

Pragmatics Strategies of English of Thai University Students

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Abstract

Pragmatics is about language in use. Language users need to acquire not only linguistic rules but also sociolinguistic rules of language use to perform communication effectively and appropriately. Apology, among other speech acts, has received great attention in pragmatics research as politeness is essential in social interaction. Though being polite is a universal, the connotations of politeness might differ across cultures. Research studies in the performance of apology speech acts among Thai learners reveal that there are more strategies for apologizing in English than there are in Thai, not only in terms of frequency but also of quantity. There is also often a negative transfer on the part of Thai learners in the production of apology acts in English for reasons such as transferring structures from Thai to English and transferring Thai social norms of societal hierarchy by considering the social status of the hearer. Negative transfer tends to occur where the two languages do not share the same language system thus resulting in the production of errors. Thai EFL learners often have problems communicating in English as language is deeply related to its culture and there may be some difficulties in acquiring the nuances in language that are culturally-bound. Thai learners learning English in a Thai context are not exposed to the target community and culture and they find it difficult to use speech acts properly in English. Major problems that language learners face in intercultural communication are pragmatic. Therefore, for language learners, mastering the correct use of L2 speech acts is important in acquiring L2 pragmatic competence. A study was conducted to examine and compare apology as a speech act in Thai and English and investigate pragmatic strategies of English used by Thai undergraduate university students. The data were collected via a questionnaire called Discourse Completion Task (DCT) which consists of 15 situations with different sociolinguistic factors. The participants who agreed to participate in the study were asked to write their responses for each situation in English. The findings showed that there are more strategies used for apologizing in English than in Thai. Also, universality and culture-specificity co-exist in the act of apologizing in Thai and English. The interlanguage data revealed the influence of sociolinguistic factors: social distance, social status and severity of offense. With the social distance variable, apologies were most frequent among acquaintances only in native Thai speakers group while the other two groups, English native speakers and Thai EFL speakers, were mostly between strangers or unfamiliar people.

Key words: pragmatics, sociolinguistics, interlanguage, apology speech acts

Introduction

The importance of pragmatics has been emphasized in the area of language learning. In particular, the studies of speech act sets have been widely investigated in the field of interlanguage pragmatics. Speech acts reflect the fundamental cultural

values and social norms of the target language. Lacking the cultural, social, and pragmatic context in cross-cultural communication can lead to misunderstandings, both in producing the appropriate speech act and perceiving the intended meaning of one uttered by somebody else. That is why it is important to know how speech acts are used in both the native and the target language of second language learners. In this paper, pragmatics, apology speech acts, and relevant works, particularly those dealing with apology strategies are first reviewed. The analysis and contrastive of apology strategies in English and Thai from previous studies are subsequently discussed. Then the distribution of apologies which were analyzed according to sociolinguistics factors; social status, social distance and severity of offense are presented. Finally, some suggestions which arise from the findings for language teaching and learning are recommended in the conclusion.

Theoretical Background

Pragmatics

A subfield of linguistics developed in the late 1970s, pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a concrete speech situation which is usually a conversation. Pragmatic competence has been conceptualized by many scholars. According to Levinson (1983) pragmatics basically comprises the study of language usage. For Robert, Davies and Jupp (1992), pragmatics is centrally concerned not only with syntax and the literal meaning of words but with meaning intended by the speaker and interpreted by the listener. Meanwhile, Kasper and Rose (2001) describes pragmatics as the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. From these views, pragmatics can be viewed as a study which explains language use in context and is concerned with speaker meaning, not utterance meaning.

Pragmatics is often divided into two components: pragmalinguistics, which concerns appropriateness of form, and sociopragmatics, which concerns appropriateness of meaning in social context (Leech, 1983). Pragmatic competence is the speaker's knowledge and use of rules of appropriateness and politeness which dictate the way the speaker will understand and formulate speech acts. Speech acts are one of the key areas of linguistic pragmatics. Specific speech acts include apology, complaint, compliment, refusal, request, and suggestion. Research findings overall indicate that even advanced-level nonnative speakers often lack native-like pragmatic competence in a range of speech acts (Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991). In other words, speakers who may be considered 'fluent' in a second language due to their mastery of the grammar and vocabulary of that language may still be unable to produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate. It is necessary for L2 speakers to be exposed to or at least to be properly taught that pragmatic rules of other languages which are not always the same as those of their own.

