

กลวิธีแสดงวาทกรรมการกล่าวขอโทษ ของนิสิตวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ

มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร

Apology Strategies used by English Major Students at

Naresuan University

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจความแตกต่างของกลวิธีการขอโทษในหลากหลายสถานการณ์ของกลุ่มตัวอย่างที่มีจำนวนปีการศึกษาต่างกัน และเพื่อตรวจสอบว่าจำนวนปีการศึกษานั้น มีอิทธิพลต่อกลวิธีการขอโทษของกลุ่มตัวอย่างหรือไม่ กลุ่มตัวอย่างในการศึกษาค้นคว้า ได้แก่ นิสิตวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ ชั้นปีที่ 1 จำนวน 50 คน และนิสิตชั้นปีที่ 3 จำนวน 50 คน จากมหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร ดำเนินการวิจัยโดยให้นิสิตทำแบบทดสอบชนิดเติมเต็มบทสนทนา (DCT) ให้สมบูรณ์ ข้อมูลที่ได้ก็นำมาแบ่งตามประเภทของชุดกลวิธีการขอโทษของ Cohen & Olshtain (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) ผลการวิจัยวิจัยพบว่า นิสิตชั้นปีที่ 1 ใช้กลวิธีการขอโทษน้อยกว่านิสิตชั้นปีที่ 3 อีกทั้งความถี่ในแต่ละกลวิธียังมีความแตกต่างกันระหว่างนิสิตทั้ง 2 ชั้นปี

คำสำคัญ: กลวิธีแสดงวาทกรรมการกล่าวขอโทษ; วาทกรรม; แบบทดสอบชนิดเติมเต็มบทสนทนา; จำนวนปีการศึกษา

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Abstract

An attempt of this study was to investigate the differences of English apology strategies in various social situations from participants who had differing years of study in order to determine whether or not the number of years of study has an influence on the apology strategies used. The data of this study were elicited from 50 first-year students and 50 third-year students, majoring in English at Naresuan University, Thailand, using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) The data were categorized based on Olshtain & Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) apology speech act sets. The findings revealed that the first-year students used a smaller number of categories than the third-year students, and the frequency of use in each category also differed between the two groups of students.

Keywords: Apology Strategies; English Major Students, Naresuan University

Introduction

Teaching and learning English as a second and foreign language is inevitably involved with communicative competence. Hymes (1966) states that communicative competence is concerned with rules of both language and conceptual ideas about social domain. Hence, learning English as ESL and EFL necessitates the ability to attain pragmatic competence as well. In human communication, people use language to communicate and the language often includes intended messages. It is a responsibility for an interlocutor to interpret the

message as it is intended by a speaker in a particular socio-cultural context. (Fraser, 2010) Because language is a set of words which not only consists of sound and meaning, it also entails the production of symbols, words, or sentences in performance of the speech act in a particular context. (Searle, 1969).

In the aspect of language, speech acts are considered extensively the most culturally specific involved (Kalisz, 1993; Kachru, 1998; Chakrani, 2007; Meier, 2010). As seen in the countries where English is used as a second language, people who have

inadequate abilities of pragmatic knowledge may not succeed at communicative aims (Fraser, 2010). Moreover, the overall research on English language study reveals that even non-native English learners who even have an advanced-level in English usually lack pragmatic knowledge in a range of speech acts. This is because the grammar and vocabulary of English that they have cannot be counted as 'fluent' if they are still unable to accurately produce socially and culturally in language (Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991, as cited in Thijittang, 2010). Apart from grammar and vocabulary, culture and society of the target language also play a crucial role in the proportion and production of speech acts, even in the same speech act may be used differently across culture (Farashaiyan & Amirkhiz, 2011). Besides, the EFL learners' proficiency can have an effect on a selection of speech acts which is influenced by the first language norms (Istifci & Kampusu, 2009). In addition, apologies, refusals, requests, compliments and complaints are

considered as face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It is explicit that EFL learners often experience problems producing speech acts polite and appropriate (Tamimi Sa'd and Mohammadi, 2014).

