

A Cross-Cultural Study of Apology Speech Act Realisations

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ABSTRACT

Different cultural backgrounds may perform different semantic formulas. This study aimed to investigate the occurrences of apology speech acts in two dimensions of semantic formulas: frequency and pattern. The participants for this study were 32 English native speakers and 32 Thai EFL learners, making a total of 64 participants. The participants responded to 10 acts of apologising in a written discourse completion task (DCT) that simulated apology-provoking situations. The responses from the DCTs were coded according to the apology taxonomy. The data were then analysed according to the frequency and pattern of the semantic formulas used by the two different groups. The findings revealed that the three most frequently used semantic formulas of the two groups were “Expression of apology”, “Offering repair”, and “Explanation”, respectively. Also, the three most used patterns of semantic formulas found in the two groups were “Expression of apology + Offering repair”, followed by “Expression of apology + Explanation”, and “Expression of apology + Offering repair + Showing concerns”, respectively. The findings suggest opportunities for building cross-cultural communications across continents. The results have implications for teaching and learning of English as an L2 in the cross-cultural contexts.

Keywords: Cross-cultural study, speech act, apology strategy, social status

INTRODUCTION

Since Hymes (1972) first introduced the concept of ‘communicative competence’,

which is the ability to employ linguistic forms in order to communicate appropriately in social interaction, it has been recognised as important in the development of the interlanguage of second or foreign language learners. This has been the focus of the studies of interlanguage pragmatics, the branch of second language research that studies how

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non-native speakers understand and carry out linguistic actions in a target language, and how they acquire second language (L2) knowledge (Kasper, 1992). It can be said that successful and effective speaking of L2 learners is not just a matter of using grammatically correct words and forms, but also knowing when to use them and under what circumstances (Olshtain & Cohen, 1988; Tamanaha, 2003).

This has led to the study of cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics, which focuses on the study of non-native speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic patterns in a second language (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). Much attention in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics has been devoted to learners' performance of speech acts in the second language. Speech acts, as one way to investigate pragmatics are "the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" (Searle, 1969, p.16). Requesting, complimenting and apologising are examples of speech acts that demonstrate the intentions of the speakers. The ability to perform various speech acts is an important part of the development of communicative competence (Kwon, 2003). Therefore, a substantial body of empirical research has emerged describing speech acts performed by non-native speakers of various linguistic and cultural backgrounds such as Cohen and Olshtain (1981), Mir (1992), Olshtain and Cohen (1983), Reiter (2000), Takahashi and Beebe (1993), Prachanant (2006), Tamanaha (2003) and Trosborg, (1987, 1995).

In the past four decades, the speech act of apologies has also been investigated cross-culturally and some similarities and differences have been found between cultures in the use of apologies (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain, 1983; Owen, 1983; Olshtain, 1983; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein, 1986; Trosborg, 1987; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Vollmer & Olshtain, 1989; Holmes, 1990; Holmes, 1990; Mir, 1992; Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Trosborg, 1995; Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper, & Rose, 1996; Suszczynska, 1999; Reiter, 2000; Tamanaha, 2003; Intachakra, 2004; Prachanant, 2006). The studies mentioned were carried out in second or foreign language learning situations. The studies that have been carried out in Thai EFL situations are the studies of Intachakra (2004) and Prachanant (2006). They have carried out studies on the use of apologies in a foreign language learning situation with EFL learners in Thailand and found differences resulting from the culture of the learners.

This study, therefore, attempts to provide some insights into the norms and patterns of apology strategies used by native English speakers (NE) compared with the producing of those strategies of Thai EFL learners. The findings of this study could be of great help in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in relation to cultures, like teaching Thai to speakers of other languages or teaching English to Thais as well as in developing

a syllabus for communicative English courses in order to enhance one's ability to communicate effectively in a cross-cultural setting without facing a communication breakdown.