With regards to the significance of pragmatics to language learning and the lack of study which focuses on cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics of Thai and English, further investigation into pragmatic strategies of adult Thai learners of English helps them become pragmatically aware and improve their pragmatic knowledge.

Speech Act of Apology

The focus of this investigation is the speech act of apology. Among the speech acts we engage in daily, apology is frequently used in conversation. The function of apology is to restore and maintain harmony between a speaker and a hearer. People expect to apologize when they think that they have violated social norms (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). Like other speech acts such as requests and refusals, apology is face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and thus demands a full understanding of its usage in order to avoid miscommunication.

Olshtain (1989 :156-7) views an apology as “a speech act which is intended to provide support for the hearer who was actually or potentially mal-affected by a violation.” When speakers agree to offer an apology, they are willing to humiliate themselves to an extent which, by definition, makes an apology a face-saving act for the hearer and a face-threatening act for the speaker, in Brown and Levinson’s (1978) terms. For Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), apologies are generally post-event acts and they signal the fact that a certain type of event has already taken place or the speaker might be aware of the fact that it is about to take place. By apologizing, the speaker recognizes the fact that a violation of a social norm has been committed and admits to the fact that s/he is at least partially involved in its cause. Hence, apologies involve loss of face for the speaker and support for the hearer. Holmes (1990:156) gives the definition of an apology as a speech act addressed to remedy an offence for which the apologizer takes responsibility, and thus to restore equilibrium between the apologizer and the person offended. The views on the definition of apology and its function expressed by various scholars show the theoretical views on the face- needs, social norms and functions of politeness. Different scholars define apologies in different ways. The diversity in definitions of apologies leads to the diversity in classifications in apology strategies. Also, the speech act of apology is complex in the sense that it may employ a variety of possible strategies. Researchers have developed systems for classifying apology strategies in various ways. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) provide the classification of apology strategies into five main categories which can be summarized as follows:

1. Expression of apology: use of an expression which contains a relevant performative verb, i.e. “I’m sorry,” “I apologize,” “Excuse me,” or “Please forgive me,” “Pardon me.”
2. Acknowledgement of responsibility: recognition by an apologizer of his or her own fault in causing the offense, i.e. “That’s my fault,”.
3. Explanation: explanation or account of situations which caused the apologizer to commit the offense, i.e. “I have family business,”.
4. Offer of repair: offer made by an apologizer to provide payment for some kind of damage caused by his or her infraction, which can be specific and non-specific, i.e. “I will do extra work over the weekend.’
5. Promise of non-recurrence: committed made by an apologizer not to let the offense happen again, i.e. “It won’t happen again.”

Our study was based on the apology strategies provided by Holmes (1990) since her construct has been used as a competitive framework to categorize apology strategies of English native speakers and Thai native speakers in previous research studies and some comparison could be made. Also, the analysis of interlanguage apologies of Thai EFL learners can be done on the basis of Holmes’ categorization in order to study pragmatic transfer of first language norms. Holmes (1990) categorizes the apology strategies in four super- strategies with eight sub-categories;

A. Explicit expression of apology

- A1 An offer of apology/ IFID e.g. I apologize; please accept my apologies.
- A2 An expression of regret e.g. I’m sorry; I’m afraid.

- A3 A request for forgiveness e.g. Excuse me; forgive me.
- B. Explanation or account e.g. The traffic was horrendous.
- C. Acknowledgement of responsibility
 - C1 Accepting the blame e.g. It is my fault; silly me.
 - C2 Expressing self-deficiency e.g. I was confused; I forgot.
 - C3 Recognizing a hearer (H) as deserving apology e.g. You're right.
 - C4 Expressing lack of intent e.g. I didn't mean to break it.
 - C5 Offering repair/ redress e.g. I'll get a new one for you.
- D. Promise of forbearance e.g. I promise it won't happen again.

Apart from the classifications mentioned above, apologies can be intensified in order to increase apologetic force. Some intensifying devices are the use of adverbials: 'very', 'terribly', 'awfully' in English (Márquez Reiter, 2000). Also, apologies can be downgraded to present the offense as less severe or to reduce responsibility for the offense, as in "Am I really late for the meeting?"

