Apology in Women's and Men's Language

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Abstrak

Artikel ini dimulai dengan perkataan 'Maaf adalah kata yang paling sulit diucapkan', ini bukan dikarenakan pengucapannya yang sulit tetapi karena dengan mengucapkan kata 'Maaf' dapat diartikan bahwa seseorang mengakui bahwa ia telah melakukan suatu kesalahan. Permintaan maaf cenderung dikatakan ketika seseorang telah melanggar norma sosial (Scher dan Darley, 1996). Pria dan wanita mungkin memiliki urutan prioritas yang berbeda saat mengucapkan kata 'Maaf'. Strategi Face Threatening Act (FTA) merekapun kemungkinan berbeda. Penelitian ini dirancang untuk mencermati hal tersebut diatas. Ada tiga pertanyaan yang diajukan dalam penelitian ini, yaitu: (1) Apa strategi permintaan maaf yang paling sering digunakan oleh laki-laki dan perempuan? (2) Bagaimanakah distribusi permintaan maaf dalam situasi yang berbeda?, dan (3) Bagaimanakah hubungan antara strategi permintaan maaf dengan jarak sosial, kekuatan sosial, beratnya pelanggaran dan kewajiban meminta maaf? Subjek penelitian terdiri dari 20 laki-laki dan 20 perempuan yang merupakan siswa pascasarjana di salah satu universitas di Bandung. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah Discourse Completion Test on Apology (DCT).

Abstract

This article starts with English saying "sorry is the hardest word"; this is not because it is hard to pronounce or spell, but because it could mean that someone admitted that she/he had done something wrong. Apologies tend to be offered when an individual has violated a social norm. When given in this context, apologies serve as remedial work, designed to smooth or remedy any social disruption that was caused by the norm violation (Scher and Darley, 1996). Men's and women's order of priorities might not the same, which would probably make strategies of weaken or avoid a Face Threatening Act (FTA) different between them. This study underlies a number of questions as follows: 1) What kind of apology strategies do the subjects of this study use most often?, 2) How does the distribution of the apology strategies vary across different situations?, 3) In what way is a choice of an apology strategy related to social distance, social power, severity of offence, and obligation of apology? This study investigates the similarities and differences among males and females from these three points of view. The subjects of this study were 40 students of School of Postgraduate Study in one of the universities in Bandung. The subjects were majoring in English Language Education. They were 20 males and 20 females. The subjects were given the full description of the apology situations and were asked to evaluate Discourse Completion Test on Apology (DCT) questionnaires.

Introduction

Apologies tend to be appropriately offered when an individual has violated a social norm. Scher and Darley (1996) indicate that when given in this context, apologies serve as remedial work, designed to smooth or remedy any social disruption that was caused by the norm violation. In accordance with this, experts such as Cohen & Olshtain (1981) explain some reasons for people in using apologies, such as: to say that they are sorry, to explain why the offense happened, to make a repair for the offense and maintain a good relationship with the addressee.

Literature Review

Speech Act of Apology

The most extensive analysis of the content of apologies has been carried out by the Cross-Cultural Speech Acts Realization Projects (CCSARP) (among others: Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, as cited in Huang, 2007: 124). This project began as an attempt to develop a measure of sociocultural competence in the learning of a second language (Cohen and Olshtain, 1981, as cited in Scher and Darley, 1996), but developed into a comprehensive analysis of the realization of the speech acts of requests and apologies across cultures.

The CCSARP has proposed five strategies that form the "apology speech act set". These five strategies are as follows: (1) an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID; such as, "I'm sorry," "I apologize," or "Excuse me"); (2) an expression of the speaker's responsibility for the offense; (3) an explanation or account of the cause which brought about violation; (4) an offer of repair; and, (5) a promise of forbearance. CCSARP had found that these five strategies are used frequently in apologies in a variety of languages and across a variety of cultures. The discussion is now proposed to elaborate these strategies.

First, illocutionary force indicating device (IFID). Illocutionary force indicating device of an apology can be identified by the use of verb such as "sorry", "excuse", "forgive", and "apologize" as in "I am <u>sorry</u> that I was late" or "We <u>apologize</u> for the delay in answering your call"; by the use of intensifier such as "really", "very" as in "I am <u>really sorry</u>"; and by using interjection such as "Oh!", "Oops".

