

母語非英語之大學生其學術英文之學習經驗如何影響其使用英文  
道歉的策略發展

**The Effects of Academic English Learning Experience  
on University English-Majored EFL Students'  
Use of Apology Strategies**

by

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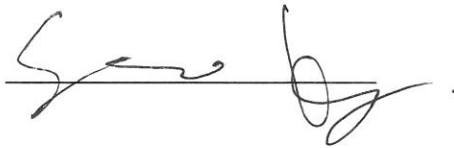
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....                                 | IV  |
| <b>CHINESE ABSTRACT</b> .....                               | V   |
| <b>ENGLISH ABSTRACT</b> .....                               | VII |
| <b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....                         | 1   |
| Background of the study .....                               | 1   |
| Statement of the Problems.....                              | 2   |
| Purpose of the Study .....                                  | 2   |
| Research Questions .....                                    | 3   |
| Definition of Terms.....                                    | 3   |
| Significance of the Study .....                             | 4   |
| <b>CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</b> .....             | 5   |
| Communicative Competence .....                              | 5   |
| Sociolinguistic Competence .....                            | 6   |
| EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence .....                    | 6   |
| Academic Learning Experience and Pragmatic Development..... | 8   |
| Speech Acts .....   | 11  |
| Apology Speech Act.....                                     | 12  |
| Apology Strategies .....                                    | 13  |
| Inter-language Studies on Apology.....                      | 15  |
| Cross-Cultural Studies on Apology.....                      | 17  |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Influence of Time Spent Abroad on Apology Strategies .....                      | 19        |
| Different Proficiency Levels and Apologies Strategy Choice .....                | 20        |
| Summary of Apologies Strategy Use among EFL Language Learners .....             | 23        |
| <b>CHAPTER 3 METHOD .....</b>   | <b>26</b> |
| The Pilot Study.....  | 26        |
| Participants .....  | 30        |
| Instruments .....   | 31        |
| Data Collection Procedures .....  | 32        |
| Data Analysis Procedures.....   | 33        |
| <b>CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....</b>                                   | <b>35</b> |
| Frequency Distribution of Apology Strategies by Freshmen and Senior Students... | 35        |
| Independent Samples T-test Results .....  | 38        |
| Primary Apology Strategies by Freshmen and Seniors.....                         | 39        |
| Intensifiers, Premodifiers and Expressing Concern in Apologies.....             | 45        |
| Strategy Combinations by Freshmen and Seniors.....                              | 50        |
| Lack of Expressing an Apology Strategy.....                                     | 51        |
| <b>CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS .....</b>  | <b>53</b> |
| Summary of the Study.....   | 53        |
| Summary of the Major Findings .....   | 54        |
| Implications of the Findings of the Study .....                                 | 56        |
| Limitations of the Study .....  | 57        |

|                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Suggestions for Future Research..... | 58 |
| Conclusion.....                      | 59 |
| <b>REFERENCES</b> .....              | 61 |
| <b>APPENDICES</b> .....              | 67 |

## LIST OF TABLES

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Table 3.1</b> Frequency of freshman students' apology strategy use.....   | 27 |
| <b>Table 3.2</b> Frequency of senior students' apology strategy use.....   | 28 |
| <b>Table 3.3</b> Number of apology strategies used within the same situation by participants.....                  | 29 |
| <b>Table 4.1</b> Frequency of apology strategies by freshmen and senior students .....                             | 35 |
| <b>Table 4.2</b> Percentage of apology strategies distribution among freshmen and senior students ....             | 37 |
| <b>Table 4.3</b> Apology strategy use across situations among freshmen .....                                       | 42 |
| <b>Table 4.4</b> Apology strategy use across situations among seniors.....   | 42 |
| <b>Table 4.5</b> Frequency of intensifiers, premodifiers and expressing concern by freshmen .....                  | 45 |
| <b>Table 4.6</b> Frequency of intensifiers, premodifiers and expressing concern by seniors .....                   | 46 |
| <b>Table 4.7</b> Frequency of apology strategy combinations in the situations by freshmen and senior students..... | 50 |
| <b>Table 4.8</b> Lack of apology by participants in Situation 4 and Situation 8 .....                              | 52 |