As a type of speech act, the apology has been studied extensively in previous pragmatic studies in many different languages in comparison with English: Cantonese (Rose, 2000), Danish (Trosborg, 1995), Hungarian and Italian (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998), Hebrew (Olshtain, 1989; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985), Japanese (Kondo, 1997; Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper, & Ross, 1996), Korean (Kim, 2001; Lee, 2000) and Romanian (Demeter, 2006). These studies in apology produced many interesting results. First, learners' L2 proficiency and their first language's socio-cultural norms affect their use of apology strategies (Ellis, 1994). Second, in the case of English apology, the expressions with 'sorry' are used as part of a social interaction formulae (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1995). Third, learners experience difficulty in performing and understanding apology in L2 though strategies used in this speech act are universal (Ellis, 1994). Fourth, contextual factors such as severity of offense, social status and social distance, and formal or private relationships influence speakers' choice of apology strategies (Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Tanaka, 1991; Wolfson, Marmor, & Jones, 1989). Fifth, some studies highlight the implication of the pragmatics studies concerning L2 pragmatic teaching and learning.

Further studies are needed to investigate cross-cultural and linguistic understanding of this particular face-threatening act. To this day only two studies (Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Richards & Sukwiwat, 1983) focusing on interlanguage pragmatics of the apology speech act have been carried out based on Thai learners of English. Thus, the aim of our study was to investigate apology as a speech act in Thai and English and explore interlanguage data on apologies used by Thai learners of English. It should be noted that this study focuses only on the use of speech act of apology by the speaker. Whether or not the hearer accepts the apology is beyond the scope of this study but might be considered for future research.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine and compare apology as a speech act in Thai and English and investigate pragmatic strategies of English used by Thai undergraduate university students. The following research objectives were raised:

1. To examine apology as a speech act in Thai
2. To examine apology as a speech act in English
3. To examine the similarities and differences of the speech act of apology in Thai and English

4. To investigate the pragmatic strategies of Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in relation to the use of apology as a speech act

Research Methodology

This study consisted two phases: contrastive analysis of apology speech act data and interlanguage data analysis.

Phase 1: Previous Studies Analysis and Contrastive Analysis Data

In phase 1, data from previous studies was analyzed and compared. Previous studies of Thai apologies and English apologies were reviewed and the similarities and differences of apologies in Thai and in English were examined by the researchers.

Phase 2: Interlanguage Data

In phase 2, data was gathered by using questionnaires and interview techniques. The Thai undergraduate students were invited to participate in the study. They were provided with information sheets which inform them about the aims of the study, its procedure, the process involved in the dissemination of the findings, confidentiality, and security of information and a consent form.

The data was collected via a questionnaire called Discourse Completion Task (DCT) which consists of 15 situations with different sociolinguistic factors.. The total numbers of questionnaire respondents were 160 Thai undergraduate students at Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Thailand. There were ten students agreed to participate in individual interviews. The interview used a structured format and took approximately thirty minutes.

Data Analysis consists of two parts: quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively to discover the frequency and percentage of each response in DCT. The analysis use in the study based on the four main strategies classified by Holmes (1990).

Qualitative data gathered from the interview was transcribed and then transcripts were categorized according to social variables focused on in this study.

Findings and Discussions

Phase 1: Previous Studies Analysis and Contrastive Analysis Data

Apologies Strategies in Thai

Studies on pragmatic performance of Thai speakers are almost absent There are three existing research studies that concentrate on apologies in the Thai language within the framework of linguistic politeness. The first was a study by Bergman and Kasper (1993) who investigated the performance of native apologies of American English (Hawaiian) and Thai, and non-native apologies produced by Thai learners of English. The second was done by Makthavornvattana (1998) for her Master's degree thesis published in Thai, wherein she explored apologizing strategies in Thai and the relationship between these strategies and offense weightiness. The most recently study is that done by Intachakra (2001) who studied linguistic politeness by focusing on three expressive speech acts; compliments, apologies and thanks of native speakers of British English and Thai.

