Apology Strategies Used by EFL Undergraduate Students in Indonesia

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Abstract

Interlanguage speakers, regardless of proficiency level, often experience problems in communication due to their limited knowledge of how speech acts are commonly performed in the target language. The current study attempted to investigate the effects of English proficiency level on the apology strategy use by Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners from two English proficiency levels. The study employed a DCT (Discourse Completion Task) questionnaire and involved 21 A2 students and 21 B1 students majoring in English in their first-year period from an Indonesian university. Utilizing the apology strategy framework from Olshtain & Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989), the findings demonstrated no significant difference between the two subject groups in the overall use of apology strategies, whereas differences were noted at an individual strategy level. Nonetheless, the B1 group made more frequent use and a wider range of apology strategies than the A2 group. In addition, the study found two forms of pragmatic transfer made by the subjects and a new apology strategy.

Keywords: apology, speech acts, discourse completion task, EFL learners

1. Introduction

The English language used by people from different first languages and cultures plausibly leads to communication breakdown, misunderstanding or even offense. This is made possible as people carry certain intentions in their communicative practices that are often intricately realized and interpreted in different ways across speech and cultural groups (Bowe & Martin, 2014). Meanwhile, interlanguage speakers have a tendency to utilize their first language (L1) pragmatic conventions in their second language (L2) production due to their limited knowledge on how to carry out particular acts in the target language properly. Interestingly, such a phenomenon is not confined to low proficiency speakers as even EFL learners who gain the advanced level of grammar and vocabulary are frequently confronted with trouble in creating benevolent and proper apololgies, as well as other speech acts (Tamimi, Sa'ad & Mohammadi, 2014), owing to their limited pragmatic knowledge (Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991). A Korean driver, for example, apologized to an American driver by saying "I'm sorry. I'll tell police officer and I'll give money for you" (Turgut, 2010, p. 13). In fact, it is not the American cultural norm to offer money in a situation like this (idem). Accordingly, learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) need to possess not only linguistic knowledge, but also pragmatic knowledge of the language (Hymes, 1964) to be able to efficiently use the language in both production and comprehension in a specific socio-cultural context (Fraser, 2010). In other words, it is of great importance for EFL learners to have the ability to perform speech acts in the target language according to its working pragmatic conventions.

Speech act has seemingly become the most intriguing area of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP). It can be seen from the fact that speech act is often the major focus of ILP studies, leaving other areas such as conversational structure and conversational implicature barely touched (Stalnaker, 1972 as cited in Bardovi-Harlig, 2010, p.21). It has been extensively investigated by researchers around the globe attempting to reveal values and norms of learners' first language (L1) culture in their second language (L2) production and aimed ultimately to enhance learners' pragmatic competence of the target language. Among the speech acts of primary use by language speakers is apology. Apology is a speech act which varies cross-linguistically and cross-culturally (Kalisz, 1993; Kachru, 1998; Chakrani, 2007; Meier, 2010) and is used frequently in human life (Salehi, 2014). Different speech and cultural communities can have different sets of available apology strategies or use particular strategies unique to certain languages depending on the norms and values they maintain. Members of particular cultures may have different judgments on what events necessitate apologies and what kinds of apology strategies should be imbued in particular situations.

A number of studies have been conducted to find the realizations of apology involving participants of various cultural backgrounds. In Indonesian context, Wouk (2006), while conducting a study in Lombok, found that Indonesians used multiple strategies, primarily overt apology, and that there were no significant gender effects in strategy choice. In

addition, she revealed that Indonesians were inclined to provide specific explanations and avoid overt acceptance of responsibility in their apologies. Meanwhile, Adrefiza (2010), comparing the use of explicit apology strategies between Bahasa Indonesia and Australian English speakers, found that Indonesians tended to use request for forgiveness while Australians' apologies are dominated by expression of regret. Request for forgiveness is a relatively hearer-oriented strategy, whereas the expression of regret strategy is relatively speaker-oriented. , Furthermore, she added that Indonesians tended to be more elaborate, less straightforward, and monotonous in their apologies. Qorina (2012), on the other hand, investigating the use of apology strategies of EFL university students from different semesters (period of study), showed similar findings to the aforementioned apology studies in Indonesia. She found that Indonesians used expression of regret most frequently, followed by an alerter (e.g., honorific terms and endearment) and explanation. She also noticed development in the use of apology strategies from the lowest to the highest semester participants. In addition, she pointed out some pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfers in the participants' apology in English.

