Thai Undergraduate EFL Learners' Apologies:
A Speech Act Perspective
การกล่าวคำขอโทษโดยผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็น
ภาษาต่างประเทศระดับปริญญาตรี: มุมมองเชิงวัจนกรรม

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Abstract

This research aimed at studying the apology speech act in English by Thai EFL learners in order to determine similarities and differences between EFL learners' and native speakers' apology strategies. It also sought to explore potential relationship between offense severity and their apology strategies. The participants were 100 undergraduates majoring in English from Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University and 20 native speakers of American English. A discourse completion task (DCT) and oral interviews were used to collect the data. The findings showed that the learners predominantly used key IFID strategies regardless of the scenarios. Other strategies varied

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across the two groups with some degree of similarities and differences. Also for the Thai learners, there is no relationship between the offense severity and the number of strategy types.The findings were attributable to cultural and individual differences and learners' language proficiency levels.

Keywords: apologies, Thai EFL learners, DCTs, speech act theory

บทคัดย่อ

　　　　งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการกล่าวคำขอโทษโดยผู้เรียนชาว
ไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในระดับปริญญาตรีเพื่อ
เปรียบเทียบความคล้ายคลึงระหว่างรูปแบบต่างๆของการขอโทษระหว่างผู้เรียน
กับเจ้าของภาษา ผู้ให้ข้อมูลคือนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏ
อุบลราชธานีจำนวน 100 คน และผู้พูดภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่หนึ่งจาก
สหรัฐอเมริกาจำนวน 20 คน วิธีการเก็บข้อมูลคือ แบบจำลองสถานการณ์ให้เติม
ความให้สมบูรณ์ และ การสัมภาษณ์ ผลการศึกษาหลักๆคือผู้เรียนมักใช้เครื่องมือ
แสดงเจตนาแบบต่างๆเป็นกลยุทธ์หลักไม่ว่าสถานการณ์จะเป็นอย่างไร ทั้งสอง
กลุ่มใช้กลยุทธ์อื่นๆในลักษณะที่ทั้งคล้ายคลึงและแตกต่างกัน นอกจากนี้ในกลุ่ม
ผู้เรียนชาวไทย ไม่พบความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างระดับความรุนแรงของความผิดและ
จำนวนประเภทของกลยุทธ์ กล่าวได้ว่าผลการศึกษาดังกล่าวเป็นผลมาจากความ
แตกต่างทั้งทางวัฒนธรรมและทั้งพฤติกรรมรายบุคคล รวมไปถึงระดับ
ความสามารถทางภาษา

คำสำคัญ: คำขอโทษ, ผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ
แบบจำลองสถานการณ์ให้เติมความให้สมบูรณ์, ทฤษฎีวัจนกรรม

Introduction

Pragmatic competence is one of the core competences crucial to the success in second language acquisition (Bachman, 1990). Pragmatic competence entails an appropriate use of language in social contexts including speech acts, such as apologizing, requesting, complimenting, refusing and thanking (CARLA, 2011). Among other speech acts, apology frequently occurs in our daily life transactions. Since it is highly face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987), a full understanding of its usage is warranted in order to minimize potential miscommunication. As far as language learning is concerned, research has found that Thai learner apologies are different from those performed by native speakers (Alexander, 2012; Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Thijittang& Le, 2010). Due to a small number of studies on Thai EFL apologies, we believe it is important to conduct further research to gain a better understanding of characteristics of learner apologies. This paper therefore attempts to answer the following questions:

1.What are the similarities and differences between apology strategies used by Thai EFL learners and native English speakers?

2.What is the relationship between perceived degree of offense severity and speakers' apology strategies?

Background

Apology was defined by Goffman (1971) as remedial work used to rebalance social harmony after a real or potential offense has occurred. According to Goffman, to have an effective apology,

the apologizer needs to acknowledge that an offense has taken place, to take responsibility for that offense and to offer some compensation or reparation. This section offers background information to this research as follows.

