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An Investigation of Apology Strategies in EFL College Students in Taiwan

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摘要

本研究將探討臺灣大學生使用英語道歉的能力。實驗對象為七十二名臺灣的大一學生，研究方法以問卷調查方式進行，共設計有二十二個情境，含有六種冒犯的類型（即談話的冒犯、空間的冒犯、時間的冒犯、言行失態的冒犯、使對方感到不便的冒犯、以及物品的冒犯）。研究結果顯示：一、臺灣大學生能使用三種道歉語彙，即表示遺憾（A1）、原諒（A2）、道歉（A3）的用語。二、A策略（道歉語彙）和C策略（承認應付則任）是最常使用的「單一策略」道歉。前者用於談話時的冒犯、與時間有關的冒犯、空間權益的冒犯、行為失態的冒犯、以及使對方感到不便的冒犯。後者用於因損傷物品而造成的冒犯。三、A、B（對冒犯處加以解釋或說明）及A、C（承認應付責任）是最常使用的「綜合策略」道歉。前者用於談話時的冒犯、與時間有關的冒犯、行為失態的冒犯、以及使對方感到不便的冒犯。後者用於空間權益的冒犯、以及因損傷物品而造成的冒犯。四、臺灣大學生於談話時的冒犯、與時間有關的冒犯、空間權益的冒犯、及因損傷物品而造成的冒犯上，對嚴重的冒犯情境會使用較多的「綜合策略」道歉，對輕微的冒犯情境會使用較多的「單一策略」道歉。五、「綜合策略」道歉多使用於較親密的關係上，而C策略（承認應付責任）最常用於普通朋友。六、「綜合策略」道歉，及B、C、E（表現情緒）三種策略多使用於對下的關係上；A、C2（表示並非有意）、D（保證下不為例）三種策略多使用於對上的關係上；C3策略（自責）常用於普通朋友。七、對絕大多數的冒犯（除因損傷物品而造成的冒犯），女生比男生愛用「綜合策略」道歉以及A2、A3、C1（接受責備）、C2、C3、C4、F（表示關心）七種策略；男生比女生愛用B、D、E三種策略。

關鍵字：道歉、冒犯、語行、社會語言能力

Abstract

The purpose of the project is to investigate the productive competence of Taiwanese EFL college students in realizing English speech act of apology. Seventy-two randomly selected EFL college freshmen in Taiwan participated in the study. The instrument was a discourse completion test, which requires the participants to write down an apology for each of the twenty-two situations involving six kinds of offence: talk, space, time, social gaffe, inconvenience, and possessions. The results of the study showed that the participants used three types of apology phrases: expressions of regret, forgiveness, and apology. The most frequently used single-strategy apologies are: A1 (for time, talk, space, social gaffe, and inconvenience) and C4 (for possessions). The most frequently used multiple-strategy apologies are AB (for talk, time, social gaffe, and inconvenience) and AC (for space and possessions). It was also noted that for talk, time, space, and possessions, the participants produced more multiple-strategy apologies for the more serious offence situations and more single-strategy apologies for the less serious offence situations. Regarding the effect of the distance between the speaker and the addressee, the participants used the most number of

multiple-strategy apologies for spouses and showed a stronger intention to repair for their friends than for strangers and their spouses. In terms of the power relations between the speaker and the addressee, the participants used multiple-strategy apologies most frequently for their sons, their downwards, and they produced the greatest number of Strategies A, C2, and D for their professors, their upwards; used Strategies B, C, and E most frequently for their sons, their downwards; and adopted only Strategy C3 most often for their friends, their equals. Finally, it was found that girls used multiple-strategy apologies more frequently than boys except for possession offence, and that the girls used A2, A3, C1, C2, C3, C4, and F more frequently than boys, who, instead, used B, D, and E more frequently than girls.

Keywords: apology strategy, offence, speech act, sociolinguistic competence

I. INTRODUCTION

Sociocultural competence has been receiving more attention than before. It is a term referring to the ability to use target language knowledge in communicative situation (Ervin-Tripp, 1972; Hymes, 1974) or the ability to select speech act strategies that are appropriate for the culture involved, for the age and sex of the speakers, for their social class and occupations, and for their roles and status in the interaction (Cohen, 1996).

To explore this area, an increasing number of studies have investigated EFL students' sociocultural competence in comparison to that of native speakers'. Some (e.g., Walters, 1979a; Carrell & Konneker, 1981; Trosborg, 1987) focused on the receptive side, whereas the others (e.g., Walters, 1979b; Rintell, 1979; Scarvella, 1979) focused on the productive side.

One important aspect of sociocultural competence is sociolinguistic competence, which, defined as the ability to select appropriate linguistic forms to express the particular strategy for realizing the speech act (Cohen, 1996), has been explored by many researchers. Matsumura (2001), for example, investigated the impact of the Japanese college students' changing sociocultural perceptions of social status during the year they studied in Canada on their pragmatic use of English when offering advice. Rinnert and Kobayashi (1999) compared requestive hints in Japanese and English. Kuo (1997) analyzed complaint/commiseration exchanges in young adult Chinese' conversations. Liao (1994) studied the ways refusal is expressed in Chinese. Shi (1993) conducted a cross-cultural study of conversational politeness in Chinese and English. Chen (1993) and Wolfson (1981) studied compliments in cross-cultural perspective.