In addition, apology studies have been carried out to look into effects of various factors. In relation to apology in English, a number of studies accord with Qorina's finding that learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) apologize in the norm of their L1 culture (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Suszczynska, 1999; Thijittang, 2010; Qorina, 2012; Parsa, H., & Mohd Jan, 2015). Regarding gender, previous studies showed that gender (sex) does not have a significant impact on the use of apology strategies (Saleem, Azam & Saleem, 2014; Hassan, 2014; Ghanbari et al., 2015; Ali Harb, 2015). Concerning proficiency level, many believe that higher proficiency learners have better performance in apology. This claim is supported by Rastegar and Yasami (2014) who contended that there were significant differences between learners of higher and those of lower proficiency level in their apology strategy use. On a similar account, Istifci (2009) and Qorina (2012) added that higher proficiency learners were inclined to use a wider range of apology strategies and make more complex apology patterns. However, these findings are opposed by Khorshidi, Mobini and Nasiri (2016) and Mohebali and Salehi (2016) who argued that there were no significant differences in the use of apology strategies between learners of high and those of low proficiency levels. Tabatabei and Farnia (2015), in a wider scope, further claimed that there was no positive correlation between proficiency level and pragmatic competence. These inconclusive findings on the effect of proficiency levels in apology strategy use clearly prompt a call for further investigation of the effects of proficiency level on the performance of apology.

The current study was aimed at investigating variations in apology strategy use between Indonesian EFL students of two different proficiency levels. It is expected that the findings of the study can serve as one basis for teachers in developing learners' pragmatic competence. The study is also expected to contribute to the literature of interlanguage pragmatic studies, particularly the study of apology speech act. Lastly, the findings can provide a glimpse of the practice of apology by Indonesians in English. Therefore, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1) What are the apology strategies used by the English major students of A2 level and B1 level of English proficiency?

2) Are there any significant differences in the apology strategy use between the A2 students and the B1 students?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Interlanguage Pragmatics

Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) is a relatively new area of study composed of two domains: pragmatics and interlanguage. Bardovi-Harlig (2010) argues that pragmatics is the scientific study of all aspects of linguistic behavior dealing with contextual meanings. It is the study of the speaker's meaning vis-a-vis the sentence meaning that bridges the gap between language system and its use. Therefore, the definition of interlanguage pragmatics should not be far from the notion of language use in context. Meanwhile, Kasper and Rose (2002 as cited in Schauer, 2009, p.37) describe interlanguage in association with the non-native speakers' ability to comprehend and perform acts in the target language and its development. In other words, ILP can be defined as the study of learners' second language in use (Tatsumi, 2012). Despite its broad scope, researchers in the field are often interested in exploring learners' speech act performance in a target language aimed at enhancing learners' pragmatic competence. The current study investigated the performance of apology speech act by two groups of EFL learners – non-native speakers, in English – the target language, and thus can be thought of as belonging to the study of ILP.

2.2 Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is a vital component of L2 learning. In order to effectively use language in context, familiarization with the pragmatic norms and rules of the target language and culture is essential (Schauer, 2009). As has been widely acknowledged, language is embedded with particular specific cultural values and norms of the community where the language is spoken. In other words, the language is used with certain pragmatic conventions maintained by members of the society according to which thoughts and intentions are commonly performed in the language and this may vary from one culture to another. Consequently, only pragmatically competent learners can take part in communication using the target language properly.

Pragmatic competence is 'the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context' (Thomas, 1983, p.92). Similarly, Schauer describes pragmatic competence in relation to 'appropriate ways of performing speech acts according to the social context' (2009, p.37). In this point of view, a pragmatically competent speaker should find no difficulty in expressing his intention in communication. The speaker should show such strong awareness of the social context in which he takes part in that he can conform to the standard linguistic behavior agreed by the participants. In interlanguage context, the standard of pragmatic reference is that of the

native speakers. Pragmatic competence can be divided into two subgroups: pragmalinguistic competence – 'the knowledge of forms and strategies to convey particular illocutions' and sociopragmatic competence – and sociopragmatic competence – 'the ability to use these forms and strategies in a given context' (Kasper & Roever 2005 as cited in Dippold, 2008, p.131). To put it in another way, pragmatic competence involves two types of judgment: 'the basically grammatical assessment of the pragmatic force of linguistic token and sociopragmatic judgments concerning the size of imposition, cost/benefit, social distance, and relative rights and obligation' (Thomas, 1983, p.104). Pragmatic competence is the key to effective communication for EFL learners. A lack of pragmatic competence may force learners to use conventions from their L1 in their target language production and comprehension, and consequently communication breakdown may prevail. This phenomenon is often called pragmatic transfer. While pragmatic transfer can be positive, it is often negative as it causes interference or communication trouble due to the contrasting properties of the L1 and the L2 (Leech, 2014).