Second, concerning an expression of the speaker's responsibility for the offense; this strategy could indicate that the offender recognizes his/her fault in causing the infraction. When dealing with acknowledgement of responsibility, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) distinguish the degree of recognition on the part of the apologizer: 1) Acceptance of the blame, for example: "It's my fault." 2) Expression of self-deficiency, such as: "I was confused/ I didn't see it/ you are right." 3) Expression lack of intent, for example: "I didn't mean to." 4) Implicit expression of responsibility, such as: "I was sure I had given you the right direction.", and 5) not accept the blame at all, in which case there may be a denial of responsibility: "It wasn't my fault" or even blaming the hearer: "It's your own fault".

Third, concerning giving an explanation or account; in this strategy the speaker describes the situation which caused him/her to commit the offense. This explanation might be used by the speaker as an indirect way of apologizing, for example, in explaining his late coming, a person may say "The bus was late" or "My clock doesn't work."

Fourth, regarding an offer of repair; this strategy may be given when the apologizer makes a bid to carry out an action or provide payment for some kind of damage resulting from his/ her infraction, the examples of this, are "How can I make it up to you- why don't I buy you lunch on Friday?" or "Would you be willing to reschedule the meeting?".

Finally, regarding a promise of forbearance; this strategy could be used to indicate that the apologizer commits him/herself to not having the offense happen again, the examples are as follow "It won't happen again!" or "I will never be late again!"

Face-threatening Acts

An extensive cross-cultural/linguistic variation in directness/indirectness in the expression of speech acts has now been established especially in face threatening acts (FTAs) such as requests, complaints, and apologies (Huang, 2007: 125).

Experts such as Brown and Levinson (1987 as cited in Huang, 2007) explain that in the first place, FTAs could threaten positive face, negative face, or both. Acts that threaten positive face include expressions of disapproval, accusation, criticism, disagreements, and insults; on the other hand, acts that threaten negative face include advice, orders, requests, suggestions, and warnings; while, acts that threaten both positive and negative face include complaints, interruptions, and threats.

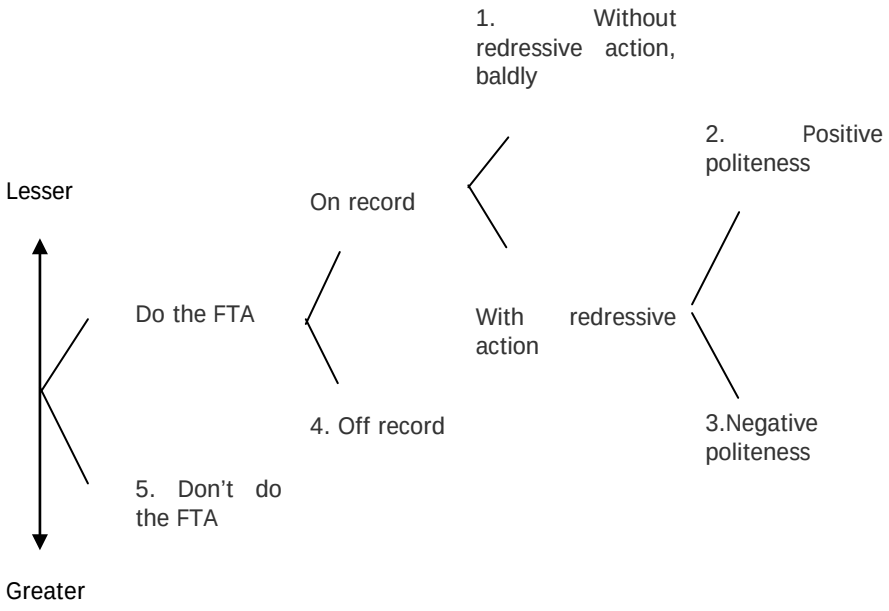
A second distinction can be made between acts that primarily threaten the speaker's face and those that primarily threaten the addressee's face. The speaker can threaten his or her own face by performing, for example, the acts of accepting compliments, expressing thanks, and making confessions. To confess means to say or admit that one has done wrong (The Advanced Learner's

Dictionary of Current English). Admitting that one has done wrong is one of five strategies mentioned in CCSARP that is the offender recognizes his/her fault in causing the infraction. On the other hand, acts such as advice, reminding, and strong expression of emotions threaten primarily the addressee's face wants.

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987 as cited in Huang, 2007) posit three independent and culturally sensitive social variables according to which the strength of weightiness of an FTA can be measured. First, there is social distance (D) between the speaker and the addressee. Second is relative power (P) of the addressee over the speaker. Finally, the third variable is the absolute ranking (R) of imposition in a particular culture. The strength of an FTA is measured by adding together the three variables D, P, and R, on the basis of which amount of face work needed or the degree of politeness required can be worked out.

There is a set of five strategies one can choose from to avoid or weaken an FTA on Brown and Levinson's model. The strategies are given in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Brown and Levinson's set of FTA-avoiding strategies with the estimation of risk of face loss.