Research findings (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1982; Tenhoff & Nakaseko, 1999) have shown that sociolinguistic competence is especially problematic for learners of a foreign language: the complex nature of the interdependence between pragmatic, linguistic, and social factors in the target language often prevents L2 students from getting their meaning across (Cohen, 1996: 53).

To have a better understanding of Taiwanese EFL college students' sociolinguistic competence, the study will focus on their use of English apologies in various offence situations with people of different relationships.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Definition

An apology is an expressive speech act (Hymes, 1962, 1964; Searle, 1976) intended to remedy an offense for which the speaker takes responsibility and to restore the equilibrium between the speaker and the hearer (Leech, 1983). There are three conditions on apologizing: first, an act has occurred; second, the speaker believes the act has offended the hearer; and, third, the speaker takes some responsibility for the act (Holmes, 1990: 161).

An apology is primarily aimed at maintaining or supporting the hearer's "face" (Goffman, 1967). It may redress the hearer's negative face as in example 1 (Holmes, 1990: 161).

1. [A bumps into B, who is standing still.]
 - A. Sorry.
 - B. That's OK.

It may also redress the hearer's positive face wants when the speaker ignores the hearer's desire for recognition and respect. Example 2 (Holmes, 1990: 162) is an illustration.

2. [Introducing B to C, A has used *Mr.* Instead of *Dr.* for B.]
 - A. Oh I am sorry—it's Dr. Hall not Mr. Forgive me.
[B smiles in an embarrassed way and addresses C.]
 - B. Nice to meet you.

Since an apology itself may be a face-threatening act (FTA) (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 65) that damages the speaker's positive face by admitting that he or she has offended the hearer (Holmes, 1990: 162), it is regarded as a negative politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 192). Being aware of the need to redress his or her positive face loss, the speaker often makes an attempt to incorporate some explanations in the remedial exchange, as in example 3 (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984).

3. Explanation or account of cause
 - a. explicit: The bus was late.
 - b. implicit: Traffic is always so heavy in the morning.

Forms and Meanings of Apologies

English apologies are made up of a narrow range of lexical items: *apology*, *apologize*, *be afraid that*, *excuse*, *forgive*, *sorry*, and *regret* (Holmes, 1990). The majority of apologies include an explicit apology strategy (Holmes, 1990) such as "I'm sorry," expressing regret; "I beg your pardon" and "Excuse me," expressing a demand for forgiveness; and "I apologize," expressing apology (Table 1). The variants of apologies are relatively rare.

Table 1. Syntactic-semantic patterns used for apology

Meaning	Major Form	Variant forms
A. Expression of regret	1. Sorry. 2. I'm sorry.	I'm so sorry.
		I'm very sorry.
		I'm terribly sorry.
		I'm really sorry.
		I'm truly sorry.
		I'm deeply sorry.

	2. I'm afraid that ...	
B. Expression demanding forgiveness	1. I beg your pardon. 2. Pardon.	Pardon me.
	2. Excuse me.	
C. Expression of apology	I apologize.	I owe you an apology
		I present my apologies.

Apology Strategies

A wide range of possible apology strategies can be used to realize the speech act of apology. Fraser (1981) established a taxonomy of nine strategies. The first four are direct: announcing that you are apologizing, stating one's obligation to apologize, offering to apologize, and requesting the hearer to accept an apology. The other five are indirect: expressing regret for the offense, requesting forgiveness for the offense, acknowledging responsibility for the offending act, promising forbearance from a similar offending act, and offering redress.

Olshtain and Cohen (1983) established five major categories of semantic formulas that comprise the speech act of apology. The first three main categories are non-language-specific: an expression of an apology, an explanation or account of the apology situation, and an acknowledgement of responsibility. The last two are situation-specific: an offer of repair and a promise of forbearance. With respect to the subformulas, those of the first two major categories may vary from language to language: an expression of an apology; an explanation or account of the situation."

Trosborg (1987) proposed seven major categories of indirect apology strategies besides the verbs that directly signal apology (e.g., *apologize*, *be sorry*, and *excuse*) and presented them in order of increasing directness and with an increase in the potential ability to satisfy the complainer: minimizing the degree of offence, acknowledgement of responsibility, explanation or account; expression of apology, offer of repair; promise of forbearance, and expressing concern for hearer.

Aijmer (1996) distinguished 13 different apologizing strategies (Table 2), which are divided into two subcategories: explicit apology strategies and implicit apology strategies. In each subcategory there are both emotional and non-emotional apology strategy types.

Table 2 Apology Strategies*

1. Explicit apology strategies

1.1. Emotional

- a. explicitly apologizing (e.g. I apologize (for)...)
 - b. expressing regret (e.g., I'm sorry. I'm afraid that...)

1.2. Non-emotional

- a. offering (giving, presenting) one's apologies (e.g., I present my apologies)
 - b. acknowledging a debt of apology (e.g., I owe you an apology.)
 - c. demanding forgiveness (e.g., pardon me; excuse me.)
 - d. explicitly requesting the hearer's forgiveness (eg., I beg your pardon)
-

2. Implicit apology strategies

2.1. Emotional

- a. giving an explanation or account (e.g., (I'm sorry) it's so unusual.)

b. expressing emotion (e.g., Oh (I'm so sorry.))