2.3 Speech Acts

As mentioned earlier, speech act has been commonly perceived as the main focus of ILP studies. It refers to actions performed via utterance (Yule, 2006). Austin further adds that 'all utterances, in addition to meaning whatever they mean, perform specific actions (or do things) through having specific forces' (Levinson, 1983, p. 236). It is embedded in them a certain intention of the speaker to persuade a certain response from the hearer. In other words, it is the action behind the utterance made by the speaker. Moreover, Austin describes speech act as composed of three kinds of action: locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act (Oishi, 2006; O'Keeffe, Clancy & Adolphs, 2011). Locutionary act refers to the actual utterance produced by the speaker, while illocutionary act is associated with the act the speaker intends to perform by means of making the utterance. Perlocutionary act is related to the effects the act has upon the utterance of a sentence. For example, in responding to an invitation, one speaker may say 'It's getting late', which is supposed to mean a refusal, rather than to tell about the time. In this case, the act of uttering the sentence in the situation is the locutionary act while the force upon the utterance of the sentence, that is, refusal, depicts the illocutionary act. In addition, the effects on the hearer, which could be a feeling of disappointment or a gesture like 'nodding', etc., belong to the aspect of perlocutionary act.

Meanwhile, Searle (1965) emphasizes on the illocutionary act in defining speech act by arguing that all linguistic behaviors must be performed with a certain intention. Searle posits five basic kinds of action that one can perform in speaking, by means of five types of utterance (1976 as cited in Levinson, 1983, p.240). They are: representatives (committing the speaker to the expressed propositions), directives (getting the hearer to do something), commissives (committing the speaker to some future course of action), expressives (expressing a psychological state), and declarations (causing immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs. As regards this study, apology falls in the category of expressives speech act.

2.4 Apology

Apology is a speech act to show recognition of the fact that violation of a social norm has taken place. It is an act used to express speakers' mental and emotional state or any sincerity condition of the propositional content (Searle, 1976), functioning to reestablish the social harmony, trust and conflict resolution (Goffman, 1971; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983), to give a recompense for the misdemeanor (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984), and to retain a good connection between the apologizer and the recipient (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Like other common speech acts, apology is subject to cultural and linguistic differences where speakers of a particular language or members of a particular culture may have their own unique realization of the speech act of apology. Consequently, many researchers have attempted to identify forms of apology and developed frameworks of apology strategies that can accommodate the practice of the speech act in particular language and cultural contexts such as Fraser (1981), Olshtain & Cohen (1983), Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984), House (1988), Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) and Holmes (1990, 1995).

The current study adopted the apology strategy framework initially proposed by Olshtain & Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989). It consists of six major strategies and nine sub-strategies distributed 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.")

Source: Olshtain & Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) cited in Bowe, Martin, & Manns, (2014, p. 83)

3. **Method**

3.1 Participants

The current study collected data from two groups of Indonesian EFL learners. Each group consisted of 21 first-year students of English Language Education Major of a university in Indonesia. The participants were selected from a total of 68 students who were willing to take part in the Oxford Placement Test equivalent and data collection process. They were selected based on the results of the test and were divided into two groups consisting of 21 students in the A2 and 21 students in the B1 English proficiency levels under the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) of languages. In order to maintain the participants' privacy, confidentiality measures were taken.

3.2 Instrument

A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire was used to collect the data of the study. A DCT is a research tool built of a set of tasks that contain conversational situations which prompt acts of apology. It was selected due to its flexibility for socio-cultural variables and ability for large data collection quickly (Golato, 2005). The current study adapted the DCT used by Thijittang (2010) in her investigation into Thai undergraduate students' apology in English, which was modified from Olshtain & Cohen (1983), Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein (1986), and Bergman & Kasper (1993). The DCT is interesting because it covers sociolinguistic variations in terms of social status, social distance, and severity of offence and is considered relevant to the objectives of the present study.