Native English speaker apologies. In linguistics, two major foci of native speaker apology research are: relationship between apology strategies and other factors (see Holmes, 1989) and hearers' perception of apologies (see Edmundson, 1992). Holmes (1989) investigated a naturally occurring corpus of 183 apologies by New Zealanders. She found that there were significant differences between female and male apologizers. That is, females gave and received more apologies than did they male counterparts. Edmundson (1992) looked particularly at the perception of semantic formulas in apologies by American English native speakers. The study has shown that native speakers viewed certain apology formulas as less appropriate than others in a particular offense situation suggesting the effect of offense severity in apology choices.

EFL learner apologies. Several studies have been conducted on apologies by learners of English. A major finding is that there seems to be an effect of the speakers' native culture (Nureddeen, 2008; Rizk, 1997). Nureddeen (2008) examined apology strategies by 110 Sudanese EFL learners by using a discourse completion task (DCT) to elicit the apologies. The author found that relatively more serious offenses tended to generate more elaborate apologies. Rizk (1997) analyzed the apology strategies used by 110 Egyptian, Saudi, Jordanian, Palestinian, Moroccan, Lebanese, Syrian, Tunisian, Yemeni and Libyan learners of English. Interestingly, it was found that these learners showed relatively similar apology strategies. Another interesting finding was that unlike native English speakers, these learners tended to minimize an offense against a child rather than

apologizing to the victim.   In another study, Alfatah(2010) investigated apology strategies of Yemeni FFL university students. The results revealed that the participants tended to use illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) regardless of the apology situations.

Offense severity and apology strategies. In addition to the classification of apology strategies, the study also attempts to determine whether there is any relationship between apology strategies and the degree of offense as observed in some previous studies (Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Holmes, 1990). It was found that the most frequent apology strategy that has been found in the studies is the IFIDs. Others were used occasionally, depending on situations. Factors related to the use of strategies mentioned in Holmes (1990) were degree of offense severity and social distance. Offense severity is a main factor causing different apologies. Different kinds of violations, e.g., time, social etiquette, damage or hurt result in different degrees of seriousness. For example, note that if one slightly bumps into someone may simple say "Excuse me," while bumping into someone with a pile of books in hands consists of "Oh! Sorry! Let me help you pick the books." The relationship of the interlocutors or social distance also determines the choices of strategies. The interaction between people unfamiliar with each other tends to be limited to formal situations. Between friends who share a room with and some you are not familiar with, their responses to apology situations are also different (Fraser, 1981).

Theoretical Framework

Blum-Kulka and Olhstain (1989) is one of the most adopted models in the investigation of apology as a speech act (see Searle, 1976, for further details on speech act theory) because it is extensive and allows for a cross-linguistic comparison. This study

thus employs it as a framework. This coding scheme categorizes apology strategies into six different types: illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), explanation or account, taking on responsibility, concern for the hearer, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance. A detailed discussion of this framework is given in the Method section.

Method

Participants

During the academic year 2011, 100 EFL students majoring in English from UbonRatchathaniRajabhat University and 20 American teachers participated in this research. The American participants were from Vermont, United States of America. They came to Thailand through an exchange program to help Thai villagers in rural areas in terms of education. None of them spoke Thai and had no prior experience with the Thai culture. Sixteen American participants were under the age of 25 while the remaining four were above 25. This research only focused on apology strategies used by Thai EFL learners;the data gathered from the native speakers were used to establish the native norm for comparison purposes.

Instruments

It is important to note that while we believed that given the nature of this speech act, role-playing as a data-collecting method was more appropriate than a written task, feasibility was an issue given our time constraints and a large number of participants. We therefore opted to select a discourse completion task as our data-gathering method.

The Discourse Completion Task (DCT). This is a paper-based questionnaire consisting of personal information and different offense situations aiming to elicit apology strategies. The situations were designed to be familiar with the respondents' sociocultural backgrounds. Also, the situations varied according to time, social etiquette and the nature of damage. The degree of seriousness of each situation is taken into account in order to establish potential relationship between perceived degree of offense severity and the speakers' strategies. The situations in the DCT were as follows.