# 母語非英語之大學生其學術英文之學習經驗如何影響其 使用英文道歉的策略發展

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## 中文摘要

基於語言學習者需要經常在特殊情境下選擇最適宜道歉策略來彌補犯錯，所以道歉能力可視為社會語言能力重要指標之一。本研究以 Olshtain 和 Cohen (1983) 的道歉策略先驅研究為理論架構。其研究目的在探究台灣大學英文主修新生以及四年級學生英語道歉策略的運用，以及比較對照兩組學生英語道歉策略之異同。本研究提出的三個研究問題如下所列：1) 大學英文系新生最常使用的英語道歉策略為何？2) 大學英文系四年級生最常使用的英語道歉策略為何？3) 大學英文系新生以及四年級學生其英語道歉策略的運用是否有顯著差異？

本研究將參與的 70 位英文系大學生分為兩組，包括 35 位大一新生以及 35 位四年級學生。研究資料來源為書寫言談情境填充問卷。研究方法由研究者加以解碼歸類問卷回覆的內容，並著重於分析新生與四年級生道歉策略使用頻率及合併策略運用之異同，再以 t 檢定分析兩組參與者道歉策略運用的顯著差異。研究分析結果顯示如下：（一）、由參與者的道歉策略中，研究者歸納出七項主要道歉策略以及三項輔助策略等共十項不同道歉策略。（二）、T 檢定結果顯示兩組參與者在整體道歉策略運用有顯著差異，但在七項主要策略運用上則無顯著差異。（三）、兩組參與者在其他三項輔助策略的使用頻率上則有顯

著差異。四年級生顯示出使用較多象徵英語為母語使用者的策略，如副詞加強語及前置修飾語以及在同一情境下綜合運用多項策略。本研究者由上述結果結論英語為外語學術學習時間對學習者如何使用英語表達道歉有重大的影響。

關鍵字：語用學，道歉學習，大學學習經驗，學術學習經驗，新生及四年級生，道歉模式



# **The Effects of Academic English Learning Experience on University English-Majored EFL Students' Use of Apology Strategies**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study investigated English majored freshmen and senior college students' use of apology strategies in Taiwan and compared/contrasted these two groups' use of apology strategies. Apologizing as a speech act is a great indicator of sociolinguistic competence due to its frequent use by language learners in specific situations that require selecting the most fitting apologies strategy for remedying a case. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) were the first researchers who investigated apologizing strategies in greater length, and their study served as the theoretical framework for this research. The participants of this study were English majors in the Taiwanese context and the two groups of participants consisted of 35 freshmen and 35 senior students. Participants were given written discourse completion tasks (WDCT) and their responses were coded and categorized. The study highlighted differences between freshmen and senior students' apology strategies in terms of frequency and combination of these strategies. There were ten different strategies identified among the participants and seven of these strategies served as primary apology strategies whereas three were considered as supplementary strategies by the researcher. T-test showed that when looking at the overall apology strategies there is a significant difference between freshmen and seniors whereas in the case of the seven primary apology strategies the difference was not significant. T-test however showed a significant effect in the frequency of the three supplementary strategies between freshmen and seniors. Seniors also

showed more signs of native-likeness by using intensifiers and premodifiers in greater frequency as well as more frequently expressing a combination of three, four and five apology strategies within the same situation. From differences observed between freshmen and seniors in their apology strategies the researcher concluded that years of academic learning experience does contribute significantly to how EFL learners express their apologies in English language.

Key words: pragmatics, apology study, university learning experience, academic learning experience, freshmen and senior students, apologizing patterns

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction section offers a short summary about the background of the present study as well as listing issues that the researcher may face during the research. The purpose, significance of the study and the research questions state the aim of this research and give readers an understanding of the nature of the research.

### **Background of the Study**

Since Hyme's (1966) theory of Communicative Competence there has been a growing number of studies that looked at the pragmatic comprehension of L2 learners (Garcia, 2004; Rost, 2013; Savignon, 1972). Apart from studies that focused on measuring pragmatic competence of language learners a good body of research has also been conducted on speech acts, some taking apologies as their main focus. Several studies compared apology strategy use among non-native speakers (Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein, 1986; Rastegar & Yasami, 2014; Tajeddin & Pirhoseinloo, 2012) while others looked at inter-language apology patterns (Linnell et. al., 1990; Mir, 1992; Mirzaei, Roohani & Esmaeili, 2012) while several others focused on cross-cultural apology strategy use (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Song & Liu, 2002; Suszczyriska, 1999).