The Speech Act of Apology

Apologies are 'expressive' illocutionary act (Searle, 1976) and 'convivial' speech acts, the goal of which coincides with the social goal of maintaining harmony between speaker and hearer (Leech, 1983). Apologies typically occur post-event in an adjacency pair and involve interactions in which the apologiser attempts to restore harmony when an offence has been committed, but there is also an element of face-saving involved with a protective orientation towards saving the interlocutor's face and a defensive orientation towards saving one's own face (Trosborg, 1995).

Goffman (1971) undertook the study of apologies, which he termed 'remedial interchanges', focusing on the description of the remedial work necessary to transform the perceived offensive meaning of an act into an acceptable one. Such a task could be accomplished through accounts, apologies and requests. Goffman stated that a speaker can perform an apology by: 1) expressing embarrassment; 2) stating his/her knowledge of proper behaviour; 3) sympathising with the application of negative sanction; 4) repudiation of his/her own behaviour; 5) showing contempt for himself; 6) promising to embrace the 'right way'; and 7) proffering penance and restitution.

Taking for granted that the act of apology is one type of remedial work, Fraser (1981) continued an analysis and description of the 'semantic formulas' that are used to perform an apology. Fraser mentioned that speakers apologise not only by expressing 'regret' ("I'm sorry,"), but also by requesting 'forgiveness' ("Forgive me for..."), by acknowledging their 'responsibility' ("It was my fault."), by promising 'forbearance' ("It'll never happen again.") or by offering 'redress' ("Let me pay for the damages."). Fraser also points out that in cases where social norms are broken, speakers tend to add an 'account / explanation' of the situation to their apology formula.

Using Fraser's description of the semantic formulas employed in producing an apology as a starting point, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) came up with a more detailed classification, which constitutes the core of all the categorisations used in studies of apology. Olshtain and Cohen described apology as "a speech act set" that comprises five potential semantic formulas, namely:

1. Expression of an Apology or Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) – this formula can be classified into three sub-strategies: expressing regret (e.g. "I am sorry,"), offering apology (e.g. "I apologise.") and requesting forgiveness (e.g. "Excuse me." / "Forgive me.");
2. Acknowledgement of responsibility – there are three sub-categories: accepting blame (e.g. "It's my fault."),

expressing self-deficiency (e.g. “I wasn’t thinking.”) and recognising that the other person deserves an apology (e.g. “You are right.”);

3. Explanation or account – this formula varies according to the context (e.g. “I was sick.” / “There was an accident.” / “I forgot.” / “I had to work.”);
4. Offer of repair – this formula occurs only in certain contexts (e.g. “I’ll pay...” / “Let me help you.”);
5. Promise of forbearance – this formula occurs only in certain contexts (e.g. “It won’t happen again.”)

When offenders need to apologise, they have the previous set of formulas as shown above to use/explain in the offensive act. On the other hand, when offenders do not need to apologise, they have a number of options, which are classified, but not analysed by Olshtain and Cohen, as follows:

1. No verbal reaction (opt out);
2. Denial of the need to apologise (e.g. No need for you to get insulted);
3. Denial of responsibility – this formula can be categorised into two types: not accepting the blame (e.g. “It wasn’t my fault.”), and blaming others (e.g. “It’s your fault.”).

Olshtain and Cohen’s categorisation of apology strategies was developed and employed in studies of L1 and L2 in a variety of languages (Holmes, 1989, 1990; Mir, 1992; Trosborg, 1995; Suszczynska,

1999; Reiter, 2000; Intachakra, 2001; Tamanaha, 2003, Prachanant, 2006). However, the most interesting study, utilised in the present study, was conducted by Prachanant (2006). His study focussed on how to respond to complaints in the hotel business; he stated that reactions to complaints in the hotel business can be performed using one or more of 12 apology strategies or semantic formulas. The semantic classification of the 12 formulas is as follows:

1. Expression of Apology (e.g. “I (do) apologise.” / “I’m (very, really, terribly, extremely) sorry.” / “Excuse me.”);
2. Acknowledgement of Responsibility (e.g. “Yes, sir/madam.” / “Certainly!” / “All right.” / “I see.” / “Of course.”)
3. Explanation (e.g. “We were very busy this morning.” / “There were many orders this morning.” / “All the rooms are occupied now.”);
4. Offering Repair (e.g. “We’ll inform them to be quiet.” / “We’ll call to check for you.” / “I’ll carry it out.”);
5. Promise of Forbearance (e.g. “Everything will be ready in five minutes.” / “Hope that you can go to bed early as planned.” / “It will be done properly and under my supervision.”);
6. Making a Suggestion (e.g. “Please relax at the restaurant.” / “Would you like something to drink while you wait?”);
7. Giving the Time Frame for Action (e.g. “Just a moment, please.” / “Please wait a few minutes.”);

8. Showing concern (e.g. “Steak is medium?” / “What’s your room number, please?”);
 9. Gratitude (e.g. “Thank you.” / “Thanks for letting us know of your inconvenience.”);
 10. Promise of Follow-up Action (e.g. “I will investigate how the incident occurred.”/“Could I call you tomorrow to ask if the problem can be solved?”);
 11. Empathy (e.g. “I understand how you feel about this.” / “Madam, if I were you, I will be the same as your feeling.”);
 12. Repetition of Complaints (e.g. “The TV cannot be turned on?” / “You said that your room is disgusting?”).
1. What are the typical apology strategies employed by English native speakers and Thai EFL learners?
 2. What are the patterns of semantic formulas used by English native speakers and Thai EFL learners?

In conclusion, it can be seen that the apology strategies analysed by many researchers in previous studies are similar. Therefore, these apology strategies are utilised as the conceptual framework for the present study.

Objectives and Methodology

This study was conducted for the purposes listed below.

1. To investigate the typical apology strategies produced by English native speakers and Thai EFL learners.
2. To investigate the patterns of semantic formulas used by English native speakers and Thai EFL learners.

The following research questions were investigated in this study.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

The participants of the study were two different groups of subjects, namely, 32 native English speakers (NE) and 32 Thai EFL learners (TEFL). The former included 19 males and 13 females, with ages ranging from 19 to 52. All were from the U.S.A. The latter group included 12 males and 20 females, ranging in age from 22 to 48 years; they were all M. A. English major students at Buriram Rajabhat University, Thailand.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The data were collected through a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT). An important task in this study was to examine the semantic formulas used in responding to apology situations of two different cultures: English and Thai. This required a controlled procedure by which a substantial amount of data from two different cultural and linguistic groups was collected in the same contexts for the purpose of comparison.

A DCT, employed by numerous studies (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosentein, 1986; House & Kasper, 1987; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987; Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz, 1990;

Rose, 1994; Al-Issa, 2003; Kwon, 2003; Wannaruk, 2004, Prachanant, 2006), is the most widely used method of data collection in second-language speech act research. The reasons for employing the DCT were that the DCT is a controlled elicitation method that meets the demand for cross-cultural comparability (Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Trenchs, 1995; Decapua, 1998; Kwon, 2003) and it allows researchers to control the variables of the situation (e.g. status of interlocutors), thereby providing a consistent body of data. Also, it has been proven to be quick and efficient in gathering a large amount of data (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Wolfson, 1986; Beebe & Cummings, 1996). Since the goal of this study was to investigate the subjects' use of apology strategies under the given situations rather than to study those pragmatic aspects that are specific to the dynamics of a conversation e.g. turn-taking, speaker-listener coordination or sequencing of speech, a DCT is an adequate instrument to employ.

The DCT typically consists of a set of brief situational descriptions designed to elicit a particular speech act (Kasper & Rose, 2001). Subjects read the situation and then respond in writing to a prompt. The following is an example of a DCT prompt as used in this study:

Situation: You have placed a shopping bag on the luggage rack of a crowded bus.

When the bus breaks, your bag falls down and hits a humble woman.

You: _____

The DCT consisted of 10 different situations, designed to elicit apology strategies.