Situation 1 (Specialist): You must go to the medical clinic for an appointment with a specialist. Your appointment is for 9:30 a.m. You arrive at 9: 45 a.m.
The receptionist: "I'm sorry. The doctor is now busy with another patient!"

Situation 2 (Phone): You used your friend's mobile phone without his/her permission to make an important call because yours is out of battery. Your friend found out later, and he/she got angry.
Friend: "Did you use my phone?"

Situation 3 (Bumping): At the library, you were carrying several books in your hand. You bumped into someone, and the books fell on his feet.
The student: "Ouch!"

Situation 4 (Presentation): Today you have a presentation with a friend. Your presentation is supposed to be the first one in class, but you are late.
Friend: "Do you know that we are the first group to present?"

Situation 5 (Library): You are having a loud discussion with your friends in a library. A librarian comes to warn you.
Librarian: "Please be quiet!"

Situation 6 (Book): You unintentionally ripped off the book that you borrowed from your friend. It was torn apart. You returned it to your friend.
Your friend: "Oh, my goodness."

The above situations were written in the questionnaire in such a way that each respondent had to 1) rate the offense severity on a five-point Likert scale whereby 0 = Not serious at all, and 6 = very serious, and 2) write what he or she would say in response to the scenario in the space provided.

The interviews. Ten Thai speakers were chosen for a follow-up interview in Thai based on their overall responses. Five respondents were randomly chosen from a pool of responses highly similar to NS responses. Another five were chosen from those responses highly different from NS responses. The purpose of the structured interview was to gain the speakers' retrospective report (Cohen, 1993) on their own behavior. The questions asked were:

1) What makes you apologize differently in each situation?
2) When you graded the seriousness of the offense in each situation, did it make any difference in your apology? How?
3) What are the differences between apologizing to your friends and to people you do not know well?

Procedures

The DCT (Discourse Completion Task) were given to the learners. This was carried out in the reading room of the English department, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The EFL learners were divided into two groups of 50 respondents for ease of data-gathering. They were given instructions on how to complete

the task. Translation into Thai was also provided when they did not understand any scenario.

Later, the English speakers completed their DCT. This was carried out at Phachan village, Kemmarat District, UbonRatchathani during their break from activities with the villagers. The data from English native speakers were categorized to establish the apology norm. The data from both groups of participants were compared in order to locate five EFL learners who used apology strategies which were highly similar to those produced by the native speakers and five learners who responded differently from native speakers. Ten of the Thai EFL learners were later interviewed in person.

Data analysis

First, we coded the apologizing strategies based on the model proposed in the CCSARP project (Cross- Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns) (Blum- Kulka et al, 1989) discussed below.

The CCSARP is a cross- cultural investigation of speech act realization patterns by comparing the two speech acts: request and apology in order to establish similarities and dissimilarities across languages, and to determine their universal features. According to this model, linguistic realization of the act of apologizing can take one or two forms, or a combination of both strategies:

　　　a.　An explicit illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) -- the most direct realization of apology containing a routinized, formulaic expression of regret or known as a performative verbs such as (be) sorry, apologize, regret, and excuse.

　　　b.　An utterance containing reference to one or more of the following elements: (1) an explanation or account of the cause which brought about the

offense; (2) an expression of the speaker's responsibility for the offense (be it accepting responsibility or denying intent to cause the damage); (3) an offer of repair; (4) a promise of forbearance.

Once apology strategies were coded, they were tallied, recalculated into percentages,and compared across speaker groups in order to determine whether there were similarities and dissimilarities of apology strategies using between Thai EFL learners and English native speakers. Then, interviewswith a subset of Thai participants were analyzed to determine whether there was any factor that could have affected the choices of apology strategies used by the Thai EFL learners and if there was any relationship between perceived degree of offense severity and the speakers' apology strategies.