Two research studies, Intachakra (2001) and Makthavornvattana (1998), were reviewed. The findings of Thai apologies from Intachakra's (2001) corpus are comparable to the previous studies of English apologies due to the fact that Intachakra used the same coding system, and samples of Thai apologies are also provided. Whereas Bergman and Kasper's (1993) findings are not comparable, owing to their different coding system and also the absence of samples of Thai apologies. Unlike the other studies, which grouped strategies according to coding categories, Makthavornvattana (1998) has proposed five strategies that form the apology strategies used to apologize in Thai. It is remarkable to examine her study due to the fact that some strategies found had not appeared in previous studies and she also provided samples of Thai apologies. Consequently, Makthavornvattana's (1998) and Intachakra's (2001) studies were reviewed in order to examine apology as a speech act in Thai. The apology strategies found in these two studies are as follows:

Firstly, an explicit display of apology strategy, specifically, 'k Hawthot' (ขอโทษ) literally meaning 'asking for wrongdoing', is regarded as the most common and socially neutral means of 'saying sorry' in Thai. This implies that in Thai society, when an offense has occurred, it is common that the expression 'k Hawthot' (ขอโทษ) would be used. Also, the shortened word 'thot' (โทษ) is used when the situation at hand is informal. This shortened form can be explained by the fact that a Thai speaker may feel that the act of admitting the guilt may be unduly intimidating to one's self-esteem or, too much of an FTA to the speaker's negative face that he/she opts for the briefest verbalization possible (Intachakra, 2001). Whereas, 'Khaw prathan thot' (ขอโทษอย่างเป็นทางการ) (literally meaning 'asking to be given wrongdoing') and 'Khaw apai' (ขอโทษขอโพย) (literally meaning 'asking for forgiveness') are to be used in formal situations and when converting with those having more power in status.

Secondly, apart from using explicit expressions of apology, Thai speakers prefer using either an explanation strategy or an acknowledgement of responsibility strategy to redress the FTAs. Also, Thai people might combine another strategy such as expressing lack of intent, offering repair and accepting the blame with an explicit expression of apology.

Lastly, for another sub-strategy, Thai people rarely use an explicit expression of apology in conjunction with blaming others/things by suggesting those other things or other people caused the damage. They never opted for recognizing the hearer as being entitled to an apology as recognizing H as deserving apology strategy. Moreover, Thai people sometimes use a promise of forbearance strategy. The promise words indicating future; such as, "ขอโทษในครั้งต่อไป" (in the future) "ขอโทษในโอกาสต่อไป" (next occasion) or "ขอโทษในครั้งหน้า" (Next time) are employed when a speaker promise that the same mistake will not happen again.

Apology Strategies in English

The apology strategies found from previous studies are comparable based on Holmes' categories. Review of previous studies which were studied by Holmes (1990), Intachakra (2004), and Márquez Reiter (2000) are as follows:

First, an explicit expression of apology is the most frequently occurring strategy used by native English speakers; especially, an expression of regret is the most frequently

used apology strategy. This implies that explicit apologies have always been employed when a speaker conveys an admission of guilt to the offended person.

Second, an acknowledgement of responsibility is the second most used. This result is consistent with those found by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) in that explicit expression of apology and expression of responsibility appear in British English. This would seem to imply that native speakers of British English have a tendency to use the explicit expression of apology in conjunction with an acknowledgement of responsibility. Only Holmes's New Zealand English corpus shows explanation is the second highest rank in the frequency of apology strategies. From these results, one possible explanation may be attributed to the cross-cultural differences which may affect the way native speakers of English (British English from Intachakra's and Márquez Reiter's corpus and New Zealand English from Holmes's corpus) choose apology strategies.

Third, apology strategies are selected differently from those indirect apology strategies at some points for both British English speakers and New Zealand English speakers. British English speakers show a marked preference to use acknowledgement of responsibility after explicit expression of apology, whereas New Zealand English speakers tend to use explanation or account following an explicit expression of apology. This shows cross-cultural differences between these two English speaking societies and demonstrates that speakers from different cultures may weigh the factors such as severity of offense and relationship between participants differently. These factors have been described by Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) as factors which must be considered when estimating the weightiness of a face-threatening act. Moreover, this evidence illustrates that different cultures weigh the face loss engendered by apology differently (Holmes, 1990). In short, the way apologies function in different groups or different cultures awaits further investigation.

Finally, the findings from previous research studies appear, then, that native English speakers' culture where people view apologizing behavior as a common conversational routine has a tendency to pursue negative politeness strategies. Negative politeness strategies that are mostly directly associated with expressive speech acts are the alleviation of impositions, ceremonial courtesy, exchange of deference and personal independence (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 131) while positive politeness strategies involve claims to common ground, and desires to maintain group interdependence (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 102). Thus, it can be concluded that apologies play an essential role in the remedial process in English speaking culture.