### **Statement of the Problems**

Although there have been several studies conducted on the speech act of apology, there is clearly a shortage of those studies in this area that look at how students with different language

skills choose to apologize in various situations in English. Moreover, according to the best knowledge of the researcher, there has not been any studies conducted that look at how participants with different years in their academic studies at university level choose to apologize in English. A better understanding of this will allow researchers and English language instructors to know how and whether adult English learners' construction of apology strategies is related to the length of English education they receive and to have them familiarize with the pragmatics of apology strategies in their learning of English.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study was to investigate English majored Taiwanese college students' use of apology strategies in English, specifically how Taiwanese students in different academic years of their studies chose to express their apologies. As Thomas (1983) pointed out, language learners' sociopragmatic failure is hard to remedy as how someone chooses to use the language depends on a set of system of belief as well as language knowledge. English majored students throughout their academic years of studies read and listen to many dialogs between English speakers as they enroll to various English language classes as well as classes about the culture and history of English speaking countries. By comparing students with different study-years we can gain more insights into whether there is any progress of students' pragmatic competence in their apology strategy use during their academic studies as English majors. Given their advanced years in their studies, the researcher expected increased language awareness among senior students compared to freshmen students and thus it is also expected that senior students are able to express a more variety of apology strategies in various contexts than freshmen students. The main objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To observe apology strategies most preferred by freshmen and senior students.
2. To compare/contrast college freshmen and senior participants' use of apology strategies.

### **Research Questions**

The study tried to answer the following questions:

1. What are the apology strategies most commonly used by university English-majored EFL freshmen?
2. What are the apology strategies most commonly used by university English-majored EFL seniors?
3. Is there a significant difference in university English-majored EFL students' use of apology strategies between freshmen and seniors?

### **Definition of Terms**

Accounts: An apology strategy, the offender tries to explain the circumstances of why the offence took place

Apology strategies combinations: combination of two or more apologetic strategies within the same response

Apology strategies modifications: a modified version of one of the apology strategies from the adapted apology strategies coding scheme

Academic English learning experience: refers to students' accumulated English learning experience at formal university education. Length of English learning experience at academic level.

Discourse-Completion Task: it is used to test participants' performance of Speech Acts and see how participants complete pragmatics related gap filling tests

Illocutionary Force Indicating Device: expression of an apology

Intensification: how utterances are increased

Speech Acts: A field in linguistics that measures how a speaker uttered something in order to relay communication. Some of the Speech Acts are: apologizing, greeting, refusals, complimenting etc... It is important what the functions of the speakers are, and whether the speakers achieve their intended meaning or not.

### **Significance of the Study**

Findings of the present study aim to provide a better understanding of English majored university students' apology strategy use in different grade levels. By comparing freshmen and senior students in their apology strategy use we can document any change or progression in the two groups' pragmatic performance in apology strategies. It is hoped that the findings help college instructors develop apology strategies that tend to be underused by the participants in the teaching and highlight their students' incorrect use of apology strategies for their improvement of English proficiency and for their accurate use of English apology strategies.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Hymes' (1966) theory of Communicative Competence prompted an increase in studies of pragmatics (Widdowson, 1978; Canale & Swain, 1980) as well as studies in speech acts such as apology studies (Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, 1989; Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E., 1984) which made a better understanding of how the language is used in a variety of contexts.

#### **Communicative Competence**

Hymes theory of Communicative Competence in 1966 has provided a new ideology that regarded the social use of the language separate from linguistic understanding. Hymes proposed that linguistic and communicative competence are separate components of the language as the first only involves grammatical understanding whereas communicative competence involves the understanding and the appropriate use of the language. Hymes argued that when learning a language, aside from being able to understand grammatical rules, appropriateness of language use should also be emphasized.

In 1978, similarly to Hymes, Widdowson distinguished between language 'usage' and language 'use'. Usage referred to the linguistic competence of the language learner whereas use meant appropriately demonstrating language skills in real-life situations. Following Hymes' (1966) and Widdowson's (1978) claim about separate grammar and communicative competence several researchers (e.g., Rajan, 2012; Thomas, 1983; Widdowson, 1989) conducted studies that supported Hymes' and Widdowson's theory where grammatical competence does not always equal to communicative competence. All the subjects in the studies by Rajan (2012), Thomas

(1983) and Widdowson (1989) had high grammatical competence but when they were presented with various social situations in most cases they failed to perform appropriate language use that the situations would have required.