The instrument consisted of two parts. Part one was consent and instruction, and part two included scenarios. The former part contained documents of consent for participation in the study, as well as instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. The later part comprised fifteen open-ended questions resembling realistic situations to the participants in which they were asked to identify themselves as an apologizer in the situations and were expected to give their written reactions to the situations in English.

To maintain the validity, the DCT questionnaire was consulted for expert judgment by two native speakers of English. The index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) (Rovinelli & Humbleton, 1976) was also implemented to examine the questionnaire relevance to the expected data. Then, it was analyzed and revised following the experts' comments. In relation to its reliability, a pilot study was conducted involving 15 first-year Indonesian students majoring in English. This step was aimed to check the clarity of instructions and questions in the questionnaire, effectiveness, and ease and time of completion. The DCT questionnaire was considered ready for data collection after the pilot study demonstrated that no further revision was needed.

3.3 Data Collection

The DCT was distributed to the participants together with the English proficiency test. The researcher described the goals of the study, the risks and benefits of participating and instructions for the questionnaire to the participants. The researcher also offered the participants the opportunity to inquire about the study. Furthermore, the researcher sought the participants' consent to join the study by having them sign the consent form. This document indicated that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to leave the study at any time. The participants were given 30 minutes to do the English test and 30 minutes to finish the questionnaire, during which they were restricted from consulting their dictionary, books, their communication devices, and friends.

3.4 Data Coding

After collection, the data were grouped into categories of apology strategy following the framework from Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). The framework was chosen as it has been widely used in previous apology strategies. The framework consists of 6 major strategies, i.e. Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), Explanation of Account, Taking on Responsibility, Concern for the Hearer, Offer of Repair, and Promise of Forbearance. In addition, Taking on Responsibility contains seven subcategories: Explicit Self-blame, Lack of Intent, Expression of Self-deficiency, Expression of Embarrassment, Self-dispraise, Justify the Hearer, and Refusal to Acknowledge the Guilt, which is composed of three sub-categories (Denial of Responsibility, Blame the Hearer, and Pretend to be Offended). In the coding, every occurrence of each strategy either in the same or difference responses was counted as one.

The coding process was carried out by the researcher, a research assistant, and a native speaker of English. In order to maintain coding reliability, the researchers were required to work independently while following the same coding guidelines. In case of disagreement, the researcher and the reviewed guidelines together and discussed the discrepancies until they reached a complete consensus on the data coding.

3.5 Data Analysis

After the coding, the occurrence of each strategy was counted and the number was keyed in into the SPSS computer program. Then, an independent sample t-test was run to find significant differences in the use of apology strategies

between the A2 participants and the B1 participants. After that, the results of the two groups' apology were compared, contrasted, and described so as to answer the research questions.

4. Results and Discussions

This section contains the analysis and discussions of the coding results of data elicited from the discourse completion task (DCT) questionnaire. The results are divided into two parts according to the research questions: the strategies used by the A2 students and the B1 students, and the significant differences between apology strategies used by the A2 students and the B1 students. The results in Table 1 are responses to the two research questions as described below.

Table 1. The comparison of the apology strategies used by the Indonesian EFL students of A2 level and those of B1 level

No	Apology Strategies	A2 Students)F, %(	B1 Students)F, %(	T	P-Value)Sig.(2-tailed
1	Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs)	317)48.40(	360)46.04(	-2.092	0.043*
2	Explanation of Account	94)14.35(	113)14.45(	-1.291	0.204
3	Explicit Self-blame	74)11.30(	53)6.78(	1.255	0.217
4	Offer of Repair	59)9.01(	98)12.53(	-3.048	0.004*
5	Expression of Self-deficiency	52)7.94(	52)6.65(	0.000	1.000
6	Promise of Forbearance	24)3.66(	30)3.84(	-0.830	0.412
7	Concern for the Hearer	18)2.75(	41)5.24(	-2.517	0.016*
8	Lack of Intent	16)2.44(	28)3.58(	-1.376	0.177
9	Justify the Hearer	1)0.15(	1)0.13(	0.000	1.000
10	Expression of Embarrassment	0	2)0.26(	-1.451	0.162
11	Self-dispraise	0	2)0.26(	-1.451	0.162
12	Denial of responsibility	0	1)0.13(	-1.000	0.329
13	Blame the hearer	0	1 (0.13(	-1.000	0.329
14	Pretend to be offended	0	0	0	0
	Total and significant value of all strategies	655 (100)	782)100(		0.791

4.1 Research Question 1: What are the apology strategies used by the English major students of A2 level and B1 level of English proficiency?