Contrastive Pragmatics: Apologies in Thai and English

In contrasting apologies in Thai and English, only explicit expressions of apology between the two languages were compared; other aspects such as topic of apology, interpersonal relationship and offense weight are not comparable since each research study focused on different aspects of apologies. Thus, the contrastive findings and discussions are as follows:

The similarities between Thai native speakers and English native speakers' apologies strategies are observed in terms of the kinds of strategy used, the distribution of strategies, and the use of sub-strategies. Both native Thai speakers and native English speakers use very similar apology strategies: explicit expression of apology, explanation, acknowledgement of responsibility, and promise of forbearance. Also, Thais and native English speakers share similar strategy

distributions. An explicit expression of apology which is a direct apology strategy was used most frequently, followed by an indirect apology strategy, and either an acknowledgement of responsibility or an explanation. With regard to the similarity of sub-strategy used between the two languages, recognizing H as deserving apology strategy was not found in Thai and it was rarely found in English.

Hence, it is possible to say that the realization of selecting some apology strategies for both Thai and English apologies is a universal phenomenon. As Brown and Levinson (1987) explain, everyone in a society tends to keep certain image of themselves, an image that is called 'face'. They claim that there are two types of face; one is 'positive face' which is the desire of the individual to be liked, appreciated and approved of, and another is 'negative face' which is the desire not to have one's person, attention, time and space invaded. These two face needs are universal.

The differences between apology strategies used by Thai native speakers and English native speakers are demonstrated in the quantity of direct acts of apologizing, explicit expression of apology, and the use of sub-strategies. Thai people do not apologize in such a wide range of contexts since there are fewer semantic indicators and fewer functions in Thai apologies. Thai speakers have only four verbal means of explicit apologizing available; Khawthot (ขอโทษ); khaw prathan thot (ขอประทานโทษ), Khaw apai (ขออภัย) and Sia jai (เสียใจ) whereas native speakers of English have at least seven of explicit apologizing available to be used: I'm sorry; I'm afraid; I apologize; excuse me; forgive me; I beg your pardon and I regret that. Here it appears that native English speakers stress showing their emotional states through a wider range of apology speech forms to make the others feel good. If politeness is equated within an individual's motivation to please the others, it seems possible that speakers who use a greater variety of apology strategies are more concerned with attending to each other's face needs. This aspect should not be taken as an argument that one group is more polite (in this case, native English speakers), and another group is impolite (in this case, native Thai speakers). Instead, appreciation that different groups of people have diverse perceptions of politeness should be deemed.

Another difference between Thai and English apologies is the use of sub-strategies. Thai and English apologies do not always have the same order of distribution in sub-categories such as offering of repair, expressing self-deficiency, expressing lack of intent and accepting the blame. Moreover, strategies that seem intended to please the hearer only exist in Thai apologies. Here, Hofstede's (1980) individualism – collectivism dimension is useful as a means to explain such differences. Hofstede created an individualism index (IDV) to assess a culture's relative position in the individualism-collectivism continuum. Cultures with high IDV are those in which the people living in those societies are highly individualistic. Their personal rights and the autonomy of an individual are of vital importance. Conversely, cultures with low IDV tend to be more group-oriented. People living in those societies must be loyal to the group to which they belong and the group's best interest always come before an individual interest, and the individual seeks to be taken care of by the group. Hofstede (1980) proposes that English speaking culture is an individualistic one and that Thai culture is a collectivistic one (Komin, 1991), therefore Thai and English apologies do not always have the same order of distribution in sub-categories. Again, this seems to indicate that people in individualism and collectivism cultures may value apologizing differently based on the cultural norms and values specific to their groups. The review of Thai and English apologies demonstrates that universality and culture-specificity co-exist in the act of apologizing. Also, it appears that no cultures are more polite than others; they are simply diverse in culture-specific ways.

Phrase 2: Interlanguage data*Questionnaire data: Apology Strategies of Thai EFL students***Apology Strategies interacting with Social Status**

Table 1 shows the distribution of apology strategies in the data according to the social status relationship between the participants. The analysis reveals that in equal status and lower status, Thai EFL speakers used the highest similar proportion of the 'express regret' apology strategy, 45.5% and 45.1%, respectively. Conversely, in higher status, Thai EFL speakers used 'express regret' apology strategy less than other two social status categories, accounting for 43%.