Findings and Discussion

To iterate, the purposes of this study were to determine whether or not Thai EFL learners and native English speakers were similar in their apology strategies and whether perceived degree of offense severity is related to the speakers' choice of apology strategies.

First, the strategies utilized by both groups for each situation were reviewed for similarities or differences. Second, the severity of the offense was reviewed with regards to the speakers' choice of apology strategies.

Apology strategies

To recall, the responses were classified based on the CCSARP coding scheme (Blum- Kulka et al, 1989). The results are presented in Table 1 in percentages. Tokens were counted for each strategy and converted into percentages. These percentages for each scenario were calculated from dividing the number of tokens for each strategy by total number of tokens for all strategies combined for each scenario. The overall distributions of the apology strategies by native English speakers and Thai EFL learners were illustrated and compared both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Table 1: Percentages of Elicited Apology Strategies by Situation

Scenarios	Respondents	IFID	Providing an explanation	Taking on responsibility		Offer for compensation	Showing concern	Promise for forbearance
				Self- blame	Showing lack of			
1.Specialist	EFL	79.21	17.82	1.98	0.99	0	0	0
	NS	75.00	12.50	12.5	0	0	0	0
2.Phone	EFL	58.28	35.76	0	0.66	0.66	0.66	3.97
	NS	45.45	39.39	0	0	0	0	15.15
3.Bumping	EFL	64.43	10.74	1.34	8.05	0	14.77	0.67
	NS	52.63	2.63	10.53	7.89	0	26.32	0
4.Presentation	EFL	62.16	31.76	0.68	0.68	0	0	4.73
	NS	71.43	3.57	7.14	0	0	3.57	14.29
5.Library	EFL	70.08	1.57	0	2.36	0	0	25.98
	NS	60.71	0	0	0	0	0	39.29
6.Book	EFL	54.02	1.72	1.15	2.87	38.51	0.58	1.15
	NS	50.00	2.50	0	0	47.50	0	0

EFL= Thai EFL learners (n= 100); NS= native speakers (n= 20)

In the first scenario, the offense involved the situation of being late for an appointment with a specialist. In this case, the EFL and the NS participants responded similarly choosing the IFID strategy (79.21 % and 75 %, respectively) as their primary strategy. Both the EFL and the NS participants selected the *providing an explanation* strategy as their second choice, with the EFL participants using it a little more frequently than the NS participants (17.82% and 12.50%, respectively). The *self-blame* strategy was selected as the third choice; in this situation the NS group opted for self- blame at a relative much higher level of frequency than did the EFL participants (12.50% and 1.98%, respectively). Finally, the *showing lack of intent* strategy was selected by less than 1% of the EFL participants and not selected at all by the NS participants. In other words, both groups showed a similarity in not preferring this strategy in the first scenario.

The second scenario involved borrowing a friend's phone without permission. Once again, both the EFL and the NS participants chose the IFID strategy as their primary response (58.28% and 45.45%, respectively) although this was to a much lesser degree of use than it was in some other scenarios. The secondary choice by both groups was the providing an explanation strategy, which accounted for 35.76% of all strategies used by the EFL participants and 39.39% by the NS participants. In this situation, the EFL participants also responded with three additional strategies (the showing lack of intent, offer for compensation and showing concern strategies) that were not selected by the NS participants. However, the NS participants overwhelmingly used the promise for forbearance strategy to a greater degree than did the EFL participants (15.15% vs. 3.97% of all strategies used in this scenario). This difference might indicate reluctance on the part of the EFL

participants to acknowledge their wrongdoing in this scenario. The reluctance could be from many possible reasons such as the differences in cultures, language ability, and pragmatic competence. In the American culture, a social value of privacy seemed to be highly respected among the NS participants as reflected through their responses in this scenario. As a result, using other people's phone without their permission was viewed as very disrespectful by the NS participants. However, this should not be concluded that the Thai participants were not aware of personal privacy. They might want to express their apology as a native speaker would, but their limited language ability might have prevented them from producing adequate utterances to apologize. Furthermore, this could be because of the pragmatic failure in transferring intended meaning in L1 to L2 (Thomas, 1983). Evidently, the NS participants felt a higher degree of wrongdoing, and this resulted in an increased use of the promise for forbearance strategy.