2.2. Non-emotional

- a. self-denigration or self-reproach (e.g., How stupid of me. How awful. I ought to know this.)
- b. minimizing responsibility (e.g., I didn't mean to...I thought this was...I was thinking it was...
- c. acknowledging responsibility for the offending act (e.g. That was my fault.)
- d. promising forbearance from a similar offending act (e.g. I promise you that that will never happen again.)
- e. offering redress (e.g., Please let me pay for the damage I've done.)

Source: Aijmer (1996)

Functions of Apology Strategies

Most of the time, an apology is a **ritual apology**, or casual apology according to Bach and Harnish (1979), which involves “weak acknowledgement” (Bach and Harnish, 1979) and is issued to satisfy the social expectation (Aijmer, 1996). Ritual apologies are usually appropriate for trivial offences. They also serve as disarmers of softeners. The second type of apology, **retrospective apology**, is an apology responding to an offence. Speakers use it to apologize for a fact. Being retrospective in nature (Aijmer, 1996), its function is remedial, supportive (face-saving) and self-demeaning (Owen, 1983). The third type of apology is an **anticipatory apology**. It is used for an intention or a need to perform a particular speech act (Edmondson, 1981). It also has a “disarming” or “softening” function (Owen, 1983).

The Offence

Types of offence. Building on Goffman's discussion (1971) of relevant factors that lead to apologies and Owen's observation of the impact of different types offence on apology expressions, Holmes (1990) classified the offences that resulted in apologies in the New Zealand corpus into six categories: (1) inconvenience: actions that inconvenience the addressee in some way, such as failing to provide adequate service, (2) space: infringements on another's personal space, such as walking too close to another person, bumping into them, and taking their seat or desk space, (3) talk: intrusion on the addressee' talk or talking turn or infringement of the rules for polite talk, such as interruption and introduction of an inappropriate topic, (4) time: not taking appropriate account of the value of another's time, such as arriving late for an appointment, (5) possessions: damage or loss to the addressee's possessions, including money, and (6) social gaffe: breaking a social etiquette rule relating to socially frowned on behavior, such as burping or speaking while eating.

Seriousness of offence. A three-point scale was used to categorize the seriousness of the offence (Holmes, 1990). Offences such as bumping into someone are classified as “light offences.” Offences such as keeping someone waiting are classified as “medium offences.” “Heavy offences” include examples such as making someone miss an important engagement.

Holmes (1990) pointed out that there was a tendency for the more serious offences to elicit a more formal apology strategy involving an IFID (illocutionary force indicating device) and a combination of apology strategies, which often include an explanation, an acknowledge of responsibility or an offer of payment for injury or loss.

Relationship Between the Participants

Familiarity. The apology use also differs widely in terms of how well the participants know each other. According to Brown and Levinson's model (Brown & Levinson, 1978), when other things are equal, the politest strategies would be used to the most distant addressees, whereas the simplest strategy would be used to the least distant. Fraser (1981) found this pattern for his American data. According to Wolfson's bulge theory of interaction (Wolfson, 1988), however, the two extremes of social distance—strangers and intimates—seem to react in a similar way, while relationships toward the center show marked differences.

Power. Power relations of the participants are the other factor that causes a difference in the choice of apology strategy (Holmes, 1990). Between children, relative size and age are important factors. In transactional relationship, the roles of participants, such as teacher-student, are more important than their relative social status (Leech, 1983). Brown and Levinson's criterion (1978) is the degree to which hearer can impose his own plans and self-evaluation at the expense of speaker's plans and self-evaluation. Thus, customers have more power than those that serve them.

For his New Zealand data, Holmes (1990) reported that the majority of the apologies occurred between "equals." Among the remaining group, the apologies toward "upwards" were twice as many as those toward "downwards." Moreover, apologies for those with more power correlated with more elaborated strategies than apologies for power equals or inferiors.

Empirical Studies of the Speech Act of Apology

A large number of studies have been conducted to investigate the speech act of apology. Concerning apologies across languages, Fescura (1993) noted that native speakers of Italian in Italy preferred the self-supportive formulas. They would deny guilt, appeal to the complainer's leniency, or provide an explanation for the offense. In contrast, native speakers of English preferred the hearer-supportive ones. They would admit their own guilt, recognize the complainer's rights, or offer compensation to support the face of the complainer.

Trosborg (1987), on the other hand, found differences between Danish EFL learners and native speakers of English in the frequency and use of apology strategies. First, Danish EFL learners failed to take on responsibility in situations where NSs acknowledged responsibility. Second, Danish EFL learners, whose linguistic proficiency is lower than native speakers', provided fewer explanations than NSs. Third, NSs volunteered repair more willingly than Danish EFL learners. Fourth, NSs used more modality markers and thus appeared politer than Danish EFL learners. Fifth, NSs would use strategic disarmers (p. 162) to soften the complainer's feelings. For example:

- a. Yea, you see I hate to do this but...
- b. I would have told you but you weren't there.

Finally, both Danish EFL learners and NSs used the strategy of minimizing the degree of offence less to authority figures than to friends.

Linnell, Porter, Stone, and Chen (1992), when assessing oral apologies of native- and non-native speakers of English, failed to find significant differences between the two groups in six of the eight situations. However, in two situations nonnative speakers showed a less frequent use of explicit apology, acknowledgment of responsibility, and intensification of the

expression of apology than native speakers.

