



An Investigation of Apology Strategies Employed by Filipino Business Management Learners

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Abstract: Several apology studies conducted in the field of linguistics have based their results on a corpus of collected data. This research, on the contrary, has considered the use of raw and natural events to investigate the societal and contextual factors that might have affected the apology strategies utilized by the participants. Using Cohen and Olshtain's (1981, in Elham, 2016) classification of different types of apology strategies, this paper determined the apology strategies used by 50 Filipino Business Management learners enrolled in a private school in Muntinlupa City, and the effects of other factors such as social distance, social status, and severity of the offense in the way they frame their apologies. Descriptive statistics was used to compute for the Mean Percentage Score (MPS) of each apology strategy based on the participants' responses to the Oral Discourse Completion Tasks (Oghanian, 2016) and from the adapted Written Discourse Completion Tasks by Al Masaeed, Waugh, and Burns (2018). There are a series of findings worth acknowledging in this study: 1) most of the participants used explicit expressions of apologies, most specifically, in expressing their remorse; 2) the participants considered the context of the situation and social constraints in expressing sincerity and regret in the apology; and 3) the apology strategies used were aimed at reestablishing relationships among the interlocutors. This study could assist the teachers in developing materials and teaching students to become more pragmatically competent.

Key Words: apology strategies; Filipino learners; language learning; pragmatics; speech act

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the pendulum of research on language learning has shifted from the traditional focus of grammatical structures to communicative purposes in real-life contexts. More than the acquisition of grammar and lexis, one should know the appropriate utterances by which elements of

time and place, manner, and socio-cultural backgrounds of interlocutors must be placed at the core of the communication process (Hymes, 1972 in Pride and Holmes, n.d.). Moreover, Canale and Swain (1980) identified four components for an individual to be communicatively competent: *grammatical competence* (or one's understanding of phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax), *discourse*



competence (or one's cognition in the reception and production of texts to achieve coherence and cohesion), *strategic competence* (or one's awareness of difficulties in terms of grammar or discourse and ways on how to compensate linguistic deficits) and lastly, *sociolinguistic competence* (or one's consciousness in perceiving and producing language for various communicative functions in different speech communities). All of which are essential in establishing good and harmonious relationships between and among the interlocutors in different contexts. Noteworthy, among the four above-mentioned components, considerable attention has been given to interlocutors' sociolinguistic competence which is closely interrelated to another domain termed as pragmatic competence.

In the field of pragmatics, the concept of speech acts plays a significant role. Generally, speech act puts a premium on how words can elicit actions using performative verbs (e.g. "I apologize." to express apology). Bach (2010) emphasized that using words, one can make a request, seek answers, give commands or orders, make commitments, express gratitude, convey apologies and so on.

The act of apologizing is performed to address "B's face-needs and intended to remedy an offense for which A takes responsibility" (Holmes, 1998, in Harris, 2006, p. 732); thereby maintaining harmonious relationships and restoring the broken connection (Kitao & Kitao, 2013) with B, the apologizee (Oghanian, 2016). This definition, as Harris (2006) pointed out that the primary motive behind apologies is to save the face of the person offended and its main goal is to restore the equilibrium between two individuals involved in the process.

If the offenders' act of apologizing saves the apologizees' face and warrants restoration of what was broken between them, what should they say or how should they do it?

Cohen and Olshtain (1981, in Elham 2016) examined how people apologized and categorized these strategies into five types:

1. Use of an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID)
 - a. an expression of regret, e.g., *I'm sorry*
 - b. an offer of apology, e.g., *I apologize.*
 - c. a request for forgiveness, e.g., *Excuse me/forgive me/pardon me.*
2. Explanation or account, e.g., *There was heavy traffic.*
3. Taking on responsibility
 - a. Explicit self-blame, e.g., *it's my mistake.*
 - b. Lack of intent, e.g., *I didn't do it on purpose.*
 - c. Expression of self-deficiency, e.g., *I totally forgot it.*
 - d. Expression of embarrassment, e.g., *I feel ashamed.*
 - e. Self-castigation, e.g., *It was very stupid of me.*
 - f. Justify the hearer, e.g., *You are right to be angry and disappointed now.*
4. An offer of repair, e.g., *I'll pay for the damage.*
5. Promise of forbearance, e.g., *It won't happen again.*

Although several studies have provided considerable scrutiny on apology strategies across diverse languages and cultures (see, for example, Al Masaed, Waugh, & Burns, 2018; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016; Uglu & Abidin, 2016; Chamani & Shariati, 2010; Banikalef, Maros, Aladdin, & Alnatour, 2015), little is known as to how Filipino learners perform the speech act of apologizing. This is what the present study aims to investigate. Specifically, it aims to examine the apology strategies Filipino Business Management learners use following Cohen and Olshtain's (1981, in Elham 2016) categories.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The present study used descriptive statistics and qualitative approach to research. Descriptive



statistics was done by computing the Mean Percentage Score (MPS) of each apology strategy after collecting the participants' oral responses on six role-play scenarios as part of the Oral Discourse Completion Tasks (Oghanian, 2016).