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of Apology Strategies Interacting with a Social Status Factor

Social Status Apology Strategies	Higher	Equal	Lower	Totals
	Number %	Number %	Number %	Number %
A. An Explicit expression of apology A1 Offer apology/ IFID	12 0.9%	10 0.6%	4 0.2%	26 0.6%
A2 Express regret	600 43.0%	728 45.5%	739 45.1%	2067 44.6%
A3 Request forgiveness	4 0.3%	24 1.5%	31 1.9%	59 1.3%
B. An explanation or account	323 23.1%	186 11.6%	216 13.2%	725 15.7%
C. An acknowledgement of responsibility C1 Accept blame	29 2.1%	50 3.1%	54 3.3%	133 2.9%
C2 Express self-deficiency	175 12.6%	196 12.3%	203 12.4%	574 12.4%
C3 Recognize H as entitled to an apology	-	-	-	-
C4 Express lack of intent	45 3.2%	44 2.8%	35 2.1%	124 2.7%
C5 Offer repair/ redress	74 5.3%	135 8.4%	81 5.0%	290 6.3%
D. A promise of forbearance	17 1.2%	46 2.9%	73 4.5%	136 2.9%
E. Alerter	32 2.3%	65 4.1%	79 4.8%	176 3.8%
F. Intensifiers of the apology	83 6.0%	115 7.2%	122 7.5%	320 6.9%
Totals	1394	1599 100%	1637	4630 100%

	100%		100%	
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The following examples from situation 9 (a university lecturer was late for grading assignments to students) show the utterances without the explicit expression of apology.

“I had a meeting yesterday so I couldn’t grade your paper. Can you come tomorrow?” (student ‘24’)

“I haven’t graded them yet. Let me return them by tomorrow” (student ‘65’)

In the above examples, Thai EFL learners did not use the explicit expression of apology in the apology situation. As an alternative, they used the ‘explanation or account’ and/or ‘offering repair or redress’ strategy. These examples show the transfer of Thai native speakers’ norm to Thai EFL speakers’ apology. Thai EFL speakers may be aware of the notion of face and their status as university lecturers, as well as the anticipated social role of their student hearers. Therefore, apologizing to students could be a serious threat to Thai lecturers’ positive face, so they tended to avoid the explicit expression of apology strategy in the apology situation.

Regarding acknowledgement of responsibility strategy, Thai EFL learners in the three social status groups used the similar proportion of expressing self-deficiency strategy: 12.6% in higher status, 12.3% in equal status, and 12.4% in lower status. Recognizing a hearer H as deserving apology was not heard at all in this data. Offering repair or redress was used most between status equals, such as friends and close acquaintances (8.4%). This may be because of the increased chance to meet each other again and to restore a relationship by other means. The promise-of-forgiveness strategy was used most by the speakers of lower position (4.5%) and between those of status equals (2.9%). On this basis it can be explained that speakers in lower and equal positions who have committed a heavy offense to the interlocutors strongly needed to choose the promise-of-forgiveness strategy in order to redress the offense.

As predicted, Thai EFL speakers in the lower status showed the highest proportion of the ‘alerter’ (4.8%). The following examples from situation 13 (a speaker bumped into a professor on a corner of a building) show how Thai EFL speakers of lower status used the ‘alerter’ strategy.

“Oh teacher! Sorry. I’m rushing to the exam room.” (student ‘1’)

“I’m sorry, Professor. I’m in hurry.” (student ‘6’)

This finding reveals the result of cultural influence. In Thai culture, terms of address are significant when expressing deference to the hearer in social interaction. Also, the hearer’s occupational title can be used as a second-person pronoun. Therefore, from this it can be assumed that Thai EFL speakers frequently used address terms such as ‘teacher’ or ‘professor’ as an alerter to show their polite intention when they are aware of the social status of the hearer.

Apology Strategies interacting with Social Distance

As regards the social distance variable, an expression of regret strategy was the most occurring strategy employed by Thai EFL speakers. Table 2 gives the following distribution: 42.6% of apologies between friends or close acquaintances, 35.8% of neutral social distant or acquaintance apologies and 51.7% of apologies between

unfamiliar people or strangers. This indicates that a majority of English apologies of Thai EFL speakers were uttered between strangers.