Since the present study was conducted mainly in a specific situation based on the relative power relationship, the social distance between the interlocutors varied; the interlocutors were set as stranger and intimate. In addition, the power relationship was 'high-low', 'low-high' and 'equal' and the social distance was not close.

The DCT was written in English. The following are the 10 provoking-apology situations:

- Situation 1 : Borrowing the English book from a professor (Low-high)
- Situation 2 : Asking a new trainee to answer the telephone (High-low)
- Situation 3 : Forgetting a promise to watch a movie with a close friend (Equal-Equal)
- Situation 4 : Borrowing a car from your close friend and then meeting with an accident (Intimate-Intimate)
- Situation 5 : A shopping bag falls and hits a woman from a humble background (Stranger-Stranger)
- Situation 6 : Spilling food on the customer's clothes (Low-high)
- Situation 7 : Smashing part of a new trainee's laptop (High-low)
- Situation 8 : Bumping into an old woman who is holding some fruit (Stranger-Stranger)

Situation 9 : Having lunch with a friend and burping involuntarily (Equal-Equal)

Situation 10: Pushing a close friend and falling down on a dirty floor (Intimate-Intimate)

After the design of the situations as well as the content of the DCT was carefully thought out and thoroughly discussed with native speakers of both languages in order to ensure they were sufficiently natural, the instrument was pilot-tested by six respondents: three from each group of the NE and Thai EFL subjects. The main objectives of the pilot test were: 1) to carry out a preliminary analysis in order to determine whether the wording, the format and the setting of the situations would present any difficulties; 2) to identify any problematic items in the DCT and remove those elements that did not yield usable data so that the respondents in the second phase would experience no difficulties in answering the DCT; 3) to double check that the DCT was clear to all respondents and that there was no confusion as to what they were meant to do; 4) to estimate how long it would take the respondent to answer the apology-provoking situations; and 5) to ensure some sort of validity of the DCT for the data collection and to check its reliability. In other words, to make sure that the DCT was an effective and dependable means of eliciting results that would yield answers to the questions.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher collected the Thai EFL data himself and had a friend who studied in the U.S.A. collect the NE data. Before completing the DCT, both groups of subjects were given the Informed Consent Form. They completed a demographic questionnaire on their age, gender and years of schooling. Similar to the completion of the Informed Consent Form, both groups of subjects were asked to fill in the DCT. Both groups were told to respond as naturally as possible when completing each dialogue. The subjects were also free to ask questions of the administrator regarding the items in the DCT. No time limits were imposed for completion of the DCT.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section explains how the semantic formulas of the DCT data obtained from the subjects were coded. Also, it describes the statistical procedures used to analyse the data.

Coding

The data collected from both groups were analysed using semantic formulas as “units of analysis”. All data from the DCTs were coded according to the apology taxonomy developed by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and Prachanant (2006). For example, in the situation where participants responded to “Borrowing a car from your close friend and then meeting with an accident”, a response such as “I’m terribly sorry. I had

an accident. I will certainly be responsible for the damages and costs,” was analysed as consisting of three units, each falling into corresponding semantic formulas (as shown in the brackets):

- (1) I’m terribly sorry.
[Apology]
- (2) I had an accident.
[Explanation]
- (3) I will certainly be responsible for the damages and costs.
[Offering repair]

When a particular response strategy to situation was used more than once in a single response, each use was counted independently. In addition, new types of strategy (semantic formulas) were identified based on this study. To make sure the semantic formulas were correct, three trained teachers of English who acted as independent raters, worked independently on recoding all of the apology strategies in each response according to the initial coding performed by the researcher. Generally, intercoder reliability value should be more than 80% (Wannaruk, 1997). For items on which there was disagreement, all the coders reviewed the coding guidelines, recoded the data together and discussed any discrepancies until they reached a consensus. The intercoder reliability was

94%. After the coding was completed, the researcher tabulated, quantified and compared the main discourse components between the two groups. Frequency was chosen as the primary endpoint of this study.