### **Sociolinguistic Competence**

Canale and Swain (1980) proposed that a language learner with communicative competence also retains sociolinguistic competence as sociolinguistic knowledge involves being able to correctly interpret various social contexts. Second language learners need to be aware of several norms during their discourse in order not to break sociolinguistic rules as appropriate language use is required in a specific situation. It is expected that L2 learners are aware of the general rules though individual perception about one's judgement of specific situations may vary depending on the background of the language learners. Goffman (1971) looked at the disparity between language learners' views of the same social situations presented to them. He found that most participants who came from different countries or cultures did perceive the same situations differently and thus acted or responded in various ways depending on how they regarded these situations.

### **EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence**

As Communicative Competence of L2 learners had received more and more focus in the 60's and 70's, (Hymes, 1966; Savignon, 1972) several empirical studies have been carried out to examine differences of pragmatic patterns use of EFL learners. There have been several models set for defining pragmatic competence. Rost (2013) described pragmatic competence as an ability wherein language learners can understand language elements of a given text as well as also being



able to differentiate between contextual facts like interlocutors' social position. Roberts, Davies and Jupp (2014) emphasized the importance of meaning in pragmatics, as the speaker must deliver a message that is received by the listener with the original intended meaning.

In his study, Garcia (2004) looked at how advanced and beginner level English language students processed pragmatic meanings in audio materials. 16 advanced level and 19 beginner level students participated in the research and the researcher looked at how students perceive different speech acts as well as uttered feelings and attitudes. Results of the study showed that higher proficiency students outperformed lower proficiency students in pragmatic comprehension as high group students were overall more able to predict the interlocutor's next response after listening to an audio excerpt where only half of the conversation was available.

Matsumura (2003) examined the change of EFL learners' pragmatic competence over time as functions of participants' different level of English and exposure to English language. English proficiency of the students were set by their TOEFL scores whereas amount of exposure of English language was determined by a self-report questionnaire. As a method, participants were given multiple choice questionnaires in three intervals related to advice-giving during the course of the research. Results not only revealed that participants' pragmatic competence had slight improvement at each of the measured occasion, but data also indicated that the amount of exposure to a language is more relevant for developing pragmatic competence than language proficiency.

Koike (1989) measured pragmatic competence of beginner L2 learners by looking at various speech act production. Discourse completion tasks were used as a mean for measuring production

of speech acts. Findings showed that in most cases where a speech act such as politeness might have been too difficult to express for the L2 learners they chose to use a more simple form in order to successfully convey their meaning. The participants generally felt safer uttering a short, direct form of the speech acts given the simplicity of their linguistic forms.

### **Academic Learning Experience and Pragmatic Development**

Some research has also been conducted to examine the correlation between language learning at higher education and their effects on pragmatic competence. The review of such studies has resulted in mixed findings. Several studies observed no significant difference in pragmatic development of young adult students after attending language courses (Cohen, 1997; Kasper, 1996; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Bardovi-Harlog & Hartford, 1993) whereas some researchers (Koike, 1996; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Trosborg, 1995) did report on notable differences in the increase of participants' pragmatic competence after a period of time.

Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford (1993) focused on pragmatic ability development of sixteen advanced level non-native English speakers while attending academic advising sessions in the course of one semester. The researchers were especially interested in students' abilities in expressing suggestions and use of rejections at the end of the semester. Results showed that while there were similarities between students' use of these two speech acts and native-English speaker norms the non-native speakers still lacked appropriate skills of using mitigators and they also used more aggravators while expressing speech acts. Session advisors did not provide feedback on the appropriateness of speech act forms, students only received positive and negative feedback on the outcome of the speech act.

Cohen (1997) attended intensive Japanese language course for one semester at his local university and he kept a diary where he recorded his progress in using speech acts such as apologies, requests and expressing gratitude. Cohen possessed some Japanese language ability from his previous studies and he expected that with attending the course he would have enough proficiency to be able to adequately express himself using speech acts. By the end of the course, however he noted that his pragmatic abilities in Japanese language were more poor than what he had previously anticipated. Cohen believed that the teaching style in the class played a major role in his failure to express himself in Japanese as the teacher used a rote learning method that focused more on memorization of language segments. He concluded that based on his own views after attending this course his communication skills in Japanese still remained very poor.