Regarding gender differences in English apologies, Holmes (1989), for example, found that New Zealand women, in general, used more apologies than New Zealand men. In addition, while New Zealand men's apologies often alluded to the offender, New Zealand women's apologies focused more on the offended person.

With respect to the parameters of dominance and social distance, Holmes (1990) found that apologies for offenses against those with more power correlate with more elaborated strategies than apologies for offences against power equals or inferiors. In terms of social distance, according to Brown and Levinson's model (1978), the politer strategies would be used to the more distant addresses and the simpler strategies to those less distant. Fraser (1981) indeed found this pattern for his American data, but Holmes (1990) found a reverse pattern in the New Zealand data: intimates receive almost twice the norm for the compound apologies.

Situational factors may also affect the selection of apology strategy. While some situations generalize across cultures, others are more culture-specific (Cohen, 1996). In the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Research Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989), in the situation where a waiter brought the customer the wrong order, all the native respondents in the role of waiter did not express personal responsibility. Perhaps acknowledging the mistake would cost them their jobs.

With regard to the seriousness of offense, it was found to have an influence, too, on the use of apology strategy (Holmes, 1990): there was a tendency for the more serious offenses to elicit a more formal apology strategy involving an IFID (illocutionary force indicating device). The majority of light offenses elicited a simple explicit apology. Medium offenses were more likely than light offenses to involve an explanation and an explicit apology. In contrast to the lighter offenses, heavy offenses elicited a range of responses, including a majority of the strategy of acknowledging responsibility and the strategy of promising forbearance.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the productive competence of Taiwanese EFL college students in realizing the English speech act of apology. It intends to understand if students with intermediate level of English proficiency are able to use appropriate linguistic expressions and apology strategies in accordance with the type and severity of the offence, the degree of familiarity between the interactants, the power relations of the interactants, and gender differences.

The specific goals of the project are: (a) understand the appropriate use of apology strategies for various types of offence, (b) investigate the relationship between the severity of the offence and the apology strategies, (c) explore the impact of gender differences, familiarity, and power relations on the use of apology strategies.

Research Questions

1. What formulaic linguistic expressions will students use in realizing English apology speech acts? Are they linguistically and pragmatically acceptable to native speakers?
2. What types and combinations of apology strategies will students use for different types of offence? Are they pragmatically acceptable to native speakers?
3. What kind of relationship exists between the choice of apology strategies and the severity of the offence?

4. What kind of relationship exists between the choice of apology strategies and the relationship between the participants?
5. Do gender differences have an impact on the choice of apology strategies?

III. METHODOLOGY

Participants

Seventy-two EFL Chinese-speaking college freshmen participated in the study. They were nineteen years old, and fourteen of them were boys. They had studied English for more than six years and their English proficiency was approximately that of a lower-intermediate level.

Instrument

The instrument used to study the participants' linguistic and pragmatic abilities in producing English apologies was a discourse completion test that the CCSARP Project (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) employed. It was like a questionnaire (see Appendix 1), which allowed fast and easy elicitation of data from a large sample of participants (Rintell & Mitchell, 1989) and was especially effective for the purpose of comparing strategies used by learners of the same language. One possible drawback of this method is that it may elicit shorter responses than those of the spoken form (Rintell & Mitchell, 1989). To remedy this shortcoming, the investigator gave all the participants enough space to write down "anything they wanted to say" for each apology situation.

Design of the Apology Situations

Twenty-two offence situations were designed to elicit apologies for six kinds of offence: social gaffe, space, talk, time, inconvenience, and possessions (Appendix 1). Among them there are three situations for each type of offence, all differing in their degree of severity: one is a light offence, another is a medium offence, and the other is a heavy offence. For the purpose of studying the choice of apology strategies for addressee who has more or less power than or the same power as the speaker, the offence situation "Time 2", forgetting about an appointment, was further developed into three different offence situations. In one of them, the speaker forgets about an appointment with his/her professor, an upward. In another, the speaker forgets about an appointment with his/her friend, an equal. In a third situation, the speaker forgets about an appointment with his/her son, a downward. Finally, for the purpose of studying the choice of apology strategies for addressee who is more or less familiar to the speaker, the offence situation "Possession 3" was further developed into three different offence situations. In the first, the speaker broke a teapot when he/she was looking at it at a stand. In the second, the speaker broke a teapot at his/her friends' house. In the third, the speaker broke a teapot that his/her spouse purchased from a trip abroad.

Tasks and Procedure

Twenty-two offence situations (see Appendix 1) of six types of offence (i.e., talk, time, space, social gaffe, inconvenience, and possession) were given to the participants to elicit apologies. They were first asked to rate the seriousness of the three situations for each offence. Then, the investigator read to them the apology expressions that they could use (see Table 3 for examples). For each apology situation, the investigator told the participants

to use any or several of the apology strategies, or not to use them at all. To ensure that the participants will produce “oral” apologies instead of “written” apologies, the investigator told the participants to write down their apologies as quickly as possible as if they were “talking” to the hearer.

Table 3 Apology Expressions

I apologize (for)...	Sorry	I’m sorry
I’m (intensifier) sorry	I’m afraid that...	I present my apologies
I owe you an apology	Pardon me,	Excuse me...
I beg your pardon.	Oh, (I’m so sorry).	(I’m sorry) it’s so unusual.
How stupid of me.	How awful.	I ought to know this.
I didn’t mean to.....	I thought this was	I promise you that it will never happen again.
That was my fault	I was thinking it was...	Please let me pay for the damage I’ve done.