The third scenario involved accidently bumping into someone and causing the person to drop his/her belongings. The results of this scenario greatly varied across the speaker groups, suggesting that the participants viewed this scenario differently. Although the IFID strategy was selected as the most frequent choice by both groups (64.43% for NSs and 52.63% for EFLs), the EFL participants favored the providing an explanation strategy while it was not the case with the NS participants (10.74% and 2.63%, respectively). This suggests that the EFL participants may have thought that a brief explanation would have mitigated the seriousness of the offense. Also, the NS participants chose the showing concern strategy to a greater degree than did the EFL participants. This seems to indicate that there are differences between in how the EFL and the NS participants perceived this situation. The pattern of the strategies used by the NS participants in

descending order was: 1) the IFID strategy, 2) the showing concern strategy, 3) the self-blame strategy, 4) the showing lack of intent strategy and 5) the providing an explanation strategy. The EFL participants' pattern was: 1) the IFID strategy, 2) the showing concern strategy, 3) the providing an explanation strategy, 4) the showing lack of intent strategy, 5) the self-blame strategy and 6) the promise for forbearance strategy. The patterns of apology strategies used by both groups were different in the third choice and number of strategies. The NS participants would blame themselves (10.53%) for causing the problem while the Thai EFL participants would provide an explanation (10.74%). This might be because the groups of participants perceived the severity differently, which will be discussed later.

The fourth scenario involved a joint presentation with a friend in which the respondents' character arrived late. The IFID strategy was selected most frequently by both participant groups, but a great variation occurred with the second choice, when the EFL participants chose the providing an explanation strategy with a larger percentage than the NS participants (31.76% and 3. 57%, respectively). These results suggested that the EFL participants would favor providing more information about their reasons for being late than the NS participants would. The Thai participants seemed to use explanation to justify their tardiness. In contrast, American speakers seemed to place considerable value on punctuality. This was probably why they felt reluctant to find an excuse for arriving late for the class presentation. Instead, the NS participants used more tokens of this strategy than did the EFL participants (7.14% vs. 0.68%). Similar to the response patterns observed in the second scenario, the NS participants chose the

promise for forbearance strategy with a much higher frequency level than did the EFL participants (14.29% and 4.73%, respectively).

In scenario five, like in the previous scenarios, the IFID strategy was preferred by both participant groups (EFLs at 70.08% and NSs at 60.71%). The major between-group difference for this scenario was that despite the fact that the EFL and the NS groups selected the *promise for forbearance* strategy as their second choice, their frequencies of distribution varied greatly (25.98% and 39.29%, respectively).

In the sixth scenario involving the ripping off and damaging of a friend's book, once again the most preferred strategy selected by both participant groups was the IFID strategy. However, both groups of participants chose this strategy with the lowest percentage level than shown in previous scenarios (54.02% for EFL and 50.00% for NS participants). This resulted in a wider selection of the remaining strategies by the EFL participants and a notable preference for the *offer for compensation* strategy by the NS participant group a (47.50%) and the EFL participant groups (38.51%). As this is the only scenario that involved any physical property or personal damage, it was likely that the participants believed that some form of compensation should be offered to make amends.

As shown in Table 1, among the seven strategies, the IFID strategy was the most frequently used by both groups. It occurred in all situations. This finding was consistent with previous studies by Afghari (2007), Suszczynska(1999), Holmes (1989), and Olshtain and Cohen (1983). Thai EFL learners and native speakers all used this strategy to reveal the direct act of apologizing. This strategy seems to be universal and was used regardless of the social context of the apology.