Statistical Procedures

The semantic formulas employed by each group in response to each DCT apology situation were analysed. The researcher then calculated the total number of frequencies of the apology strategies occurring in each situation from each group by using the percentages.

FINDINGS

Apology Strategies Used by Native English Speakers and Thai EFL Learners

This part presents the frequency of apology strategies employed by 64 participants: 32 NE and 32 Thai EFL learners, who were asked to respond to 10 apology-provoking situations through the DCT. The overall frequency of semantic formulas of each group is shown in Table 1 below. Strategies are listed in descending order from reported as those most frequently used to those least used based on the total frequency counting of both groups.

TABLE 1
Frequency of Apology Strategies Used by NE and Thai EFL Learners

Apology Strategies	NE (n=32)		Thai EFL (n=32)		All Groups Combined	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Expression of apology	252	17.57	306	21.34	558	38.91
2. Offering repair	167	11.65	148	10.32	315	21.97
3. Explanation	98	6.83	129	9.00	227	15.83
4. Showing concerns	52	3.62	48	3.35	100	6.97
5. Promise of forbearance	37	2.58	38	2.65	75	5.23
6. Acknowledgement of responsibility	30	2.09	36	2.51	66	4.60
7. Offering help	29	2.02	18	1.26	47	3.28
8. Gratitude	16	1.12	7	0.48	23	1.60
9. Amusement	14	0.98	0	0.00	14	0.98
10. Exclamation	4	0.28	5	0.35	9	0.63
All Strategies Combined	699	48.74	735	51.26	1,434	100.00

Table 1 shows the overall frequency of semantic formulas reported on the two different groups: NE and Thai EFL groups through the DCT. The findings revealed that both groups employed 10 different strategies with 1,434 frequencies of semantic formulas. When considering each culture group, it was found that the NE group employed 10 different strategies with 699 frequencies (48.74%) of semantic formulas, whereas the Thai EFL group employed nine such strategies with 735 frequencies (51.26%) of semantic formulas; “Amusement” was not reported to have been used. Examination of the overall frequencies of strategy use, however, indicated that the three most frequently used strategies were: 1) “Expression of apology” (f = 558, 38.91%), followed by “Offering repair” (f = 315, 21.97%) and “Explanation” (f = 227, 15.83%), respectively. The two least used frequency strategies, on the other hand, are

“Exclamation” (f = 9, 0.63%), followed by “Amusement” (f = 14, 0.98%), which was found only in NE group.

The following are the examples of the apology strategies reported in this study.

- 1) Expression of Apology: This strategy represents a strategy used to maintain or support the apologiser’s face. In addition, it intends to remedy any threat to the apologisee’s negative face. The utterances, which serve as an expression of apology, were as follows:
 - e.g. - I (do) apologise.
 - I’m (very / really / terribly / extremely) sorry.
 - Excuse me.
 - Oops!
- 2) Offering Repair: This strategy is used to provide the apologisers with help to repair or rectify the unfavourable circumstance.

- e.g. - I will have it fixed immediately.
 - I will pay for all the damages.
 - Please allow me to pay for the repair.
- 3) Explanation: Explanation or account is a strategy used to give reasons why an unfavourable act was performed. The following were the utterances from this study.
 e.g. - I dropped the laptop accidentally.
 - I did some damage to your car while reversing.
 - I wasn't looking where I was going.
- 4) Showing Concern: This strategy is a strategy used to ask for some facts related to the unfavourable circumstance.
 e.g. - Are you all right?
 - How did everything go?
 - I hope you are not hurt.
- 5) Promise of Forbearance: This strategy is to inform the apologisers that immediate repair can be expected / will be carried out. The apologisees will also undertake to do their best to remedy the unfavourable circumstance.
 e.g. - I'm going to return the book tomorrow morning, I promise.
 - I promise to return you today.
 - I will bring it to you as soon as possible.
- 6) Acknowledgement of Responsibility: This strategy is to draw the apologisee's attention to acknowledge and accept the causes of the problem. The utterances used to accept a problem are:
 e.g. - It was my fault.
 - It's my mistake
 - I feel so stupid!
- 7) Offering Help: This strategy is used when the apologiser would like to offer help to the apologisee for the unfavourable circumstance.
 e.g. - Can I assist you in any way?
 - Please let me help you pick up the fruits.
 - May I help you?
- 8) Gratitude: This strategy is used when the apologiser would like to thank the apologisee for having informed him or her of the helping circumstance. Also, an expression of gratitude is employed when the apologiser wants to end the conversation with his / her interlocutor.
 e.g. - Thank you very much.
 - Thank you for your help.
 - Thank you very much for covering the phone for me.
- 9) Amusement: This strategy is used when the apologiser feels embarrassed when he / she performed the unfavourable act.
 e.g. - I am such a pig!
 - I can't control it (...laugh...)
- 10) Exclamation: This strategy is used when the apologiser feels surprised or shock at the unfavourable circumstance.
 e.g. - Oh, my god!
 - Oh, my gosh!