In the set of the above strategies, it can be noticed that the more threatening an FTA, the more polite (i.e. the higher-numbered) the strategy the speaker tends to employ to mitigate its effects.

There are times when something is potentially so face threatening, that one would not say it (Brown and Levinson, as cited in Thomas, 1995: 175). However, Tanaka (1993, as cited in Thomas, 1995: 175) discusses two sorts of 'saying nothing'. First, when the speaker decides to say nothing and genuinely wishes to let the matter drop; and, second, when an individual decides to say nothing but still wishes to achieve the effect which the speech act would have achieved had it been uttered. Nevertheless, Thomas (1995: 175) mentions that there is a third situation, where there is such a strong expectation that something will be said; that saying nothing is in it self a massive FTA. The example of this is failing to express condolences to someone on the death of the loved ones (Thomas, 1995: 175).

Theorizing Women's and Men's Language

While several data on the content of speech acts of apologies have been accumulating, Holmes (1995) looks at gender differences in apologies and found both similar and differences between males and females. The most obvious differences that Holmes' (1995) study found were these following three points:

1. Women used significantly more apologies than men did.
2. Women used most apologies

for the hearers of equal power, while men apologized to women of different status.

3. Women used most apologies for female friends whereas men used most for socially distant women.

Overall, the previous study introduced here seems to indicate the following points. Firstly, the study found realization patterns of apology across gender in global level of analysis, even though there were several differences among them. Secondly, choice of apology strategies in certain situations is closely related to social/situational parameters. In other words, people change their strategies according to hearers or situations.

Former research on the relationship between gender and language had also been conducted by Deborah Tannen (1990) who writes about differences in the ways women and men communicate. According to Tannen (1990), although both genders have the same primary value, the order in which these genders pursue the values would not be the same, as presented on the next page:

Man priorities are to:	Woman priorities are to:
1. Achieve status	1. Achieve involvement
2. Avoid failure	2. Avoid isolation
3. Avoid isolation	3. Achieve status
4. Achieve involvement	4. Avoid failure

From the above data, it is clear that men's and women's order of priorities are not the same, which would probably make strategies of weaken or avoid an FTA different between them. Tannen (1990) states that compared to men, women tend to use more polite and tentative language.

Furthermore, Tannen (1990) also points out the characteristics of ways of speaking of both sexes. According to her, women seek agreement or harmony in a conversation as to achieve the above mentioned priorities (achieve involvement and avoid isolation). On the other hand, Tannen (1990) concludes, men are sensitive to the power structure and social standing among the interlocutors, and try to display their own superiority or defend themselves because their prime priority is to achieve status. In her work, Tannen (1990) is not concerned with the causes of her findings; her narrative is descriptive rather than analytical.

The Present Study

Research Questions

A number of questions in this study are presented as follow:

1. What kind of apology strategies do subjects use most often?
2. How does the distribution of the apology strategies vary across seven situations?
3. In what way is a choice of an apology strategy related to social distance, social power, severity of offence, and obligation of apology?

This study investigates the similarities and differences among males and females from these three points of view.

Method

Participants

The subjects of this study were 40 students of School of Postgraduate Study in one of the universities in Bandung. The subjects were majoring in English Language Education. They were 20 males and 20 females.

Instrument

The subjects were given the full description of the apology situations and were asked to evaluate questionnaires.

(1) Questionnaire A: Evaluation of social distance, social power, severity of offence, and obligation to apology in the seven situations (see Appendix A). The evaluation of this questionnaire is based on a scale:

- Social distance on a scale of 1 to 3; (1=strangers, 2=acquaintances, 3=friends)
- Social power on a scale of 1 to 3; (1=S lower than H, 2=S and H are equals, 3=S higher than H)
- Severity of offence on a scale of 1 to 2; (1=low, 2=high)
- Obligation of S to apologize on a scale of 1 to 2; (1=low, 2=high)

Note that: S=Speaker, H=Hearer

(2) Questionnaire B: Discourse completion test on apology (see Appendix B).

The seven apology situations of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) are rearranged in this study and the subjects were asked to write their responses as realistically as possible according to how they would actually respond in the given situations. The analysis of apologies used in this study was based on the five strategies in the speech act of apology (Olstain and Cohen, 1983). Each utterance was classified according to what speech act strategies it attained. In case when an utterance included more than two of them, they were assigned to both categories.

Results

A. Questionnaire A

The weighted means of the responses are presented in Table 1. Since there was no significant difference among the two groups of subjects (male and female), mean scores of 40 subjects are.