The *providing an explanation* strategy was selected by the EFL and NS participants as their second choice in all scenarios. This strategy seems to be culture-specific. That is, the offenders could provide their explanation based on the context as well as what they see culturally appropriate in a given situation. In the scenario involving borrowing a friend's mobile phone without permission, the *providing an explanation* strategy was selected by both participant groups at the highest level of frequency (35.76% for EFL and 39.39% for NS). However, in the scenario involving arriving late for a presentation, the EFL participants chose the *providing an explanation* strategy at a much higher percentage level than the NS participants did (31.76% and 3. 57%, respectively). This scenario was concerned with time. Being punctual is considered quite serious in American culture, as evidenced in the common American expression "Time is Money". Therefore, culture can be one of the reasons that influence participants' apologies.

Another notable similarity in the selection of apology strategies by both groups was observed in the*offer for compensation* strategy. According to Table 1, this strategy was used by both the Thai EFL and the NS participants in the scenario involving ripping off and damaging a friend's book. The nature of the scenario itself limits possible choices. When offering compensation, the offender carries out an action or provides a payment for damage which results from the infraction (Cohen and Oshtain, 1994). With such obvious physical damage, the participants were forced to address the offense and make amends by offering some form of compensation.

The *showing concern* strategy appeared only in the scenario involving bumping into someone. It was selected by both groups. According to Fraser (1981), there were two kinds of apology: genuine

and ritual. People choose to apologize either because feel genuinely regretful or because they are expected to be liable for their actions and thus want to set things right by taking responsibility and expressing regret. As the scenario involved a physical offense without the speaker's lack of intent to cause it, that both groups used this strategy was not at all surprising.

The *promise for forbearance* strategy was selected by both groups of participants as their second choice in the scenario involving being noisy in the library. The selection of this strategy could easily be understood because being quiet in the library seems to be a standard practice. While in the scenarios involving arriving late for a class presentation and using a friend's mobile phone without permission, the NS participants used this strategy more frequently than the EFL participants did. It was possible that the Thai EFL learners lacked the competence to produce the expressions that they wanted to convey in the situation. The other possible reason could be the learners' lack of awareness in how to apologize appropriately in this context.

Perceived degree of offense severity

In Table 2 below, severity ratings by NS participant group and the EFL participant group were compared for each scenario. Recall that the rating scales went from 0, meaning not at all serious, up to 6, meaning very serious.

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Offense Severity by Group

Scenarios	EFL			NS			Notes	Differential
	Ratings	Tokens	Types	Ratings	Tokens	Types		
Specialist	3.16	101	4	3.7	24	3	NS>EFL	0.54
Phone	4.2	151	6	2.75	33	2	EFL>NS	1.45
Bumping	3.97	149	6	2.85	38	5	EFL>NS	1.12
Presentation	4.68	148	5	3.65	28	5	EFL>NS	1.03
Library	3.39	127	4	2.5	28	2	EFL>NS	0.89
Book	4.68	174	7	4.5	40	3	EFL>NS	0.18

• In Table 2, the NS participant group and the EFL participant group rated the severity level as it related to the apology strategies selected for each given scenario. The rating scales went from 0, meaning not at all severe, up to 6, meaning very serious.

• 0-1.00 not at all; 1.01-2.00 very mild; 2.01-3.00 mild; 3.01-4.00 medium; 4.01-5.00 serious; 5.01-6.00 very serious

In the first scenario, the NS participants rated the severity level as higher than the EFL participants did. Of all six scenarios, the first one was the only scenario where the severity level was rated higher by the NS participants. The ratings for scenario 1 were in the medium range. This shows that the NS participants took punctuality for an appointment very seriously. A failure to arrive on time would be considered a failure to honor their own commitment by the NS participants. While the EFL participants also seemed to value punctuality, but to a lesser degree than the NS participants did.

In scenario 2, using a friend's phone without permission, the EFL participants rated the scenario as significantly more severe than the NS participants. The EFL participants rated the offense as much

less seriously than did their NS counterparts. This scenario presented the highest degree of difference between the participants. The apology strategies chosen by the EFL participants reflected some remorse on their part but little evidence for a willingness to refrain from similar action in the future as indicated by their low e rating for the *promise for forbearance* strategy. In the same scenario, the NS participants appeared to believe that using the phone without permission was of little consequence or importance.