Takahashi and Beebe (1987) looked at 10 undergraduate and 10 graduate EFL learner Japanese students' use of refusals to determine whether there was a difference in the pragmatic abilities of the two groups. The researchers hypothesized that graduate EFL learners would have higher proficiency and thus their results would be better than the undergraduate students in answering the DCTs. Interestingly, the researchers could not identify any apparent differences between these two groups pragmatic competence based on the students' expressions of refusals. Based on the results, Takahashi & Beebe believed that among Japanese learners of English conversational expressions such as refusals may not be affected by EFL learners' pragmatic competence, the researchers speculated that more general expressions could have shown different results.

Similar to Takahashi and Beebe (1987), Trosborg (1995) also looked at pragmatic development of students with different education level, namely grade 9 secondary students,

commercial school and university students. Although Trosborg did not administer any proficiency test among the three different groups of participants, based on the gaps in their education level it was assumed that each education level represented different proficiency levels. The participants were English learners in Denmark and their answers of apologies, complaints and requests were recorded and analyzed. Findings showed that requests by university students were very close to the norms of that of native-English speakers as university students were observed to use more adjuncts with main strategies. In the case of apologies and complaints, however only smaller differences were observed between the groups, the only notable difference was the lower proficiency groups' higher use of opting out as a strategy in apologizing.

A study by Koike (1996) similar to Takahashi and Beebe (1987) also compared language learners' pragmatic competence in different levels of their academic learning. In Koike's (1996) study, the participants were all Spanish learning native-English speakers in their first, second and fourth years at the University of Austin in Texas. Two types of different methods were used for measuring the students' pragmatic knowledge. The researcher videotaped responses to a variety of questions and dialogues by native-Spanish speakers and the students were asked to respond to these suggestions and identify the illocutionary acts within the recorded videotapes. Apart from responding to suggestions, students' listening comprehension was also analyzed. Koike found that there was no significant difference in the first and second year students' pragmatic competence, moreover second year students did even worse than first year students. The researcher did not comment on how the second year students who attended university longer than the first year students and had exposure to Spanish language this way longer could do worse on the pragmatic comprehension tests. Fourth year students, however outperformed both the first and second year students in both kinds of tasks. Fourth year students payed more attention to

routine formulaes (Por qué no?) when listening to the tapes and thus they were able to identify more illocutionary indicating devices. As we can see from different studies such as Koike's (1996) some groups of students do benefit from academic learning in terms of their pragmatic development whereas in some other cases it seems that there is no significant difference between the pragmatic abilities of those students in different year-level of their language studies (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). Given the mixed results and the lack of those studies that looked at academic learning experience's role in pragmatic development of the students, there is clearly more room for research that look at differences in speech act realization patterns such as apologies between students in their different university grade.

### **Speech Acts**

Associated with communicative competence, the concept of speech acts was developed by Austin (1962) to address the various functions of utterances. Speech act refers to uttering statements within any given context in order to convey a message. A speech act can be considered successful if one's acts suffice the other's intention. Austin defined three main aspects that characterize speech acts, i.e., "locutionary act", "illocutionary act" and "perlocutionary act". Locutionary act is the physical performance of an utterance itself whereas illocutionary act is the intended meaning of an utterance by the speaker. Perlocutionary act, on the other hand, is the consequences of an utterance, namely how it is received by the interlocutor. Researchers who are investigating speech acts (e.g., compliments, requests, or apologies) focus primarily on the illocutionary act of the speakers as they are interested in how well the speakers can convey their desired meaning in different situations. Apologizing is one of the speech acts that have been

receiving more and more attention from researchers in order to determine how competently L2 learners are able to use English language in situations that rely on communicative competence.

### **Apology Speech Act**

Expressing an apology can be a suitable indicator of sociolinguistic competence as they occur regularly in conversations. In an apology, the speaker will have to adhere to various social norms depending on different circumstances. When apologizing, the intention of the speaker is to ask for forgiveness and to try to repair and offense. There might be misunderstandings, social and cultural differences that all make for different patterns for apologizing. Olshtain and Cohen (1989) offered a definition for apology “The act of apology is called for when there is some behavior that violates social norms. When an action or an utterance (or the lack of either) results in the fact that one or more persons perceive themselves as deserving an apology, the culpable person(s) is (are) expected to apologize. ” In their study, Wolfson, Marmor and Jones (1989) specified seven situations when Americans feel compelled to express an apology:

1. Not keeping a social or work-related commitment
2. Not respecting property
3. Causing damage or discomfort to others
4. Making others responsible for one’s welfare
5. Expecting another to be available at all times
6. Confusing strangers with acquaintances
7. Protecting another from sanctions from those in authority over them.