The Patterns of Semantic Formulas Used by the NE and EFL Learners

This part presents the patterns of apology strategies employed by the 64 participants, 32 NE and 32 Thai EFL learners, who were asked to respond to each of 10 apology-provoking situations through the DCT.

The 10 most used patterns of semantic formulas employed in each group are shown in Table 2 below. Patterns are listed in descending order from reported as those most frequently used to those least used based on the total frequency counting of both groups.

TABLE 2
Patterns of Semantic Formulas Used by NE and Thai EFL Learners

Apology Strategies	NE (n=32)		Thai EFL (n=32)		All Groups Combined	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Expression of apology + Offering repair	82	15.10	94	17.31	176	32.41
2. Expression of apology + Explanation	68	12.53	75	13.81	143	26.34
3. Expression of apology + Offering repair + Showing concern	32	5.89	30	5.53	62	11.42
4. Expression of apology	17	3.13	30	5.53	47	8.66
5. Explanation	24	4.42	18	3.31	42	7.73
6. Expression of apology + Offering repair + Explanation	12	2.21	13	2.39	25	4.60
7. Acknowledgement of responsibility	8	1.47	8	1.47	16	2.94
8. Acknowledgement of responsibility + Offering repair	7	1.28	6	1.11	13	2.39
9. Offering repair	4	0.74	6	1.11	10	1.85
10. Expression of apology + Offering help	4	0.74	5	0.92	9	1.66
All Patterns Combined	258	47.51	285	52.49	543	100.00

As shown in Table 2, it was found that both groups of participants employed the patterns of semantic formulas in responding to the provoking-apology situations in the similar way. The three most frequently use of the patterns of semantic formulas employed by both groups were “Expression of apology + Offering repair” with the frequencies of 176 (32.41%): NE = 82 (15.10%), Thai EFL = 94 (17.31%), followed by “Expression of apology + Explanation” with the frequencies of 143

(26.34%): NE = 68 (12.53%), Thai EFL = 75(13.81%) and “Expression of apology + Offering repair + Showing concern” with a frequency total of 62 (11.42%): NE = 32 (5.89%), Thai EFL = 30 (5.53%), respectively.

The following are the examples of each pattern of semantic formulas:

- 1) Expression of apology + Offering repair – “I’m extremely sorry. I will pay for all the damages.”

- 2) Expression of apology + Explanation – “I’m sorry. I did some damage to your car while reversing.”
- 3) Expression of apology + Offering repair + Showing concern – “I apologise for that. I will buy some new fruits for you. Are you okay?”
- 4) Expression of apology – “I’m terribly sorry.”
- 5) Explanation – “I wasn’t looking where I was going.”
- 6) Expression of apology + Offering repair + Explanation – “So sorry, I will buy a new one for you. I dropped the laptop accidentally.”
- 7) Acknowledgement of responsibility – “It is my mistake, madam.”
- 8) Acknowledgement of responsibility + Offering repair – “Oh, how clumsy I am! I will buy a new one for you.”
- 9) Offering repair – “I will take care of all damages.”
- 10) Expression of apology + Offering help – “Please accept my apology. What can I help you?”