IV. RESULTS

The results of the study showed that the participants used six types of apology strategies for the six types of offence (see Table 4): an explicit apology phrase (Strategy A); an explanation or account (Strategy B); an acknowledgement of responsibility (Strategy C); a promise of forbearance (Strategy D); words expressing emotions (Strategy E); and words showing concern (Strategy F).

Strategy Types

In terms of Strategy A, making an explicit apology, the expressions produced can be classified into three types: expressions of regret, expressions of forgiveness, and expressions of apology. The verbs used in these expressions are *excuse*, *apologize*, *forgive*, and *pardon*; the adjectives are *sorry* and *afraid*; the nouns are *apology* and *pardon*; and the intensifiers are *very*, *really*, *terribly*, *truly*, *awfully*, and *so*. While *excuse me* is a fixed expression, the other apology expressions vary in form: some are elliptical and fragmentary (e.g., *forgive me*, *pardon me*, *take my apologies*, and *sorry about the coke on your shirt*); the others are complete sentences (e.g., *I’m sorry*, *I’m sorry for interrupting you*, *I’m sorry that I forgot our appointment*, *I’m sorry to drop your purse*, *I beg your pardon*, *I apologize for being late*). Of the six situations, the participants used Strategy A most frequently for social gaffe (62%) and least frequently for possession (44%)

In terms of Strategy B, giving an explanation or account for an offence (e.g., *I got a cold*; *I need to clear my throat*; *maybe I’m sick*; *I’m allergic to the sun*; *I have a bad nose*; *I can’t stand it*; *It was an accident*; *I just want to look at it closely*; *I didn’t concentrate on riding my motorcycle*), the participants used it most frequently for social gaffe (29%), secondly frequently for inconvenience (22%), and least frequently for space (1%).

In terms of Strategy C, acknowledging responsibility, the expressions produced can be classified into four types: those of accepting the blame (e.g., *It’s all my fault*), those of expressing lack of intent (e.g., *I didn’t mean to hurt you*; *I didn’t do it deliberately*; *I didn’t do it on purpose*), those of self-reproaching (e.g., *I’m so stupid*; *It’s my carelessness*; *How stupid I am*; *How stupid of me*), and those of offering repair or redress (e.g., *I’ll pay for the teapot*; *I’ll buy it*; *Let me pay for that*; *I’ll pay for all the damage*). The participants used Strategy

C most frequently for possession (46%), and secondly frequently for inconvenience and space (27%), and least frequently for social gaffe (5%).

In terms of Strategy D, giving a promise of forbearance (e.g., *I'll be careful next time; I promise I'll keep this in mind; I promise I won't do it again; I promise I'll be with you tomorrow; I won't forget it next time.*), the participants didn't use it very often: for time, 6%; for talk, 3%; for space, 1%; for inconvenience and possession, 0.5%; for social gaffe, 0%.

In terms of Strategy E, expressing emotions (e.g., *Oh; Oops*), the participants used it most frequently for space (8%) and less frequently for possession (6.5%), talk (5%), social gaffe (4%), time (3%), and inconvenience (2.5%).

In terms of Strategy F, showing concern, the participants used it only for space: e.g., *Are you O.K. now? Did you get hurt? Do you feel better now? Are you all right?*

Table 4. Relative Frequencies of Apology Strategies for Different Types of Offence in EFL College Students in Taiwan

Apology Strategy	Type of Offence					
	Social Gaffe	Space	Talk	Time	Inconvenience to the others	Possession
A. An explicit apology phrase						
1. Expression of regret	122	201	144	280	130	269
2. Expression of forgiveness	86	26	84	71	70	108
3. Expression of apology	6	11	11	33	6	17
Subtotal	214 (62%)	248 (47%)	239 (54%)	394 (54%)	206 (48%)	394 (44%)
B. An explanation or account	98 (29%)	6 (1%)	85 (19%)	128 (17%)	98 (22%)	23 (3%)
C. An acknowledgement of responsibility						
1. Accepting the blame.	1	8	8	14	4	25
2. Expressing lack of intent	9	31	58	16	8	47
3. Self-reproaching	7	28	13	14	14	72
4. Offer of repair/redress	0	80	7	105	90	266
Subtotal	17 (5%)	147 (27%)	86 (19%)	149 (20%)	116 (27%)	410 (46%)
D. A promise of forbearance	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	11 (3%)	45 (6%)	2 (0.5%)	4 (0.5%)
E. Expressing emotions	14 (4%)	43 (8%)	22 (5%)	22 (3%)	11 (2.5%)	62 (6.5%)
F: Showing concern	0 (0%)	85 (16%)	0	0	0	0
Total	343 (100%)	532 (100%)	443 (100%)	738 (100%)	433 (100%)	893 (100%)

Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies

The most frequently used single-strategy apologies types are: A1 for time, talk, space,

social gaffe, and inconvenience; C4 for possessions.

In addition to single strategies, the participants also used a far greater percentage of multiple strategies for the six types of offences (Table 5). For space offence, the participants produced as high as 90% of multiple-strategy apologies; for inconvenience, 85%; for talk, 84%; for possession, 81%; for time, 79%; for social gaffe, 54%.