In relation to the first research question, Table 1 above shows that the A2 and B1 students produced different frequency counts of both individual and total strategy use, and employed different number of strategies. As presented in the table, the A2 students made use of the apology strategies for a total of 655 times while the B1 students made a higher frequency of use of the strategies for 782 times. The B1 students also had higher frequencies of strategy use than the A2 students at nearly all individual strategies, except the Explicit Self-Blame, which was employed for 74 times by the A2 students and 53 times by the B1 students. Moreover, the B1 students adopted more apology strategies than did the A2 students. The former group of students employed almost all of the fourteen strategies available in the framework but the Pretend to be Offended strategy, which was not used at all by either group. Meanwhile, the latter adopted only nine strategies which include: Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), Explanation of Account, Explicit Self-Blame, Offer of Repair, Expression of Self-Deficiency, Promise of Forbearance, Concern for the Hearer, Lack of Intent, and Justify the Hearer.

The aforementioned differences seem to suggest that the students' ability to perform the speech act of apology in English is parallel to their English proficiency. This finding is consistent with Qorina (2012). Qorina, who investigated the apology strategies used by Indonesian EFL students at different semesters (study period) at Pekalongan University, contended that those of higher semester had a higher tendency to produce more elaborate apologies than those of lower semester. Although there were variations by situations, her study revealed that, in general, students in higher semesters of study tended to use more strategies as compared to those of lower semesters. Furthermore, this phenomenon is echoed by Istifci (2009), who found that advanced learners made more complex strategy combinations than learners at lower stages. Istifci (2009) claimed that students' apology realizations and selections expanded as they grew more proficient in English. Similar to what was described earlier, the B1 students in this study tended to make more use of apology strategies and have a higher frequency of use of the strategies than the A2 students.

Regardless of the differences in the frequency and number of the strategy use, both subject groups were inclined to opt for the same strategy preferences in apology. Table 1 shows that both the A2 and B1 students preferred IFIDs in most of their apologies, followed by Explanation of Account as their most preferred apology strategy at the second place. The first strategy uses account for 48.40% and 46.04% while the second form 14.35% and 14.45% of the total strategy use of both groups, respectively. This finding comes as no surprise as it had been pointed out by researchers in previous studies investigating Indonesians' apology in either Bahasa Indonesia or English. Wouk (2006), Adrefiza (2010), and Qorina (2012) reached similar conclusions in their research. Regarding the use of IFIDs, Adrefiza (2010), comparing Indonesians' and Australian English's apology, found that Indonesians made use of apology terms extensively, especially Request for Forgiveness. Similarly, Qorina (2012) in her study with Indonesian EFL students revealed that they opted for IFIDs and Explanation of Accounts most frequently in any situation. Furthermore, a similar account was reported by Wouk (2006). Her investigation into the apology practice of Indonesians in their native language setting in Lombok found that Indonesians most regularly used overt apology strategies, or IFIDs, in the form of Requests for Forgiveness. She also argued that Indonesians were inclined to provide explanations, especially specific explanations, while attempting to reduce their degree of culpability and the level of personal responsibility. In addition, the finding is congruent with reports of other apology studies carried out outside Indonesian context that say that IFIDs and Explanation of account are the most frequently-used apology strategies (Olshtain & Cohen (1983), Istifci (2009), Alfattah (2010) and Farashaiyan & Amirkhiz (2011) and thus seems to suggest their prominence as universal apology strategy preference, rather than culture-specific one.

4.2 Research Question 2: Are there any significant differences in the apology strategy use between the A2 students and the B1 students?

As shown in Table 1, the two subject groups made use of apology strategies differently in terms of both number and frequency. The B1 students employed more apology strategies and had a more frequent use of nearly all the strategies than the A2 students. However, these variations in the use of apology strategies between the two subject groups were not supported by the statistical measure applied. The independent sample t-test resulted in a P-value of 0.791 at level 0.05, which indicates that in general there were no significant differences between the A2 students and the B1 students in the use of apology strategies. Although there were three strategies regarded to be significantly different between the two subject groups with P-values less than 0.05, which include IFIDs (0.043), Offer of Repair (0.004), and Concern for the Hearer (0.016), their number was insufficient to constitute a degree of significance in the overall strategy use of the two subject groups. Therefore, the finding showed that the relationship between English proficiency level and overall apology strategy use was minor and the level of English proficiency of the subjects in the current study did not carry considerable influences on their use of apology strategies.