Among the speech acts, apology is one type that differs cross-linguistically and is used frequently in human's life (Salehi, 2014). Goffman (1971) points out that apology can be viewed as remedial interchanges in which the speaker attempts to reestablish social harmony after an offence has happened. In terms of apology, it occurs when the apologizer attempts to restore social harmony and seeks for forgiveness requiring saving interlocutor's face and apologizer's own face (Trosborg, 1995). According to Olshtain & Cohen (1983), humans apologize when social norms are violated, and the recipient may decide to accept or deny those utterances. In light of aforementioned fact, it would be a serious problem for EFL learners especially in Thailand to use the apology strategies appropriately when they engage with English native speakers. Many studies

have been investigating the speech act of apology in Thailand – both Thai apologies solely and cross-culturally to English native speakers such as the works of Intachakra (2004), Sakseranee, Chantrachote & Pansubkul (2006), Thijittang, (2010), Prachanant (2014). However, none of the studies focus on the apology strategies among participants who have different language proficiency measured by the number of years of English study. It is still questionable whether or not the number of years of English study affects students' production and selection of apology strategies. Thus, the current cross-sectional study was conducted to investigate apology strategies used by English major undergraduate students – the first- and the third-year at Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate apology strategies used by English major undergraduate students – the first- and the third-year at Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand. Moreover, the similarities and

differences between apology strategies used by the two participant groups were also taken into account as to whether or not the number of years of study has a significant impact on apology strategies used.

Research Questions

The present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the apology strategies used by the first-year and third-year students majoring in English?
2. Are there any significant differences in using apology strategies between the first-year students and the third-year students majoring in English?

Theoretical Framework

Speech act of apology and its strategies

As mentioned in the introduction, human's utterance necessitates not only language as a communicative competence, but it is also involved in how to deal words to reach an appropriation in the particular culture. As a matter of fact, human's

utterance strategies can vary in order to make a real-life interaction as realistic as possible, especially apologies. Olshtain (1989) describes apology as a speech act in which the speaker tries to provide a support for the hearer who was actually affected by a particular violation. Goffman (1971) points out that apology can be viewed as remedial interchanges in which the speaker attempts to reestablish social harmony after an offence has happened. In terms of apology, it occurs when the apologizer attempts to restore social harmony and seeks for forgiveness requiring saving interlocutor's face and apologizer's own face (Trosborg, 1995). By the time sociocultural competence have gained attention, many researchers have developed and classified possible apology strategies such as Fraser (1981), Olshtain & Cohen (1983), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), House (1988), Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) and Holmes (1990). This study will make use of apology strategies provided by Olshtain & Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) since it

has been employed as a framework by many research studies published on the speech act of apology and can be used to compare and contrast in cross-cultural studies of other researchers easily.

Research Methodology

Participants

The participants of the present study included 50 first-year and 50 third-year English student majoring in English at Naresuan University. They enrolled in the second semester of the year 2015.

Research Instrument

In the present study, a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was employed to collect the data, adopted from Thijittang's DCT (2010) which was a modified version of Olshtain & Cohen (1983), Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein (1986), Bergman & Kasper (1993). In the structure of the DCT, there were two parts: the instruction of how to answer in the questionnaires and fifteen open-ended questions. The validity and reliability of the DCT was evaluated by three experts, and it was subsequently

piloted with 30 first-year and 30 third-year students majoring in English of Education program to assess feasibilities of the study such as clarity of instructions and questions, effectiveness, ease of completion, amount of time required for participants and if the participants provided some useful information and feedback.

Procedure

The data were collected using the DCTs which were distributed to the participants in class.

Data Analysis

The obtained data were sent to two coders, a native speaker of English and the first author, to encode and classify the responses into apology strategies classified by Olshtain & Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989). They were grouped into six major components with nine sub-categories as follows:

1. Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) (e.g. "I'm sorry" "I apologize" "Forgive me")
2. Explanation of account (e.g. "The traffic was terrible.")
3. Taking on responsibility

3.1. Explicit self-blame (e.g. "It is my mistake.")

3.2. Lack on intent (e.g. "I didn't mean it.")

3.3. Expression of self-deficiency (e.g. "I was confused.")

3.4. Expression of embarrassment (e.g. "I feel awful about it.")

3.5. Self-dispraise (e.g. "I'm such a dimwit.")

3.6. Justify hearer (e.g. "You're right to be angry.")

3.7. Refusal to acknowledge guilt

3.7.1. Denial of responsibility (e.g. "It wasn't my fault.")

3.7.2. Blame the hearer (e.g. "It's your own fault.")

3.7.3. Pretend to be offended (e.g. "I'm the one to be offended.")

4. Concern for the hearer (e.g. "Are you all right?")

5. Offer of repair (e.g. "I'll pay for the damage.")

6. Promise of forbearance (e.g. "It won't happen again.")

For validity and reliability of data analysis, it was stipulated that the results from the two coders must agree in consensus. If there was a disagreement in categorization, discussions between the two coders was done until a final decision was made. After that, descriptive statistics, i.e., frequencies and percentages, and an independent sample t-test were used to find the similarities and

differences between responses of participants in the two groups.