Table 5. Percentage of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies Used for the Six Types of Offence

Apology Type	Social Gaffe	Space	Talk	Time	Inconvenience	Possession
Single-Strategy	46%	10%	16%	21%	15%	19%
Multiple-Strategy	54%	90%	84%	79%	85%	81%

Regarding the types of typical multiple-strategy apologies that are used most frequently for each type of offence, the combinations of AB, AC, and ABR are the more typical types of multiple-strategy apologies for talk; the combinations of AB, AC, and ABC are the more typical types for time; AC, AF, and AEF are the more typical types for space; AB is the most typical types for social gaffe; AB, AC, and ABC are the more typical for inconvenience; AC and AAC are the more typical for possession (Table 6).

Table 6. The Typical Types of Multiple-Strategy Apologies Used for the Six Types of Offence

Offence	Social Gaffe	Space	Talk	Time	Inconvenience	Possession
Multiple-Strategy Apology	AB	AC, AF, and AEF	AB, AC	AB, AC, and ABC	AB, AC, and ABC	AC and AAC

Acceptability of Apologies

According to English Professor Moriarty's judgment, the participants made the least linguistic mistakes when they produced apologies for time offence: an average of 11 out of 72. The most troublesome is the offence involving damage of possessions. The participants made the most linguistic mistakes when they produced apologies for possessions offence: an average of 15 out of 72 (Table7).

Table 7. Average Number of Linguistically Unacceptable Apologies Used for Each Type of Offence Situation

Social Gaffe	Space	Talk	Time	Inconvenience	Possessions
12	14	12	11	12	15

In terms of pragmatic appropriateness, the participants are most competent in producing apologies for space offence situations, and least competence in producing apologies for talk offence situations (Table 8)

Table 8. Average Number of Pragmatically Unacceptable Apologies Used for Each Type of Offence Situation

Social Gaffe	Space	Talk	Time	Inconvenience	Possessions
9	3	25	14	5	7

Severity of the Offence Situation

With respect to the relationship between the choice of apology strategies and the severity of the offence situation, it was found that for four types of offence (i.e., talk, time, space, and possession) the participants produced more multiple-strategy apologies for the more serious offence situations.

Consider, first, the apology types for talk offence (Table 9). The participants considered the first talk offence situation (Talk 1) the least serious, the second talk offence situation (Talk 2) the less serious, and the third talk offence situation (Talk 3) the most serious. In accordance with their evaluation, the participants produced the greatest percentage of single-strategy apologies for the least serious offence situation, and the greatest percentage of multiple-strategy apologies for the most serious talk offence situation.

Table 9 Percentages of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies in Relation to the Severity of the Talk Offence Situation

Offence Type	Seriousness	Single	Multiple
Talk 1	Least	21	51
Talk 2	Less	9	63
Talk 3	Most	5	67
Subtotal		35 (16%)	181 (84%)
Total		216	

This is also true of time offence (Table 10), space offence (Table 11), and possession offence (Table 12). The participants used increasingly more multiple-strategy apologies for the more serious offence situations.

Table 10 Percentages of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies in Relation to the Severity of the Time Offence Situations

Offence Type	Seriousness	Single	Multiple
Time 1	Least	29	43
Time 2a	Most	20	52
Time 2b	Most	9	63
Time 2c	Most	6	66
Average of Time 2		12	60
Time 3	Less	13	59
Subtotal		77 (21%)	283 (79%)
Total		360	

Table 11. Percentages of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies in Relation to the Severity of the Space Offence Situations

Offence Type	Seriousness	Single	Multiple
Space 1	Least	13	59
Space 2	Most	3	69
Space3	Less	5	67
Subtotal		21 (10%)	195 (90%)
Total		216	

Table 12. Percentages of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies in Relation to the Severity of the Space Offence Situations

Offence Type	Seriousness	Single	Multiple
Possession 1	Less	10	62
Possession 2	Least	34	38
Possession 3a	Most	11	61
Possession 3b	Most	10	62
Possession 3c	Most	5	67
Average of Possession 3		9	65
Sub		70 (19%)	290 (81%)
Total		360	

However, the use of multiple-strategy apologies does not seem to correlate so much with the severity of the offence situations when we turn to the other three offences included in the present study. Take the social gaffe offence first (Table 13). The participants produced 44 multiple-strategy apologies for the least serious offence situation (Social Gaffe 2); 39 multiple-strategy apologies for the less serious (Social Gaffe 3); and 34 multiple-strategy apologies for the most serious (Social Gaffe 1).

Table 13. Percentages of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies in Relation to the Severity of the social Gaffe Offence Situations

Offence Type	Seriousness	Single	Multiple
Social Gaffe 1	Most	38	34
Social Gaffe 2	Least	28	44
Social Gaffe 3	Less	33	39
Subtotal		99 (46%)	117 (54%)
Total		216	

As for the inconvenience offence (Table 14), the participants used 62 multiple-strategy apologies for the least serious offence situation (Inconvenience 1); 61 multiple-strategy apologies for the less and most serious offence situations (Inconvenience 2 and Inconvenience 3).

Table 14. Percentages of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies in Relation to the Severity of the Space Offence Situations

Offence Type	Seriousness	Single	Multiple
Inconvenience 1	Least	10	62
Inconvenience 2	Less	11	61
Inconvenience 3	Most	11	61
Subtotal		32 (15%)	184 (85%)
Total		216	

Relationship between the participants

Familiarity

Regarding how the participants reacted to people in terms of the distance between the

speaker and the addressee, the results of the study showed that the participants seemed to use more single-strategy apologies for strangers and friends and more and more multiple-strategy apologies for friends and spouses (Table 15).