Table 1. Evaluation of the Four Factors. x=Weighted Means of Each Scale (N=40)

Factors		Situations S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
1	Distance Scale: 1-3	1.72	1.82	1.50	1.17	2.70	1.17	2.35
2	Power Scale: 1-3	2.62	1.42	2.30	1.60	2.05	1.77	1.97
3	Severity: high/low	1.17	1.62	1.45	1.70	1.45	1.62	1.55
4	Obligation: high/low	1.47	1.80	1.42	1.87	1.57	1.80	1.55

S=Situation

The data presented in Table 1 indicates the following points. Firstly, the evaluation of the level of social distance (familiarity) between S and H varied from as high as 2.70 in S5 (a friend is late for a meeting with a classmate) to as low as 1.17 in S6 (a driver backs up into someone else's car) and S4 (a waiter brings a wrong order), where it is clear that the interactors are totally strangers. Also, it is interesting to note that the subjects perceived the level of familiarity as slightly higher in S2, where a student apologizes to a professor for forgetting the book (1.82) than in S1 (1.72) where a professor apologizes for not reading the paper.

Secondly, the perception of power between interactors varied from as high as 2.62 in S1 (a professor apologizes to a student) to as low as 1.42 in S2 (a student apologizes to a professor). The data also indicates that the subjects evaluated social power between a waiter and a customer quite similarly as that between a driver and the other driver.

Thirdly, the severest offence that the subjects perceived was a waiter brings a wrong order as in S4 (1.70) and the data showed interesting fact that the severity of offence was equal in S3 (a manager keeps a student waiting) with that in S5 (a friend is late for a meeting with a classmate).

While the least severe offence was in S1 (a professor apologizes to a student). From those findings, it can be concluded that the lower the social power of a speaker, the higher the severity offence as seen in S2 and S4. In other words, the subjects perceived that offences by speakers of low social status should be more serious than those by speakers of high status. And finally, the results of obligation of apology were very similar to those of severity of offence. That is to say, if severity of offence was high, obligation to apologize was also high.

Questionnaire B

Table 2. Choice of Strategies in Seven Situations (%) (N=40)

Situations / Strategies		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
IFID	F	70	95	90	90	95	80	75
	M	40	95	60	90	75	90	75
Responsibility	F	20	55	5	40	15	45	90
	M	25	60	15	20	25	35	65
Explanation	F	20	50	90	10	50	10	15
	M	15	20	65	5	25	5	0
Offer of Repair	F	50	55	10	80	10	50	0
	M	10	30	5	70	10	20	0
Promise of Forbearance	F	0	0	0	0	30	0	0
	M	0	0	0	0	15	0	0

F=Females, M=Males, S=Situation

The results of analysis of the apology data collected from 40 subjects are presented in Table 2. They point out the percentages of the subjects' choice of each strategy. Each percentage represents the number of choices made out of the total number that is potentially possible, so if all males (20) use IFIDs, it is presented as 100%.

From the data presented in Table 2, it was found that IFIDs appeared in all situations in quite high percentages. The use of IFIDs varied from high percentages in S2 (a student and a professor) and in S4 (a waiter and a customer) where both females and males subjects used this strategy equally as they perceived that speakers of lower social status had to apologize- to a low percentage in S1 (a professor and the student) this was in accordance with what had the subjects' perceived in Questionnaire A that when the speaker's social status was high then the obligation to apologize was low. By comparing situation 1 and 2, it is obvious that the professor did not use IFIDs as often as the student did. The results give the impression that a speaker of high social status apologized less than a speaker of low social status did.

Concerning the expressions of the speaker's responsibility for the offense, both male and female subjects used this strategy more in S7 where a speaker offended a fellow worker. It is clear from the data that women used this strategy much higher than men did. According to Tannen (1990) this is probably because women seek agreement or harmony in a conversation as to achieve involvement and to avoid isolation while men are sensitive to the power structure and social standing among the interlocutors, and try to display their own superiority or defend that women used significantly more apologies than men did.

Thirdly, from examining the results of Questionnaire A and B, it became clear that factors such as social distance and severity of offence were closely related to the subjects' realization patterns of apology.

On the subject of explanation or account, the data signifies that the speakers of higher social status (as in S3) tended to use this strategy more often than the case when the speakers' status was equal or low. The manager who came late for giving an interview (S3) explained why he/she was late in order to make a good excuse. The data also indicates that the subjects chose an offer of repir in high percentage in S4 (a waiter and a customer) where the subjects perceived that the speaker's social status was low.

Regarding the fifth strategy of apology which is promise of forbearance, it can be covered from the data that subjects used this strategy only in S5 where a student had to apologize for being late for a meeting with his/her friend.