When apologizing, there are many different factors for the offender to consider if he or she wishes to be successful in seeking for forgiveness. First, as Holmes (1990) noted, one of the aspects that may influence how one chooses to apologize is the severity of the offense, namely how serious and what type of offense the wrongdoer had done. For instance, destroying an expensive laptop may warrant for a full-hearted longer apology with possibly using more than just one apology strategies whereas in the case of bumping to someone on the street a short ‘Sorry’ may suffice. Second, age and the familiarity between the two interlocutors can also assert for different word choice in apologizing. Cohen, Olshtain and Rosenstein’s study (1986) found that people with generally better relationship with each other e.g. friends will in most cases only utter a shorter apology. In contrast, when the same offense happens between people who are unfamiliar with each other the offender may apologize more lengthily. Third, as pointed out by Trosborg (1987), power relationship is also a factor in how we choose to apologize. When an employee offends his or her superior for instance, then it is likely that the employee’s apology will be more heartfelt one than vice versa.

### **Apology Strategies**

When the L2 learner has determined the need for an apology then there are several options available in the forms of strategies for apologizing. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) recorded 5 main apologizing strategies in their study that participants used as face saving acts: expression of apology, explanation or account of the situation, acknowledgement of responsibility, an offer of repair and lastly promise of forbearance.

Expression of an apology indicates regret about something that the offender did that caused some inconvenience to the offended. According to Olshtain and Cohen (1983) expression of an

apology may have three subformulas that are often used when asking for forgiveness, namely an expression of regret 'I am so sorry', an offer of apology 'I apologize.' and request for forgiveness 'Please forgive me.' Several researchers such as Blum-Kulka (1984) and Holmes (1987) also defined the simple forms of expression of an apology as an IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device) which can be the most direct way of saying sorry to an offended person.

Explanation of the situation is an indirect form of apologizing, e.g., 'This happened because...' or 'I was late because I couldn't find my keys.' In the above examples, the offender tries to justify his or her situation by stating why the unfortunate event took place. By explaining an event with details that made the offender cause some inconvenience to the offended may relieve the offender as a wrongdoer and divert responsibility to some other person or situational element concerning their particular case. If the explanation is accepted by the offended then the situation will be reconciled between the two persons.

Acknowledgement of responsibility takes place when the offender acknowledged his or her part of the action that caused some inconvenience to the offended person (e.g., 'I am the one to blame for this.' or 'My mistake.') Cohen and Olshtain (1983) further identified the subcategories of such responsibility, and concluded that these subcategories come with the offender's use of intensifier. Mild use of intensifier may result in self-defense, e.g., 'I didn't mean to.' A greater use of intensifier will result in the complete acceptance of the blame; 'I am the one who was at fault for what happened.'

An offer of repair may be attempted by the offender as a remedy for a situation where he or she was the causer of a misdeed. This type of apology strategy alongside with 'promise of forbearance' might be highly situation specific as offering a remedy may not be suitable in all kinds of situations. For instance, being late from a class would not warrant a student to offer a remedy to the teacher whereas if a student bumped into a professor on the way to the class and as



a result the professor would drop a costly laptop to the ground leaving it damaged then the student may offer to pay for the repair costs of the professor's laptop.

Promise of forbearance is a promise by the offender from refraining from doing a particular event or situation. The apologizer admits his or her fault this way and tries to reassure the offended that the unfortunate accident will not happen again.

### **Inter-Language Studies on Apology**

Several researchers that had focused on apologizing compared socio-cultural differences between apologetic strategies in English with the involvement of participants from different cultural backgrounds. Their aim was to discover how native English speakers and non-native English learners differed in terms of their apologetic strategy use in English (Linnell et. al., 1990; Mir, 1992; Mirzaei, Roohani & Esmaeili 2012). A study conducted by Linnell et al. (1990) looked at the differences between native and non-native English speakers apologizing in identical situations. Both the native and non-native speaking group consisted of 20 participants each and verbal DCTs were used to collect data. Eight apologetic strategies were observed by the researchers and they found that there were only significant differences between the two groups at two types of strategies, namely explicit apologies and acknowledgement of the need of apologizing. In addition, compared with the answers of native-English speakers, non-native speakers undersupplied the use of intensifiers in an insult type situation.