In scenario 3, which involved bumping into someone, the EFL participants had a severity rating in the high-medium range. While the NS participants felt this was of low severity and gave a rating in the mild range. The results in Table 1 indicated that the NS participants seemed to have found it easier to accept the blame and demonstrate concern for the victim, rather than providing an explanation for the bumping accident. On the other hand, the EFL participants felt it was necessary to provide an excuse for the bumping incident and less concern for the welfare of the victims.

Scenario 4 involved arriving late for a presentation. In this scenario, the EFL participants felt this had a severe consequence and rated the offense as serious. The NS participants seemed to feel that it was less severe and gave a rating in the medium range. While acknowledging that they were wrong for arriving late, the EFL participants felt explanations were required. Although the NS participants felt the situation was less severe, they did, however, offer more tokens of the *promise for forbearance* strategy. This shows that they were forward-looking in dealing with this type of offense.

In scenario 5, which involved making noise in the library, the EFL participants felt this was of medium severity while the NS participants felt that this was of little consequence and applied a

rating in the mild range. A breach of library rules, is perceived as of little consequence by both groups, but they were willing to offer apologies for their loudness as evidenced by their predominant use of the *promise for forbearance* strategy.

Scenario 6 involved the ripping off and accidentally damaging a friend's book. This scenario was the only one in which both the EFL and the NS participants felt that it was a serious infraction. Both groups rated this scenario in the serious range. Taking someone's possessions without permission was perceived by both groups as being severely offensive. Furthermore, accidently damaging the book further added more sense of guilt to the two groups, resulting in their frequent use of the *offer for compensation* strategy, to try to indicate a higher level of responsibility for their actions.

With respect to the relationship between perceived severity of the offense and the strategies used, it appears that there is no relationship between the two variables in terms of both types and tokens. While the learners tended to rate all but the first scenario as more severe than did the native speakers and used more types of strategies than did the native speakers, the number of strategy tokens for each scenario did not show any particular trend for both speaker groups. For example, the native speakers rated the presentation scenario as more severe than the phone scenario but used few strategy tokens in the former than the latter. Likewise, the learners rated the book and presentation scenarios as equally severe but used much more strategy tokens in the former than the latter (174 vs. 148 tokens) The only piece of possible anecdotal evidence for a relationship between the two variables can be seen in the last scenario in which both groups rated the offense as the most severe (see Table 2) with the highest numbers of apology

tokens (174 for ESLs and 40 for NSs). Still when it comes to strategy types, they differed. While the learners made use of all seven strategies, the native speakers used only three strategies. Therefore, in this scenario, while there appears to be a positive correlation between the numbers of strategies in terms of both types and tokens with the severity rating for the learner group, no such correlation in terms of severity rating and number of types is found for the native speakers. Despite this observation, this finding could at best serve to generate a hypothesis for future research.

Based on the interview data, the EFL respondents suggested that the severity of the offense influenced the choices of their apologies. This verbal report supported the findings by previous studies such as Holmes (1990) and Mekthawornwattana (1991) that the main factor that caused multiple apologies was the seriousness of the offense. However, with the EFL participants, the severity of the offense did not seem to be correlated with the number strategy types. In other words, the variety of apology strategies cannot be reliably predicted by severity ratings. As described earlier, only in one instance, the scenario involving damage to property (the book), did both groups deviate from their previous response patterns and opted for multiple strategies.

Based on the responses in the DCT, there were two possible factors in an apology that caused differences in the apology selection. They were 1) individual personalities and 2) language ability. Not all participants have the same characteristics or sensitivities to situations. This of course could have a direct impact on a respondent's selection of apology strategies. A weaker character might feel they need to offer more apologies than a stronger character. Language ability also can have a major impact on a respondent's ability to select the appropriate apology strategies. Some students who responded to situations differently from native

speakers pointed out their inabilities to produce sentences that would adequately express their apologies in a manner they wanted to.