2.2 Participants

A total number of 50 Filipino learners in the Accountancy and Business Management Strand participated in the present study. Their ages range from 17-18. All of them were full-time and regular learners in a private school in Muntinlupa City. In this institution, both English and Filipino are the media of instruction in various subject areas. The participants consisted of a heterogeneous mixture which means that advanced, middle, and novice levels of learners were included.

2.3 Instrumentations

The primary data collection tool was the ODCCT which required participants to respond to the six-role play scenarios. Two Filipino Language majors (Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Secondary Education) translated the ODCCTs from English to Filipino language to ensure full comprehension of the given scenarios by the participants.

2.4 Research Procedure

Prior to the facilitation of the research, the researchers sent permission letter to the President/CEO and the Principal of the private institution to conduct the ODCCT. Copies of the Informed Consents/Parental consents were also distributed. After the approvals, the researchers started the gathering of data. The researchers also piloted and tested all the data collection tools among ten learners before their actual administration.

First, the researchers conducted the ODCCTs (Oghanian, 2016) consisted of six role-play scenarios for each participant. The researchers flashed the PowerPoint presentations slides one by one by where

the situation and the picture of the perceived apologizee were included. The participants were reminded to respond quickly and as honestly as possible. The learners as assumed apologizers read the prompt and responded to each scenario. Their responses were audio-recorded.

2.5 Data Coding and Analysis

The responses of the ODCCTs were transcribed based on the researchers' framework for transcription. Second, the apologies were classified and coded using Cohen and Olshtain's categorization of apology strategies. The answers were encoded in Microsoft Excel software.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below indicates the frequency and percentage distribution of the various apology strategies used by the ABM students across the six role plays provided.

Table 1. Distribution of apology strategies

Apology Strategies	f	%
IFID	246	31.78%
Explanation	237	30.62%
Repair	215	27.78%
Responsibility	62	8.01%
Forbearance	14	1.81%

As seen in Table 1, almost 32 per cent of the Filipino students of the ABM strand who participated in this study preferred to use *IFID* strategy, where words such as, "*sorry*", "*pasensya*", "*paumanhin*", or "*patawad*" were explicitly used in their apologies as seen in the following responses:

"Sir with all due respect, sorry po talaga kasi hindi ko po alam hindi ko po talaga expected... di naman po ako agad nainform".



"boss pasensya na pasenysa na hindi ko dala yung mga handouts...bawi nalang po ako sainyo next meeting po".

Based on the foregoing extracts, it may be safe to argue here that the participants are explicit or direct when they apologize. The same phenomenon was seen in Abidin and Uгла's (2016) study where respondents in consideration of the relationship and statuses between the harmed party and the offender would explicitly or directly use IFIDs in performing an act of apologizing. Likewise, Chamani and Shariati (2010) identified this strategy as the widely used strategy among Iranians.

What is equally noticeable and unique in the students' responses in this study is the presence or use of other performative phrases in their expressions of apologies. For instance, while others would start their sentences with the usual IFIDs, some respondents would prefer to begin with or use interjections or words of grievance and reverence to the harmed party when apologizing. This strategy is probably used to minimize the gravity of the harm or offence. Take, for instance, the following sample apology lines from the data:

"Hala sir uhm sir kasi on the way pabalik dito sir nabangga ko yung kotse sorry po talaga kasi sir hindi ko ineexpect e masyado ko atang nabilisan".

"ay maam pasensya na po nasira po yung bumper ng sasakyan dadalhin ko nalang po sa paayusan ng sasakyan".

"pasensya na yung nagkaroon ng kaunting aksidente boss e nasira yung ano e plate nung ano eh nung sasakyan pero gagawan ko ng paraan boss para mapaayos"

"sorry sir hindi ko po sinasadya na masira po yung sasakyan niyo willing po akong iparepair or palitan po yung sasakyan nasira ko".