Findings

This section demonstrates results of the participants obtained from the DCT questionnaire. The results were presented as frequency counts, percentages and p-value as follows:

Table 1 The comparison of the apology strategies performed by the first- and the third-year English major participants

No	Apology Strategies	1 st - Year	3 rd - Year	P-Value
		Students	Students	(Sig.)
		(F, %)	(F, %)	2-tailed
1	Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs)	800 (48.99)	736 (41.94)	0.015*
2	Offer of repair	189 (11.57)	235 (13.39)	0.047*
3	Explanation of account	188 (11.51)	195 (11.11)	0.728
4	Explicit self-blame	134 (8.21)	159 (9.06)	0.197
5	Concern for the hearer	102 (6.25)	123(7.01)	0.292
6	Expression of self-deficiency	98 (6)	94 (5.36)	0.785
7	Promise of forbearance	66 (4.04)	104 (5.93)	0.002*
8	Lack of intent	42 (2.57)	62 (3.53)	0.130
9	Self-dispraise	7 (0.43)	12 (0.68)	0.261
10	Expression of embarrassment	6 (0.37)	11 (0.63)	0.270
11	Justify the hearer	1 (0.06)	20 (1.14)	0.000*
12	Denial of responsibility	0	3 (0.17)	0.182

13	Blame the hearer	0	1 (0.06)	0.322
14	Pretend to be offended	0	0	0
Total and significant value of all strategies		1,633 (100)	1,755 (100)	0.909

Note: The differences between the frequencies of strategies made by both participants are statistically significant at the 0.05 level were presented with *

Table 1 above revealed the differences and similarities of responses between the two groups. There was a significant difference in four of the fourteen apology strategies. These were “Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs)”, “Offer of repair”, “Promise of forbearance” and “Justify the hearer”. In overview, however, the third year participants generally used apology responses more than the first year participants (except “IFIDs” and “Expression of self-deficiency”) in terms of frequency counts (1,633 and 1,755 times), but there were ten of fourteen apology strategies which had no statistically significant difference between responses of the two subject groups. They were “Explanation of account”, “Explicit self-blame”, “Concern for the hearer”, “Expression of self-deficiency”, “Lack of intent”, “Self-

dispraise”, “Expression of embarrassment”, “Denial of responsibility”, “Blame the hearer”, and “Pretend to be offended”. Considering the overall picture, there was no statistical significance.

Discussion

An attempt of this study was to investigate apology strategies used by the first- and third-year English major students, Naresuan University. As for the research questions mentioned earlier, the findings will be discussed in this section. The first research question of the present study was: What are the apology strategies used by the first-year and third-year students majoring in English?

The results revealed that the third-year participants had a larger number of apologies as well as more strategy selections than the first-year

participants. That is, the first-year participants responded with 11 apology strategies for a total number of 1,633 times while the third-year participants responded with 13 apology strategies for a total number of 1,755 times. Moreover, there were 4 apology strategies which were statistically significant. These findings are consistent with the results in other studies with the explanation that the number of and strategy selections broaden with learners' increasing proficiency (Chang, 2009; Istifici & Kampusu, 2009; Rastegar & Yasami, 2014).

For Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), according to Olshtain & Cohen (1983), IFIDs is a routine-like and overwhelming strategy which was consistent with other studies (Suszczyńska, 1999; Alfattah, 2010; Thijittang, 2010; Salehi 2014; Tamimi Sa'd & Mohammadi 2014). After considering a linguistic acquisition, "I'm sorry" is the starter for learners, then with the learners' increasing proficiency, the combination of other strategies will be acquired later (Chang, 2009). Interestingly, IFIDs

strategy seems to have a discrepancy of use in this finding. The first-year students responded 800 times whereas the third-year responded 736 times in fifteen situations. There was a statistically significant difference at the .05 level ($P=0.047$). This finding was inconsistent with Istific & Kampusu's (2009) study which reported that advanced level English learners employed IFIDs and in more combinations more than intermediate level learners. After carefully investigate with our finding, the reason that the first-year's IFIDs was redundant was possibly because they have limited awareness of sociolinguistic variations such as social status, social distance and severity of offense. For instance, the situation of "university lecturer was late for grading assignments to students", IFIDs was used by 100% of the first-year participants and at least 1 times (e.g. I apologize. I forgot it. I hope you can forgive me) whereas some of the third-year participants did not chose IFIDs in this situation because they felt that they were at higher social status and the situation was not too severe (e.g.