In conclusion, the apology strategies utilized by both the Thai EFL learners and the native English speakers were quite similar. There were differences observed in the severity of the offense in the scenarios and in the frequency of apology strategies selected. In addition, the ways in which Thai students apologized may sometimes be different from native speakers, but the results of this study could serve as a good resource for future cultural lessons related to teaching English. Also, it could be especially useful in cross-cultural communication courses.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate apology strategies used by Thai EFL learners whether or not they were close to apology strategies used by native English speakers, as well as the relationship between the perceived degree of offense severity and the choice of apology strategies chose by the speakers. The findings supported several previous studies (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989; Thomas, 1983; Fraser, 1981; Afghari, 2007; Suszczynska, 1999; Holmes, 1989; Holmes, 1990; Olshtain and Cohen, 1983 and Mekthawornwattana, 1991).

The findings have shown that the most frequently used strategy, either as a singleton or in a combination with other strategies, was the Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs). This finding was consistent with previous studies by Afghari (2007), Suszczynska(1999), Holmes (1989), and Olshtain and Cohen (1983). The selection of apology strategies by both groups of participants

basically revealed a similarity in the strategies they used to apologize. The IFID strategy was used overwhelmingly by both groups of participants. This could be taken as a piece of evidence for a *sorry*-based strategy as the IFID regardless of social contexts (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989 and Alexander, 2012). Other similarities were also demonstrated through the results in the two scenarios involving ripping off and damaging a friend's book and being noisy in a library. Both groups chose *compensation* and *promise for forbearance* strategies as the second-most frequent strategy after the IFID strategy for each scenario, respectively.

In addition to this, apology strategies were specifically selected by the speakers depending on other variables such as cultures, personal characters, and learners' proficiency. For example, ownership over personal belongings was highly valued in the American culture while it may not be the case in the Thai culture as can be seen in the phone scenario. Another cultural value about time was also reflected the difference of apology strategies used by the two groups, especially in the scenario involved arriving late for a class presentation. Although both groups used the IFID strategy as the primary choice, a notable variation occurred with the second choice. While the EFL participants used a much higher percentage of frequency in providing explanation, the NS participants place the importance on promise for forbearance. Individual personalities might also have had an impact on apologizing. A weaker character might feel they need to give more apologies than a stronger character. Another variable was the learners' proficiency. The inability to produce adequate sentences that would express their apologies in a manner they wanted to could prevent the EFL participants from the success in communication. In addition, perceived severity of offense was not found to have any relationship with apology strategies. Finally,

noted similarities and differences in apology strategies by the two groups of participants would help to raise awareness especially among learners when cross-cultural communication takes place. For teaching English, the use of apology strategies by native speakers can help teachers to choose appropriate strategies for certain types of situations when native norms prove to be useful.

Limitations of the study

This study has some limitations. First, the situations in the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) might not cover some situations requiring apologies. In other words, the situations used in this research might not suffice to elicit apologies which are representative of the speakers' behavior. Second, collecting data through the DCT may have had a task effect in which some respondents may have not provided their answers as they would in real life situations because they had time to think what to answer or respond properly. Third, giving the DCT to the participants after their examination may cause some fatigue in writing responses, which could, in turn, lead to a question of whether or not the strategies reported were those used in authentic situations. Fourth, some students pointed out their inability to produce adequate sentences to express their apologies in a manner they wanted to. Finally, the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts since this study only examined undergraduate students who, as members of a subculture, may have their own style of apology.

Recommendations for further studies

According to the limitations stated in the previous section, there are directions recommended for further study. First, there should be more situations in the Discourse Completion Task, in order to cover more sociocultural aspects. Second, it would be interesting to examine whether the present findings would hold true if the data were collected with other types of instruments such as role play and conversations from movies. Another potential investigation would be examining apologies occurring in real-life interactions instead of the hypothetical scenarios. Third, to increase generalizability, a future study should involve more participants at different proficiency levels.

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