Table 15 Numbers of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies Used for Strangers, Friends, and Spouses

	Single-Strategy	Multiple-Strategy
Strangers	10	60
Friends	10	62
Spouses	5	66

But from Table 16, we find some interesting information about the types of apologies that were used for strangers, friends, and spouses. Firstly, the participants showed a stronger intention to repair for their friends than for strangers and spouses: Strategy C was used most frequently in multiple-strategy apologies for friends. Secondly, the participants used Strategy A most frequently for spouses, less frequently for friends, and least, for strangers.

Table 16. Typical Types of Apologies Used for Strangers, Friends, and Spouses

	1	2	3	4
Strangers	C	AC	ACE	ACCE
Friends	A	AC / CC	AAC ACC	ACCE
Spouses	C	AC	AAC / ACE	AAAC

Power

In terms of the factor of power, the participants used multiple-strategy apologies most for their sons (Table 17), but produced the greatest number of Strategies A, C2, and D for their professors, used Strategies B, C (especially C1 and C4), and E most frequently for their sons, and adopted only Strategy C3 most often for their friends (Table 18).

Table 17. Numbers of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apologies Used for Upwards, Equals, and Downwards

	Single-Strategy	Multiple-Strategy
To your professors	8	64
To your friends	19	53
To your son	6	66
Subtotal	33	183
Total	216	

Table 18. Types of Strategies Used for Professor, Friend, and Son

	To Professors	To Friends	To Sons
A1	59	57	46
A2	22	15	17
A3	13	7	2

Subtotal	94	79	65
B	9	17	19
C1	2	5	6
C2	6	2	2
C3	4	9	1
C4	14	11	61
Subtotal	26	27	70
D	19	15	7
E	7	3	9

Gender Difference

In terms of the factor of gender difference, Table 19 shows a comparison of the average frequency of the use of single- and multiple-strategy apologies for the six types of offence by each boy and girl. We noted that girls used multiple-strategy apologies more frequently than boys except for possession offence. Regarding the use of strategy type, the girls used A2, A3, C1, C2, C3, C4, and F more frequently than boys, whereas boys used B, D, and E more frequently than girls (Table 20).

Table 19. Comparison of Boys' and Girls' Use of Single-/Multiple-Strategy Apology for the Six Types of Offence: an Average Frequency Per Person

Offence	Boy/Girl	Single-Strategy	Multiple-Strategy
Social	Boy	1.7	1.3
	Girl	1.3	1.7
Space	Boy	0.4	2.6
	Girl	2.4	2.7
Talk	Boy	0.7	2.1
	Girl	0.5	2.5
Time	Boy	1.5	3.5
	Girl	0.9	4
Inconvenience	Boy	0.8	2.2
	Girl	0.3	2.5
Possession	Boy	0.8	4.4
	Girl	0.2	2.7

Table 20. Comparison of Boys' and Girls' Use of Strategy Type for the Six Types of Offence: an Average Frequency Per Person

Strategy Type	Boy	Girl
A1	15	15
A2	5.4	6.4
A3	0.6	1.3
B	6.3	5.9
C1	0.5	0.9
C2	0.7	2.7
C3	1.6	2.2
C4	6.6	7.7

D	1.8	1
E	2.9	2.5
F	1	1.2

A1: expression of regret A2: expression of forgiveness A3: expression of apology
 B. An explanation or account C1. Accepting the blame. C2. Expressing lack of intent
 C3. Self-reproaching C4. Offer of repair/redress D. A promise of forbearance
 E. Expressing emotions F: showing concern

V. DISCUSSION

The first research question concerns the learners' use of apology phrases in realizing English apology speech acts. The results of the study showed that the participants used three types of apology phrases: expressions of regret that contain the adjective *sorry* with or without intensifiers *very*, *really*, *terribly*, *truly*, *awfully*, and *so*; expressions of forgiveness that contain verbs *excuse*, *forgive*, or *pardon*; expressions of apology that contain the verb *apologize* or the noun *apology*. Except for *Excuse me*, which is a fixed expression, the other apology expressions are either elliptical and fragmentary or complete sentences.

The second research question concerns the learners' preferences in using apologies, both single-strategy and multiple-strategy types, for different offence situations. In terms of single-strategy apologies, the most frequently used types are: A1 for time, talk, space, social gaffe, and inconvenience; C4 for possessions. In addition to single-strategy types, the participants also used a far greater percentage of multiple-strategy apologies for the six types of offences: AB for social gaffe; AC, AF, and AEF for space; AB and AC for talk; AB, AC, and ABC for time, AB, AC, and ABC for inconvenience; AC and AAC for possessions. Regarding the acceptability of the apologies used by the participants, they made the least linguistic mistakes when they produced apologies for time offence, and they made the most linguistic mistakes when they produced apologies for possessions offence.

The third question concerns the learners' choice of apology strategies for situations that involve the same type of offence but different degrees of severity. It was noted that for four types of offence (i.e., talk, time, space, and possession), the participants produced more multiple-strategy apologies for the more serious offence situations and more single-strategy apologies for the less serious offence situations. However, the use of multiple-strategy apologies does not seem to correlate so much with the severity of the offence situations in the case of social gaffe and inconvenience. For the former, the participants produced more multiple-strategy apologies for the less serious offence situations and more single-strategy apologies for the more serious offence situations. For the latter, the participants used similar numbers of single-/multiple-strategy apologies for the more/less serious offence situations.

