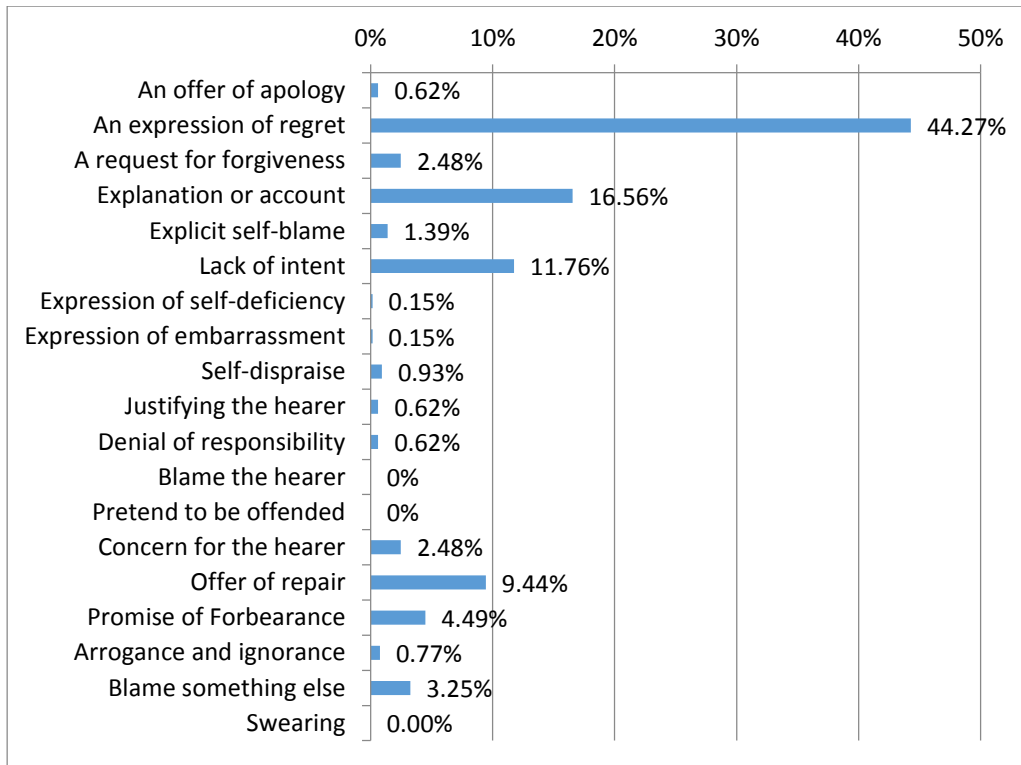
The validity of the questionnaire is determined by sending it to a panel of experts. The face and content validity were examined. The panel also have examined the suitability of the questionnaire and ensured that it is easy to use. The questionnaire was modified based on the feedback of the panel. The reliability is measured using test-retest method. Five respondents were selected to answer the questionnaire and a week later they answered the questionnaire and showed consistency in their responses.

Findings

The data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The questionnaires were labeled as M1 to M15 for the male respondents and F1 to F15 for females. The responses for each respondent were encoded based on CCSARP apology typology strategy, which Banikalef and Malyna (2013) adapted from the original typology outlined by Olshtain and Cohen (1983). The strategies were coded using code A until I (see Table 1).

Code	Strategy	Total Respondent	Percentage of respondents
A1	IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device): An offer of apology	4.0	0.62%
A2	IFID: An expression of regret	286.0	44.27%
A3	IFID: A request for forgiveness	16.0	2.48%
B.	Explanation or account	107.0	16.56%
C1	ACK (Acknowledgement of responsibility): Explicit self-blame	9.0	1.39%
C2	ACK: Lack of intent	76.0	11.76%
C3	ACK: Expression of self-deficiency	1.0	0.15%
C4	ACK: Expression of embarrassment	1.0	0.15%
C5	ACK: Self-dispraise	6.0	0.93%
C6	ACK: Justifying the hearer	4.0	0.62%
C7.1	Denial of responsibility	4.0	0.62%
C7.2	Blame the hearer	0.0	0%
C7.3	Pretend to be offended	0.0	0%
D.	Concern for the hearer	16.0	2.48%
E.	Offer of repair	61.0	9.44%
F.	Promise of Forbearance	29.0	4.49%
G.	Arrogance and ignorance	5.0	0.77%
H.	Blame something else	21.0	3.25%
I	Swearing	0.0	0.00%
	TOTAL	646.0	100%

Table 1: Percentage of Apology Strategies Used by University Students



Graph 1: Percentage of Apology Strategies Used by University Students

The findings show that the most used apology strategy is an expression of regret, which was employed by 44.27% of the respondents in their apology. This strategy can be seen in the use of words such as “Sorry” or “I am sorry”. In Malaysian context, saying “sorry” is considered as an apology. Therefore, there is a low percentage of respondents using an offer of apology as a strategy to apologize. Only 0.62% of the respondents use this strategy.

The followings are the examples of A2 (an expression of regrets):

“Emm, emm, Maam, I want to say sorry to you because I am late to return your book. For sure next time I didn’t do it again, seriously.”

M11

“I’m truly sorry, miss or madam, for being late to return your book.”

M12

“Miss, I am sorry for not silent my phone.”

F5

“Hey, I am sorry. My bad. Thank you for letting me know.”