DISCUSSION

Apology Strategies Used by the NE and Thai EFL Learners

Examining the data presented in Table 1, 10 apology strategies were used by the NE and Thai EFL learners. The three most used strategies were ‘Expression of apology’, ‘Offering repair’ and ‘Explanation’. These findings are consistent with the claims

made by all linguists who conducted the studies on apology (e.g. Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain, 1983; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1987, 1995; Holmes, 1989, 1990; Vollmer & Olshtain, 1989; Suszczynska, 1999; Tuncel 1999; Reiter, 2000; Intachakra, 2001; Tamanaha, 2003; Prachanant, 2006, Istifci, 2009; Alfattah, 2010) that with respect to the languages studies in their research, the three major semantic formulas mentioned were ‘universal’. Having said that all these strategies are normally used by both the native and non-native speakers of all varieties of English. Thus it could be said that the situations employed in the present study mirrored those in daily life so that the findings of those studies were similar in employing the strategies. This is similar to the conclusion of Olshtain (1983, p.170) that “it seems to be possible to identify universal manifestations of strategy selection’.” In addition, this strategy was claimed by Suszczynska (1999) i.e. that it was commonly called for in most situations investigated. Also, the most explicit realisation of the apology strategy is ‘Expression of apology’, which is called for in each situation by both groups. This could be explained by the fact that both groups had the perception that using ‘Expression of apology’ was compulsory in each apology; “I’m (intensifiers) sorry” was the most common used. This is consistent with the claims made by Owen (1983) that ‘Expression of apology’ is the most conventionalised and routinised as it was in the centre of the speech act of

apologising in the study and represented verbal routine or a syntactic-semantic formula, which is regularly used to fulfil a specific communicative function.

The Patterns of Semantic Formulas Used by the NE and Thai EFL Learners

The findings revealed that the two most popular patterns of semantic formulas used were 'Expression of apology + Offering repair' and 'Expression of apology + Explanation'. This could be explained by the fact that both groups of the participants have the perception that using 'Expression of apology' was compulsory in each provoking-apology situation, and 'Offering repair' or 'Explanation' should be called for in order to decrease the offence of the apologisee. As Owen (1983; cited in Suszcynska, 1999) stated, 'Expression of apology' was the most conventionalised and routinised as it was in the centre of the speech act of apologising in the study and represented verbal routine or syntactic-semantic formula, which is regularly used to fulfil a specific communicative function. This finding is similar to the studies of Tuncel (1999), Istifci (2009) and Alfattah (2010), who concluded that the three most used patterns in apology situations are 'IFID (Apology) + Explanation' and 'IFID (Apology) + Promise and forbearance' and 'IFID (Apology) + Offering repair', respectively.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggested that in some situations Thai EFL learners

approached native speaker norms in the use of apology strategies. However, in some situations there were different in the use of apologies. This may be assumed that L1 (Thai) have an influence on the use of apologies in the Thai EFL group. As mentioned in scope and limitation of the study, it is difficult to generalise the findings because the data were collected from 32 NE and 32 Thai EFL learners. However, the findings from this study suggest opportunities for building cross-cultural communications across continents. The results have implications for teaching and learning of English as an L2 in cross-cultural contexts. That is, to raise pragmatic awareness in the English classroom, language teachers should use clips from feature films or videotaped television programmes such as news reports and business talk shows, which illustrate various responses to introduce language learners to apology interaction or any other speech act behaviours between native speakers of English (Rose, 1997; Tanaka, 1997). Using audiovisual media is especially useful in an EFL environment like Thailand, where there is no or little authentic input from native speakers of the target language. The teachers could encourage the pragmatic awareness of learners by discussing status relationships between the interlocutors and by comparing the differences, as well as the similarities between the ways English speakers in the clips performed any given speech acts and the way learners would do so in Thai. This kind of activity would help learners realise that speakers from different

cultures may not always share the same sociolinguistic rules of performing speech acts as their own.

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