The fourth question concerns the effect of the relationship between the participants on the learners' choice of apology strategies. Regarding how the participants reacted to people in terms of the distance between the speaker and the addressee, the participants were found to use the most number of multiple- strategy apologies for spouses. Besides, they also showed a stronger intention to repair for their friends than for strangers and their spouses by using Strategy C most frequently in multiple-strategy apologies for friends. In terms of the power relation between the speaker and the addressee, the participants used multiple-strategy apologies most frequently for their sons, their downwards. And they produced the greatest number of Strategies A, C2, and D for their professors, their upwards; used Strategies B, C

(especially C1 and C4), and E most frequently for their sons, their downwards; and adopted only Strategy C3 most often for their friends, their equals.

The last question concerns the effect of gender differences on the learners' choice of apology strategies. It was noted that girls used multiple-strategy apologies more frequently than boys except for possession offence. And the girls used A2, A3, C1, C2, C3, C4, and F more frequently than boys, who used B, D, and E more frequently than girls.

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Appendix

A. Talk Offence.

Directions:

1. Please write in the given space what you will say.
2. Please rank the following three offence situations in order of severity (嚴重性)
the most serious _____ **the less serious** _____ **the least serious** _____

1. If you are introducing a friend to your club members and you mispronounce his or her name, what will you say to your friend?
2. You are chatting with a group of friends. All of a sudden, you remember something important to share with them. What will you say when you interrupt the conversation?
3. You are talking with a group of young people. Not knowing that one of them, a young girl, comes from a single-parent family, you express your negative feelings about children from single-parent families. What will you say to this young girl later on after you know about her family background?

B. Time Offence

Directions:

1. Please write in the given space what you will say.
2. Please rank the following three offence situations (**1, 2a, 3**) in order of severity (嚴重性)
the most serious _____ **the less serious** _____ **the least serious** _____

1. What will you say to your friend if you are late for an appointment with him or her?
2. a. If you forget about an appointment with your friend, what will you say to him or her when you meet her again?
b. If you forget about an appointment with your professor, what will you say to him or her when you see him again?
c. If you promised to take your son to a movie, but you were so busy that you forgot about the whole thing completely. What would you say to your son later on when you saw him?
3. What will you say to your friend if you need to cancel an appointment with him or her?

C. Inconvenience

Directions:

1. Please write in the given space what you will say.
2. Please rank the following three offence situations in order of severity (嚴重性)
the most serious _____ **the less serious** _____ **the least serious** _____

1. If you need to interrupt a conversation that is going on to answer a telephone call, what will you say to the person you are talking with?
2. If you promised but forgot to bring a book to your friend, what would you say to him?
3. If you promised your friend to help him or her with his or her paper but later found that you couldn't because of an important meeting you had to attend, what would you say to him or her? (Please specify the gender of your friend)

D. Space

Directions:

1. Please write in the given space what you will say.
2. Please rank the following three offence situations in order of severity (嚴重性)
the most serious _____ **the less serious** _____ **the least serious** _____

1. If you bumped into a young girl in a supermarket and caused her to drop her purse, what would you say to her?
2. If you bumped into a young girl in a restaurant and caused her to spill her coke on her shirt, what would you say to her?
3. If you bumped into a young girl in a park and caused her to trip over and fall down, what would you say to her?

E. Social gaffe

Directions:

1. Please write in the given space what you will say.
2. Please rank the following three offence situations in order of severity (嚴重性)
the most serious _____ **the less serious** _____ **the least serious** _____

1. Imagine that you are taking an elevator with some other strangers. All of a sudden, you feel like coughing. What will you say to the people in the elevator after you cough?
2. Imagine that you are taking a walk in a park with some of your friends. It is a bright, sunny day. All of a sudden you feel like sneezing. What will you say to your friends after you sneeze?
3. Imagine that you are giving a talk at a club meeting. All of a sudden, you feel like clearing your throat. What will you say to the club members after you clear your throat?

F. Possessions

Directions:

1. Please write in the given space what you will say.
2. Please rank the following three offence situations (**1, 2, 3b**) in order of severity (嚴重性)
the most serious _____ **the less serious** _____ **the least serious** _____

1. You borrowed a book from your friend. But out of carelessness, you ruined the book, which was torn in half. What would you say to your friend?
2. You borrowed your friend's motorcycle. Because of carelessness, you rode it into a car and damaged it badly. What will you say to your friend about the damaged motorcycle?
- 3a. Imagine that you are looking at some teapots in front of a stand. You are attracted by one of them and wish to take a closer look at it. But as you pick it up, it slips from your hand, drops to the ground, and breaks. What will you say to the owner of the stand?
- 3b. Imagine that you are looking at some teapots in a window closet at your friend's house. You are attracted by one of them and wish to take a closer look at it. But as you pick it up, it slips from your hand, drops to the ground, and breaks. What will you say to her friend?
- 3c. Imagine that you are looking at some teapots your husband or wife has purchased from a trip abroad. You are attracted by one of them and wish to take a closer look at it. But as you pick it up, it slips from your hand, drops to the ground, and breaks. What will you say to your husband or wife?