Mir (1992), similar to Linnell et. al. (1990), also sought to compare apology production by native and non-native English speakers. The two groups of participants were asked to role play hypothetical situations typed on cards. The researcher used Trosborgs' (1987) coding system for categorizing apologetic patterns and unlike Linnell et.al. (1990), seven different apologetic

patterns were identified during the study. Just like in the case of the study in Linnel et.al.'s (1990) second language learners undersupplied acknowledging responsibility as a strategy. Mir (1992) also came to the conclusion that in apologies many second language learners used a so called 'avoidance strategy' to express themselves with as little words as possible in order to avoid using more complex linguistic forms. For example, Mir noted that non-native speakers overused simple phrases such as 'I am sorry.'

Mirzaei, Roohani and Esmaili (2012) also carried out a research to examine how native English speakers and Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic performance differed in apologizing, refusals and requests. The instruments were written DCTs like in Mir's (1992) study that served to elicit responses from participants. In contrast to the aforementioned two studies, Mirzaei, Roohani and Esmaili also rated the appropriateness of the responses from a 1-5 scale according to how appropriate the participants' answers felt for the researchers. The poorest replies were awarded with 1 and the most appropriate ones were marked 5. Rating the data consisted of two steps. First, a linguistic scale was used (0-1), if the response contained grammatical flaws then a score of 0 was given whereas in the case of proper grammar use 1 was awarded to the participant. Second, a 1-4 scale followed the linguistic scale that measured the appropriateness of the apologies provided by the participants. The sum of the two scales consisted of the overall value of the 1-5 scale. Apart from rating appropriateness of the responses of the two groups, similar to Linnel et.al.'s (1990) and Mir's (1992) studies apologetic strategies of the participants were also observed and coded. The researchers found that native-English speakers especially favored using four strategies, 'Intensifiers,' 'Illocutionary force indicating device (IFID),' 'Explanation of cause,' and 'Offer of repair.' The non-native English speakers used fewer strategies than the

American speakers, 'IFID' and 'Offer of repair' were the most common strategies chosen by them.

All three studies that compared native and non-native English speakers' apologizing strategies concluded that native-English speakers used more varied strategies than L2 learners in expressing apologies. Mir (1992) hypothesized that the reason why non-native speakers use a reduced number of strategies in apologizing is related to their lack of target language skills. Consequently, in order to avoid improper grammar non-native speakers tend to use a more simple form of language that they are confident in using.

### **Cross-Cultural Studies on Apology**

Alongside studies that focused on L2 learners' and native-English speakers' apologetic patterns, there are also several research that looked at how participants from different backgrounds apologized using their own language. (Bataineh & Bataineh 2008, Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984, Song & Liu 2002, Suszczyriska 1999). Bataineh & Bataineh (2008) were concerned with differences in English and Jordanian Arabic apologizing differences. Participants included 100 American and 100 Jordanian students in their study. The choice of instrument used by the researchers was similar to that of DCTs as this questionnaire also consisted of 10 situations with each situation describing an action. The participants then were asked whether these actions would warrant any apologies and if yes, what kind of apology would be deemed acceptable. Jordanian participants were allowed to give their answers in Arabic language as according to the researchers if the Jordanic students provided their answers in English, language barriers could have hindered their choices. Findings showed that both groups used explicit apologies (i.e., accounts and offer of repair) though Jordanian respondents tended to use more

intensifiers in some of the situations more than the American respondents. Moreover, Jordanians also used more non-apology strategies in larger numbers than Americans.

Suszczyriska (1999) used three groups of participants for her research concerning apologizing patterns, Americans, Hungarians and Polish students. Just as in the case of Bataineh and Bataineh (2008), Suszczyriska (1999) wanted to gain more insight into how people from different cultural backgrounds choose to apologize in the same situations. Suszczyriska also favored using DCT as an instrument for gathering data, her findings demonstrated that the different groups modify IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices such as 'I am sorry, I apologize') differently. The American group upgraded most of IFID by using intensifiers or exclamations. In contrast, even though Hungarians and Polish students also used intensifiers in several cases they did not use these intensifiers to the same level as the Americans did. Offer of help and concern were also frequently observed among the participants' answers, all three groups offered a high number of help in the form of assistance in the situations. As for expressing concerns, Polish students expressed the least amount (24%) whereas Americans came close to 70% and Hungarians 40%. Suszczyriska's study was more detailed than some other studies in a way that this research specified the details more about apologizing patterns than some other research that only pointed out the apologizing strategies that were favored by the participants.