Please calm down, I'll grade you as soon as possible.) That is to say, sociolinguistic variations and cognitive learning should be taught as explicit learning in order to gain more understanding. In addition to sociolinguistic awareness, the findings also revealed the emergence of L1 transfer in using IFIDs. "Don't be angry" (Yakrotpailoei) were found from 5 respondents in the first year data. It may have been transferred from the L1 cultural norm. In the case of "Don't be angry" response was consistent with Suszczynska's (1999) study which reported that most of Hungarian EFL learners preferred to use "Don't be angry" which was asking the victim not to be angry transferred from their L1 "Ne haragudjon" more than "I'm sorry". This implies that this sample cannot make a definite statement to English native speaker norms because "speech acts are not language-independent 'natural kinds, but cultural-specific communicative routines" (Wierzbicka, 1985, 1991, as cited in Suszczynska, 1999, p. 1058). That is to say, some respondents from

this present study confirmed the statement above.

Another strategy which had a statistically significant difference was "Offer of repair". This strategy will appear only in a specified-situation in which verbal apology seems to be inadequate or physical injury and damage are involved (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). As seen in the findings, the first-year students responded 189 times whereas the third-year students responded 235 times. There was a statistically significant difference at the .05 level ($P=0.047$). A possible reason that the third-year students employed this strategy more than the first-year students was because they may have felt that some situations were too severe. For instance, in the situation of "speaker damaged a friend's camera", the data showed that 96% of the third-year students chose to respond with "Offer of repair" whereas only 80% of using this formula was found from the first-year students. In the case of "Promise of forbearance" and "Justify the hearer", there were statistically significant differences at the level of .01 ($P=0.002$) and .001

($P=0.001$) respectively. From the data, the third-year students tended to respond with these two strategies more than the first-year students in terms of frequency counts. One of the possible reasons for the difference was that the third-year students have a higher proficiency level or they had obtained L2 pragmatics by implicit learning such as knowledge from classrooms, movies, songs and fictions. In addition, the individual differences (e.g. personal preferences and learners' pragmatic competence), cultural norms, and values are other factors affected the apology strategies of the learner. (Farashaiyan & Amirkhiz, 2011)

Lastly, a majority of the first-year participants were not found to have used the following apology strategies: "Denial of responsibility", "Blame the hearer" and "Pretend to be offended", whereas the third-year participants used "Denial of responsibility" 3 times, "Blame the hearer" 1 time and "Pretend to be offended" was not found. The finding was consistent with Thijittang (2010) who stated that blaming others was

not a common apology strategy for Thai people.

With regards to the second research question (Are there any significant differences between apology strategies used by the English major students in the first and third year?), there were statistically significant differences in four apology strategies as reported earlier. Nevertheless, the results from an Independent Sample t-Test reported that there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in the use of all apology strategies. This implies that the number of years of study has no influence on apology strategies used. However, the present study confirms results of Istifci & Kampusu's study (2009) that there were some similarities and differences between advanced English learners and intermediate English learners.

Conclusion

This study investigated the use of apology strategies in English by English major students to determine whether or not the number of years of

study has an influence on the apology strategies used. The present investigation of apology strategies used by English majors in different years of study revealed that out of 14 different apology strategies, the first year students used 11 strategies whereas the third year used 13 strategies, indicating that more years of English study could help students gain more strategies of apology. In addition, it showed that for some strategies like “Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs)”, “Offer of repair”, “Promise of forbearance” and “Justify the hearer”, there was a statistically significant difference between the frequencies of the strategy used by the two student groups. The findings from this study provide useful implications for EFL teachers. The fact that the learners have limited apology strategies

reflected their need of explicit instruction. The saliency of a particular strategy should help increase learners’ development of apology strategies. The learners’ practice of strategies used is also important. Besides, cross-cultural similarities and differences in speech act realization need to be prioritized for the learners in order to prevent misunderstanding or miscommunication. However, the study has some limitations. In the use of a DCT, psychological elements of the participants such as voice, facial expression and gesture were not taken into account. Thus, another research study on apology strategies in the spoken context should be conducted. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate whether or not gender, male or female, will have an impact on the use of apology strategies.

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