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Apology Strategies Interacting with a Social Distance Factor

Social Distance Apology Strategies	Close		Neutral		Distant		Totals	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
A. An Explicit expression of apology A1 Offer apology/ IFID	11	0.6%	11	1.2%	4	0.2%	26	0.6%
A2 Express regret	819	42.6%	340	35.8%	908	51.7%	2067	44.6%
A3 Request forgiveness	20	1.0%	24	2.5%	15	0.9%	59	1.3%
B. An explanation or account	246	12.8%	178	18.7%	301	17.2%	725	15.7%
C. An acknowledgement of responsibility								
C1 Accept blame	65	3.4%	41	4.3%	27	1.5%	133	2.9%
C2 Express self-deficiency	233	12.1%	88	9.3%	253	14.4%	574	12.4%
C3 Recognize H as entitled to an apology	-		-		-		-	
C4 Express lack of intent	43	2.2%	2	0.2%	79	4.5%	124	2.7%
C5 Offer repair/ redress	212	11.0%	77	8.1%	1	0.1%	290	6.3%
D. A promise of forbearance	67	3.5%	63	6.6%	6	0.3%	136	2.9%
E. Alerter	58	3.0%	69	7.3%	49	2.8%	176	3.8%
F. Intensifiers of the apology	150	7.8%	57	6.0%	113	6.4%	320	6.9%
Totals	1924	100%	950	100%	1756	100%	4630	100%

The finding confirms Brown and Levinson (1987) hypothesis that an increase in social distance (e.g. among strangers) necessitates the display of respect by means of apologies and the decrease in social distance tends not to require the production of these speech acts. This finding is similar to English native speakers data from Intachakra's (2001) corpus in which apologies were mostly exchanged between strangers. Unlike the Thai data from Intachakra's (2001) which were mostly between acquaintances. From this it can be interpreted that the Thais' social distance norm was not transferred into Thai EFL learners' apologies. Another reason may be that Thai EFL learners heard the routine form "I'm sorry" or "Sorry" very frequently from EFL textbooks or media. Additionally, they 'overlearn' the routine form (Trosborg, 1987).

The examples from situation 10 (a customer stepped on a waiter’s foot) show the apologies between strangers.

“Oh sorry!” (student ‘16’)
 “I’m sorry. I couldn’t see you.” (student ‘24’)

Another example from situation 13 (a speaker bumped into a professor on a corner of a building) shows the apologies to an unfamiliar person.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t see you.” (student ‘5’)
 “I’m sorry. I’m in hurry to get to the exam room.” (student ‘27’)

It was also evident in Figure 2 that Thai EFL speakers in the neutral group that are acquaintances showed higher proportions of explanation or account strategy (18.7%), and accepting the blame strategy (4.3%) than they did in the close and distant categories. Wolfson (1988) explained that exchanges between people who are neither strangers nor close friends or intimates need expressions of solidarity to support them. Thus, these relationships require an explanation to nurture the relationship. The case in the Thai EFL speakers’ data shows support to Wolfson’s view. The following responses from Thai EFL speakers explain why there are high percentages of the explanation strategy.

“The traffic was bad so I’m late.” (student ‘103’)
 “My car was broken.” (student ‘153’)

As predicted, Thai EFL speakers in the close friends or close acquaintances group showed the highest proportion of the offering repair strategy (11%) among the three social distance groups. This result can be accounted for in that they would have the chance to see each other again.

Apology Strategies interacting with Severity of Offense

Interestingly, Thai EFL speakers made apology the most in the ‘Not- severe’ offense. From Table 3, speakers in the not-severe offense category employed the higher frequency of an expression of regret strategy (48.9%) than speakers in the severe offense category (41.3%). Since DCT questionnaire situations in the present study contain ‘Not- severe’ scenarios which require a high proportion of the ‘expression of regret’ strategy. For example, there were two apology scenarios in which a customer stepped on a waiter’s foot and a speaker stepped on a student’s foot in a crowded elevator.

Table 3 Frequency Distribution of Apology Strategies Interacting with a Severe of Offense Factor

Severe of Offense Apology Strategies	Severe		Not Severe		Totals	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
A. An Explicit expression of apology A1 Offer apology/ IFID	18	0.7%	8	0.4%	26	0.6%
A2 Express regret	1066	41.3%	1001	48.9%	2067	44.6%