Previous studies have split in their findings into two opposing claims. Rastegar and Yasami (2014) investigating two groups of Iranian EFL learners of different proficiency levels found that there were significant differences in the use of apology strategies between learners of higher and those of lower proficiency level. Their finding showed that the higher proficiency group was inclined to use more types of apology strategies and produce more complex apologies than the lower group. Istifci (2009), collecting data from Turkish EFL learners, and Qorina (2012), involving Indonesian EFL learners, likewise, contended that higher proficiency learners tended to employ a wider range of apology strategies and make more complex apology patterns. These studies suggest the existence of noticeable effects of proficiency level on the use of apology strategies. On the other hand, a counter argument was offered by other researchers such as Khorshidi, Mobini and Nasiri (2016) who reported the absence of significant differences in request and apology speech act production among English teaching applicants of two different proficiency levels. Similarly, Mohebali and Salehi (2016), studying the production of request and apology among Iranian EFL university students, found a negative correlation between language proficiency and knowledge of cross-cultural speech act. In addition, regarding pragmatic performance in general, Ashoorpour and Azari (2014) and Tabatabaei and Farnia (2015) claimed that there was no correlation between language proficiency and pragmatic performance. Meanwhile, the current study also found no significant differences in the use of apology strategies between participants of higher proficiency level and those of lower proficiency level and thus seems to support the second claim that there is no relationship between proficiency level and apology strategy use in particular, or pragmatic competence in general.

Regardless of their insignificant values, the three strategies mentioned above indicate that differences between the A2 students' and the B1 students' strategy use do exist. Therefore, it seems to be worthwhile to investigate how the three strategies were employed by the two groups of subjects. The first strategy to discuss is the Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) strategy, which was adopted for 317 times by the A2 students and 360 times by the B1 students, making it the most frequently used strategy in either group' apology. Similar to what Holmes (1990), Istifci (2009), Qorina (2012), and Parsa & Mohd Jan (2015) found, the strategy was commonly realized through the use of expressions such as 'sorry', 'apologize', 'forgive me', and 'excuse me'. As the P-value indicates (0.043<0.05), the B1 students made use of the strategy significantly more frequently than the A2 students. This is in line with Istifci's (2009) finding in her study on the apology strategies by Turkish EFL learners of different English proficiency levels that the advanced learners made use of IFIDs more than the less advanced.

Another strategy with significant difference is Offer of Repair. The strategy was adopted for 59 times by the A2 students and 98 times by the B1 students with a P-value of 0.004 (p<0.01). In addition to the different frequency of use, a thorough investigation into the two subject groups' use of apology strategies revealed that the B1 students seemed to have a wider range of situations in which they used the strategy. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) reported that Offer of

Repair is commonly used in situations involving belongings, material damages, and physical injuries that threaten the recipient's 'face' which implies the need of a compensation from the apologizer in order to decrease his/her remorse and 'regain face'. In the current study, the A2 students adopted the strategy mostly in situation 7 (spilled tea on a senior colleague's carpet) and 8 (damaged a friend's camera), involving belongings and material damage. Meanwhile, the B1 students also frequently employed the strategy in other situations with various sizes of offence, higher social status and wider social distance, indicating their more developed knowledge on social factors influencing the performance of speech acts, especially apology.

The other significantly different strategy is Concern for the Hearer, which was used for 18 times by the A2 students and 41 times by the B1 students, with a P-value of 0.016 (p<0.01). It is commonly used to show a feeling of concern and worry about the recipient. Similar to the previous strategy, the Concern for the Hearer strategy was also employed differently by the A2 students and the B1 students with the latter having a wider area of use. In the A2 students' apology, the strategy commonly occurred in situation 10 (stepping a waiter's foot), 13 (bumping into a professor), and 14 (stepping on one student's foot), which involve physical injuries. On the other hand, the B1 students tended to use it in wider social contexts, including, for example, when the apologizer was late for an occasion such as in situation 5 (not visiting a junior colleague at the hospital), 11 (missing the bus and was late to see a classmate), and 15 (being late for appointment as a manager). These variations seem to indicate the B1 students' better awareness of social contexts where the act of apologizing may need to take place and what strategy should prevail.