Finally, as the data mentions in Table 2, it can be seen clearly that women used significantly more apologies than men did. From this result, it can be concluded that this study got similar result as Holmes's (1995) findings.

Conclusions

This study investigated the similarities and differences of realization patterns of apology between males and females. With the small sample of subjects, the results of this study cannot be generalized; however, some interesting results were found.

Firstly, the results of this study seem to reinforce the notion that illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) such as, "I'm sorry," "I apologize," or "Excuse me" was the kind of apology strategy that the subjects used most often.

Secondly, the distributions of the apology strategies varied across seven situations depended on the perception of power between interactors.

Furthermore, the study also found that women used significantly more apologies than men did.

offence were closely related to the subjects' realization patterns of apology.

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Scher, S.J. and Darley, J. M. 1997. *How Effective Are the Things People Say to Apologize? Effects of the Realization of the Apology Speech Act.* Journal of Psycholinguistic Research. Vol. 26. No.1. Plenum Publishing Corporation.

Tannen, D. 1990. *You Just Don't Understand*: *Women and Men in Conversation* Ballantine, 1990, ISBN 0-688-07822-2; Quill, 2001, ISBN 0-06-095962-2 http://www.bing.com/search?q=SURCLE+Vol.+I.26-35&form=QBRE&filt=all themselves because their prime priority is to achieve status.

Thomas,D., 1995, *Meaning in Interaction*, London, Longman.

Appendix 1

1. Social distance on a scale of 1 to 3; (1 = strangers ,2 = acquaintances , 3=friends)
2. Social power on a scale of 1 to 3; (1=S lower than H,

2=S and H are equals,
3=S higher than H)

3. Severity of offence on a scale of 1 to 2; (1=low, 2=high)
4. Obligation of the S to apologize on a scale of 1 to 2; (1=low, 2= high)

Situation 1: A university professor promised to return the student's paper that day but didn't finish reading it.
Social distance 1____2____3
Social power 1____2____3
Severity offence 1____2
Obligation of apology 1____2

Situation 2: A student borrowed her professor's book, which she promised to return that day, but forgets to bring it.
Social distance 1____2____3
Social power 1____2____3
Severity offence 1____2
Obligation of apology 1____2

Situation 3: A manager has kept a student waiting for half an hour for a job interview because she was called to an unexpected meeting.
Social distance 1____2____3
Social power 1____2____3
Severity offence 1____2
Obligation of apology 1____2

Situation 4: The waiter in an expensive restaurant brings fried chicken instead of chicken steak to a surprised customer.
Social distance 1____2____3
Social power 1____2____3
Severity offence 1____2
Obligation of apology 1____2

Situation 5: An unpunctual student is late again for a meeting with a friend with whom he is working on a joint paper.
Social distance 1____2____3
Social power 1____2____3
Severity offence 1____2
Obligation of apology 1____2

Situation 6: A driver in a parking lot backs up into someone else's car.
Social distance 1____2____3
Social power 1____2____3
Severity offence 1____2
Obligation of apology 1____2

Situation 7: The speaker offended a fellow worker during a discussion at work. After the meeting, the fellow worker mentions this fact.
Social distance 1____2____3
Social power 1____2____3
Severity offence 1____2
Obligation of apology 1____2

Thank you very much for your cooperationAppendix 2

Gender: Male/Female

Instruction: You will be asked to read seven situations calling for an apology. In each case, the person who you owe the apology will speak first. Please respond as realistically as possible.

Situation 1: You are a university professor. You promised to return the student's paper that day but didn't finish reading it.
Student : "Did you read my paper?"
You : _____
_____

Situation 2: You borrowed your professor's book, which you promised to return that day, but forgot to bring it.
Professor : "Did you bring the book?"
You : _____
_____

Situation 3: You are a manager and you have kept a student waiting for half an hour for a job interview because you were called to an unexpected meeting.
Student : "What happened?"
You : _____
_____

Situation 4 You are a waiter working in an expensive restaurant. You brought fried chicken instead of chicken steak to a surprised customer.
Customer : "I ordered chicken steak."
You : _____
_____

Situation 5 You are an unpunctual student. You are late again for a meeting with a friend with whom you are working on a joint paper.
Friend : "Well. You are late again."
You : _____
_____

Situation 6 You are in a parking lot and back up into another person's car.
Driver : "What did you do? See what you've done!"
You : _____
_____

Situation 7 You offended a fellow worker during discussion at work. After the meeting, the fellow worker mentions this fact.
Worker : "I feel that your remark was directed at me and I take offense."
You : _____
_____

Thank you very much for your cooperation

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