F9

The strategies that were never used are swearing, blaming the hearer, and pretending to be offended. Therefore, there is no example for these strategies. The least used strategies were an expression of self-deficiency and an expression of embarrassment. Only one respondent used these strategies.

The following is the example of C3 (an expression of self-deficiency):

“Sorry sir/miss. I am late for return your book because I left it at home.”

M2

The following is the example of C4 (an expression of embarrassment):

“O, you not (name of my friend). I am so sorry. Your face look very similar to one of my friend

M14

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings in the study are similar to the findings in a study by Atieh and Seyed Yasin Yazdi (2011). An expression of regrets was the most used strategy by the respondents in local Malaysian universities. 39 percent of Malaysian students used this strategy when apologizing. The finding from this study also shows that the strategy of an offer of apology was also low (0.5%) (Atieh & Seyed Yasin Yazdi, 2011). In contrast, this study found that an expression of self-deficiency was the least used apology strategy while Atieh and Seyed Yasin Yazdi (2011) found that this strategy was used by 10 percent of the respondents in their study.

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that the most used strategy is an expression of regret like “I am sorry”. Therefore, teachers can expect this expression as common and socially acceptable as an apology. However, teachers should also teach other strategies to apologize. For example, strategies that are suitable in Malaysian context but are less commonly used such as an offer of apology (I apologize), a request of forgiveness (Forgive me), concern for the hearer (Are you alright?) and promise of forbearance (It won’t happen again).

In the field of teaching and learning, the teaching of apology strategies can be implemented in language classrooms through speaking activities. One of the suggested activities is role play activity. According to Kitao and Kitao (2014), a role play is an activity which involves a situation that is given to the participant to act out. Teachers can include the need of apology in the situations for the role play. In addition, films can also be used to teach apology strategies to students. A study showed that there are similarities in the use of apology strategies in films and in real life situations. Even though there are small differences, the strategies used in the films do reflect the strategies used in real situations and therefore can be a rich platform for students with limited chance to interact with English speakers (Huang, 2004).

We suggest that any future research on apology strategies should focus on the effectiveness of role-plays and films in teaching apology strategies. Teachers also need to focus on teaching the strategies that are less-used by the students.

References

- Banikalef, A. & Marlyna, M. (2013). Social Beliefs for the Realization of the Speech Acts of Apology among Jordanian EFL Graduate Students. *English Linguistics Research*. 2(1), 134-146.
- Bataineh, R. F. & Bataineh, R. F. (2006). Apology strategies of Jordanian EFL university students. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38, 1901-1927.
- Blum-Kulka, S. & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and Apologies: A Cross-cultural Study of speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics*. 5(3), 196-213
- Centre for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (2016), University of Minnesota.
- Farashaiyan, A. Amirkhiz, S.Y.Y. (2011). A Descriptive-Comparative Analysis of Apology Strategies: The Case of Iranian EFL and Malaysian ESL University Students. *English Language Teaching*, v4 n1 p224-229.
- Finnegan, E. (2012). *Language: Its Structure and Use*. p.10, p.304. Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
- Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, Men and Politeness*. Longman, London.
- Huang, H.C. (2004). Apologies in Film: Implications for Language Teaching. Paper presented at the 13th Symposium on English Teaching.
- Hymes, D. (1972). "On Communicative Competence". In J. B. Pride and J. Holmes (Eds.). London: Penguin Books Ltd. As cited in Wu, W. (2008). Misunderstandings of Communicative Language Teaching. *English Language Teaching* 1(1), 50-53.
- Istifçi, I. (2009). The Use of Apologies by EFL Learners. *English Language Teaching*, vol. 2, No.3, 15-25.
- Khaled Jebahi. (2011). Tunisian University Students' Choice of Apology Strategies in a Discourse Completion Task. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43, 648-662.
- Kim, G. J. (2012). Preface. *Graduate Employability in Asia*. UNESCO Bangkok.
- Kitao, K. & Kitao, S.K. (2014). Using Parallel Corpora to Compare Apologies of Native English Speakers and Japanese Learners of English. Proceedings of CLaSIC 2014.
- Lay, C.T. and Arnold, E.F. (2012). Employability of Graduates in Asia: an Overview of Case studies. *Graduate Employability in Asia*. UNESCO Bangkok.
- Maslida Yusof, Marlyna Maros & Muhammad Fadzeli Jaafar. (2011) Oops Maaf: Politeness Strategy and the Redemption of Offence. *Jurnal Melayu* (8), 27-50
- McQuaid, R.W. and Lindsay, C. 2005. The Concept of Employability. *Urban Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp.197-219
- Nurul Jamilah binti Rosly. (2013). Kesantunan Berbahasa dalam Kalangan Pelajar IPTA: Perbandingan Pelajar Tempatan dan Pelajar Asing. Prosiding Seminar Antarabangsa Linguistik dan Kebudayaan Bahasa Melayu VIII.94-102.
- Olshtain, E. & Cohen, A. (1983). Apology: A speech act set. In Wolfson, N. & Judd, E.(Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and Language acquisition*. (Pp.18- 35.) Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Richards, J.C. & Rogers, T.S. (1986). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A description and analysis*. Cambridge. Cambridge Language Teaching Library.

- Robles, M.M. (2012). Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 453-465.
- Widdowson, H.G. (1978). *Teaching Language as Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wu, W. (2008). Misunderstandings of Communicative Language Teaching. *English Language Teaching* 1(1), 50-53.