In addition to the points previously discussed, the current study also yielded three other interesting findings worth explication, which are likely to offer some cultural insights into Indonesians' apology practice. Firstly, it was found that B1 students used honorific terms in their apology in situations where the occurrence of which was commonly not expected by native English speakers. For instance, in Situation 3 where the apologizer is the head of a department in a school and s/he has to apologize to a junior teacher for not informing about a meeting, nine B1 students employed 'Sorry' followed by honorific terms such as 'I'm sorry, Sir' and 'I am sorry, Ma'am'. The use of such terms in this context seems to violate the sociolinguistic constraints as these honorific terms are very formal in English and are commonly used in hierarchical organizations as a sign of respect. Furthermore, they are normally used to speak politely to a man or woman with social distance (Ma'am & Sir, Merriam-Webster, 2016). Therefore, this appears to show B1 students' lack of knowledge and understanding of the situational context and is surprising for it was found in B1 students' data, instead of the A2s. Meanwhile, an alternative approach with more understanding of Indonesian culture suggests that this phenomenon tends to be an example of transfer of socio-pragmatic convention from Bahasa Indonesia committed by the students. While the use of honorific terms in the described situation is conventionally unacceptable in English, such a practice is relatively common among Indonesians communicating in Bahasa Indonesia or other Indonesian local languages. The word 'Sir' and 'Ma'am' can be literally translated into Indonesian words 'Pak and 'Bu' respectively. While it is a common practice in English cultures, calling somebody directly by name, especially in adult discourse regardless of hierarchical order, is often, if not always, considered impolite, or even offensive and arrogant. Therefore, it is just part of daily discourse that senior teachers call their junior by using 'Pak' or 'Bu' in Indonesia. Furthermore, Adrefiza (2010) maintained that the use of addressing terms is also very common among distant speakers in Indonesia.

Secondly, an instance was found where one B1 student used the IFIDs strategy combined with an expression 'Oh my Allah'. This came as a pragmatic transfer influenced by religious beliefs common in Bahasa Indonesia especially among Muslims, which can be translated into a more familiar English expression 'Oh my God'. A similar account was also reported by Qorina (2012) in her study that some Indonesians used a religious-specific expression 'Astaghfirullohal 'adzim', which can literally be translated into 'God, forgive me' to seek forgiveness from God, in apologizing in English. This finding supports a previous claim that sociocultural factors, especially religious beliefs, carry some degree of influence on the linguistic and pragmatic practices of a society. This indicated that members of that society are likely to refer to God (Al-Falasi, 2007; Cedar & Setiadi, 2016). Lastly, there is a new strategy called 'Thanking', which was not available in the frameworks and was used in the analysis. The A2 students and the B1 students used the strategy for 3 times respectively. It occurred in responses to Situation 3 and Situation 15 where the apologizer had a higher social status and power than the recipient. It mainly translates into meanings such as 'Thank you for reminding me' and 'Thank you for waiting for me'. Nonetheless, this strategy seems to be uncommon in other cultures as supportive literature, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, can hardly be found.

5. Conclusion

In sum, the study demonstrated that English proficiency levels did not significantly influence the performance of speech act, especially apology. The statistical measure applied in the study showed that the A2 students and the B1 students did not use significantly different apology strategies in general. Nonetheless, the A2 students' and the B1 students' strategy use differed to some extent in terms of the frequency and number of strategies used, indicating the B1 students' superiority over the A2s. Furthermore, the study also revealed some pragmatic transfers from Indonesian pragmatic convention in the form of the use of honorific terms and religion-associated expressions and a unique apology strategy used by Indonesian EFL learners, Thanking.

In summary, the study revealed that participants still fall short of pragmatic competence of the English language. It can be seen from the fact that cases of pragmatic transfer took place in the participants' apology performance. In addition, it also demonstrated that proficiency level does not warrant learners' pragmatic competence. The study seems to remind of the importance of pragmatic competence in addition to linguistic competence. Therefore, it is suggested that the

enhancement of learners' pragmatic competence should not be relied merely upon the teaching of linguistic competence since, as the study showed, there is no positive correlation between the two. Moreover, there seems to be a need of more explicit teaching of pragmatic competence (e.g. discussion of the socio-cultural contexts after watching a piece of natural language use).

Acknowledgment

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