A3 Request forgiveness	37	1.4%	22 1.1%	59	1.3%
B. An explanation or account	317	12.3%	408 19.9%	725	15.7%
C. An acknowledgement of responsibility					
C1 Accept blame	109	4.3%	24 1.2%	133	2.9%
C2 Express self-deficiency	312	12.0%	262 12.8%	574	12.4%
C3 Recognize H as entitled to an apology	-		-	-	
C4 Express lack of intent	42	1.6%	82 4.0%	124	2.7%
C5 Offer repair/ redress	244	9.5%	46 2.2%	290	6.3%
D. A promise of forbearance	131	5.0%	5 0.2%	136	2.9%
E. Alerter	112	4.3%	64 3.1%	176	3.8%
F. Intensifiers of the apology	194	7.5%	126 6.1%	320	6.9%
Totals	2582	100%	2048 100%	4630	100%

The following responses from Thai EFL speakers support why this corpus was made up of 'Not-severe' offense.

"I'm sorry. I didn't see you." (student '1')
 "Oh sorry!" (student '16')

Moreover, in the 'Not-severe' offense situation, Thai EFL speakers used a higher proportion of an explanation strategy (19.9%). One of the 'Not-severe' offense situations in the questionnaire (situation 5 a senior manager didn't come to visit a junior colleague at the hospital) shows that Thai EFL participants frequently used the 'explanation' strategy. Examples are as follows:

"I'm sorry. I had a meeting yesterday." (student '47')
 "Sorry. I couldn't come because I had an urgent work. (student '97')

For the example, "I had many works" above, the researcher found some students used this utterance; this may be because of direct translation from Thai. To be close to a native-like expression, the utterance should be expressed as "I was busy." What is more, in this corpus, the finding shows the inappropriate use of apology form, for example, the speaker used "Please forgive me." for a light offense as he stepped on someone's foot. One may look at it as the apology form 'Sorry'. In Thai, it is considered exaggerated because the more common response would be "Khow Thot" ("Sorry"). In addition, some students used intensifiers where they are not needed as in "I'm so sorry. I've no intention to step on your foot." This response sounds very formal for the situation when a speaker stepped on a student's foot in a crowded elevator. The context of situation includes a 'not-severe' offense and a high level of social distance. However, in this case, the use of the extra polite form may simply be due to the learner's inadequate sociopragmatic knowledge in English.

Interview data

The interview data reflects the Thai EFL students' views in details on significance of apology, apology strategies, and apology teaching in language learning. The findings could enrich as well as confirm the findings obtained from the questionnaire analysis.

In this study, the Thai EFL students view Thai apology and English apology as social speech acts which serve a function in communication. Apology is important for Thai EFL students. They value an apology in maintaining harmony and redressing offenses.

Most of the Thai EFL students interviewed said they do not translate apology from Thai into English when they apologize in English since they use simple explicit expression of apology such as 'Sorry' which is frequently used in English class. For the three sociolinguistic variables; namely social status, social distance and severity of offense, the findings from the interview data supports the findings from the questionnaire data. When apologizing, participants are sensitive to the hearer's social status. They vary apology strategies to match with the status of the hearer which is higher, equal or lower. They also agreed that different relationship types have an effect on the apologies they produce. In addition, participants use different apology patterns in relation to severity of offense; the more severe the offense, the more possible explicit expression of apology will be accompanied by other indirect strategies such as acknowledgement of responsibility or promises of forbearance. From these results, it can be said that the choice of strategies of Thai EFL learners is determined by social variation such as social status and social distance and also type of offense.

For apology teaching in language learning, Thai EFL students agreed that explicit apology teaching will enable learners to understand clearly in selecting apology strategies appropriately for different contexts. They also agreed that comparing the similarities and differences of Thai apology and English apology can improve their communication skill in English. They believe that they will have a better understanding of how to apologize appropriately through a contrastive study of apologies in Thai and English.

Conclusion

Speech acts are difficult to perform in second language because learners may not know the cultural norms in the second language or they may transfer their first language rules and conventions into the second language, assuming such rules are universal. With regard to the social constraints such as social status, social distance and severity of offense, Thai EFL participants were well aware of whether or not to apologize and how to use suitable apology forms to meet the requirements of specific role relationships. The findings of the questionnaire data are consistent with the results from the interview data. As far as the study is concerned, the social status, social distance and severity of offense variables have a significant impact on the production of apologies. The findings from this study provide useful implications for language teaching, especially English language teaching in the Thai context where learners are being surrounded by their native language and culture. The learners need to be assisted to develop their pragmatic competence in English in order to help them avoid difficulty they might encounter in their future interaction with speakers of English.

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