The second frequently utilized apology strategy at 31 per cent was the use of *explanation*. The respondents evidently see to it that they justify their feeling of regret by giving more details of what happened. These findings are also evident in various studies on apology strategies (see, for example, Banikalef, Maros, Aladdin, & Al-natour, 2015). These are evident in the following responses from the data:

"Naku, sorry napag-intay kita ng kalahating oras dahil tinapos ko pa kasi yung ginagawa kong sanaysay"

Uy be. Sorry a? kase nadulas sa kamay ko yung laptop mo."

Finally, the least strategy used by the respondents (1.81%) in this study was *forbearance*, where a promise not to do it or that it will not happen again was stated or offered. In Al Masaeed, Waugh, and Burns' (2018) study involving low-, middle-, and high-proficient language learners' speech act of apologizing, this strategy was mostly utilized by low-proficient learners who gave vague explanations as opposed to specific reasons provided by the high-proficient learners. This could be because no one can really guarantee that the same mistake, offence, or violation will not happen, take place, or be committed again, for no one really knows or has control over. It is also possible that the lack of vocabulary among the low-proficient participants in the previous study cited above could be a reason behind the vague explanations. Interestingly, the low frequency usage of the said strategy could also be attributed to the fact that the interlocutors in the hypothetical scenarios or role plays have already established a certain level of friendship in which the will not to commit it again is immaterial or is probably overshadowed by the offender's expression of an act of apology.

Notable findings from the study worth describing and discussing here is the presence of the combination of strategies used by the respondents. The most common combination of apology strategies noted are the following:



1. IFID+EXPLANATION+REPAIR
2. EXP+REPAIR
3. IFID+REPAIR
4. IFID+EXPLANATION+REPAIR+
RESPONSIBILITY
5. IFID+EXPLANATION+REPAIR+
RESPONSIBILITY+FORBEARANCE

The researchers argue that these combinations could have been influenced or affected by the social distance and social status between the apologizer and the apologizer.

It can be inferred that the low-high power relationship between the offender and the offeree influenced the way their apologies were constructed. Considering themselves inferior to their bosses, the respondents, assuming the role of the offerees, explicitly use performatives such as "*paumanhin*", "I apologize", "*pasensya*" followed by a phrase explaining what caused the mistake, taking responsibility and accountability of it, and expressing a promise of not doing it again.

Searle (1979) claims that a person who commits a mistake must express an apology in having a feeling of regret for the offended party to feel that the apology is sincere and true. This obligatory element, which gauges the sincerity of the apology, is evident in the responses as they on providing a solution or repair to the harm done. Despite its minimal usage among the respondents, it is still evident how the ABM students give importance to the essence of expressing the feeling of regret in their apologies.

In the role play situations where the parties involved have known each other for a long period of time, the use of IFID + Explanation + Repair + Responsibility + Forbearance strategy shows that overfamiliarity does not make the apology less sincere.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the apology strategies used by participants in this study were not limited to the abovementioned five strategies. It is notable that they modified their strategies when apologizing through the use of words, such as, *grabe*, *super*, *sobra*, interjections which

include words such as *hala*, *uy*, *ay*, curses and invocations, and the denial of responsibility which either shows blaming other parties or the offended party itself.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study revealed that the Business Management students from a private school in Muntinlupa used a variation of apology and modified apology strategies depending on the situations presented in the Oral Discourse Completion Task. The students based their strategies on the context of the situation, social constraints such as social status and distance, and even the severity of the offense.

Four implications can be drawn from the results and discussions of the present study. First, curriculum planners must incorporate learning competencies in the curriculum guide targeting the pragmatic use of language. The aims in oral language fluency domain should consider factors such as the context and the speaker's relationship to the other interlocutors as part of a discourse community. Second, textbook writers could consult a body of corpora in choosing context-dependent utterances. In this way, the sample texts or spoken data to be written down in the textbooks would be more authentic and appropriate for the learners to apply in real-life situations. Third, the above-mentioned assumptions will heed the call for the language teachers to address the possible drawbacks of studying the different speech acts (SAs) in isolation. It appears that of the three types of SAs, illocutionary force is the one that contains specific speech acts that speakers use on a daily basis. Therefore, learners must essentially and critically know when, where, why, to whom, and how they should apologize, request, complain, refuse, compliment, and the like. Language educators could then implement performance and authentic tasks in which learners can achieve competency of apology production as they deal with varied situations in different places and toward different types of people. It can be surmised that the use of GRASPS (Goal,



Role, Audience, Situation, Product, and Standard) framework in writing task prompts should be put into premium. Lastly, this paper could contribute to the limited corpus about the apology strategies that Filipinos employ in different contexts. To this end, the present study could pave the way for other discourse analysts and researchers in the field of applied linguistics to replicate, validate and strengthen the corpus that this study revealed about the apology strategies of the Filipinos.

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