Song and Liu (2002) investigated English and Chinese language apologizing patterns with the aim of finding socio-pragmatic variables that influence apologizing patterns in Chinese. The study showed that for Chinese people, apologizing is situation specific, different situations warranted for different strategies. Song & Liu also concluded that the more severe an offense was the more intensifiers Chinese students used in their direct apologies. Some similarities between

Chinese and English apologizing patterns include the use of IFID being the most favored by both groups closely followed by Responsibilities.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) in their study about Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) were also interested in differences between participants from different backgrounds in their use of apology and refusals speech acts. The research included a high number of participants, 200 native and 200 non-native English speakers helped with filling out DCTs. Concerning apology speech act, the researchers were interested in whether both groups of participants felt appropriate to utter and apology for the given scenarios and if they did which type of apology strategies they preferred using. Categories of apology types included IFID, explanation, offer of repair and promise of forbearance. The researchers claimed that explanations, offer of repair and promise of forbearance strategies were very situation dependent and participants from different backgrounds used these strategies in a more varied way.

Studies such as Bataineh and Bataineh (2008), Song and Liu (2002), Suszczyriska (1999) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) compared pragmatic differences between languages without data that has been affected by language issues as participants all used their mother tongue to provide their answers on the DCTs. In contrast to Mir's (1992) and other studies that collected data from L2 learners in English to compare apologizing patterns, research such as Suszczyriska's only used natural native-language input which this way, was not affected by any pragmatic transfers.

### **Influence of Time Spent Abroad on Apology Strategies**

Apart from comparing sociocultural differences between apologetic patterns of various languages, some researchers were interested in how time spent abroad influenced some socio-

pragmatic skills over time. Kinginger and Farrel (2004) used native-English speakers who had the chance to spend time in France studying French language. The researchers identified that spending time abroad learning the language does help in acquiring some of the slight and subtle socio-pragmatic skills and thus they concluded with that by living abroad L2 learners absorb the small nuances of a language that are required for full pragmatic competence. Similarly, Cohen and Shively (2007) as well as Shively and Cohen (2008) were also interested in socio pragmatic competence improvement during L2 learners studying abroad, namely how apologetic patterns of these learners improved in Spanish and French language while living in a French or Spanish speaking country. Cohen and Shively (2007) looked at both French and Spanish language acquisition patterns. Findings indicated that students who spent over one semester abroad improved their apologizing skills significantly. The researchers also emphasized the need of socio pragmatic awareness for language learners as lacking socio pragmatic skills might lead to inappropriate interpretation of a specific situation. Lastly, Shively and Cohen (2008) also carried out a research in order to examine how American students improved their apologetic skills in Spanish language after spending one semester abroad studying Spanish. After the initial period of studying in Spain had ended the participants' improvement of their apologizing and requesting skills in Spanish language were noticeable. All three studies pointed out the benefits of studying abroad in regards of improving one's sociocultural abilities.

### **Different Proficiency Levels and Apologies Strategy Choice**

Proficiency is also a variable that is looked at by researchers in apologetic studies (Cohen, Olshtain and Rosenstein, 1986; Rastegar and Yasami, 2014; Tajeddin and Pirhoseinloo, 2012) though generally other fields in pragmatics such as compliments or refusals have a considerably

higher number of studies that examined how participants with different proficiency differ in their apologizing patterns. By comparing higher and lower English level students' apologetic answers, researchers have a better insight of the importance of language ability in the choice of apologizing. Cohen, Olshtain and Rosenstein (1986) were one of the researchers who looked at how advanced level English learners and native English speakers differed in their strategies in apologizing. Their study adopted language-use questionnaire for collecting data with 180 university students as participants in two separate groups. 96 native English speakers were in the first group whereas the second group consisted of 84 non-native English speakers. Results showed that the difference was not significant in the answers of the two groups when looked at the five main apologizing strategies, though investigating modifications of these apologies by the respondents proved that there is noteworthy difference in modifying the apologies strategies between native and non-native speakers. One of the areas where difference was notable was in the case of using intensifiers. Non-natives preferred using intensifiers more commonly when expressing apologies than native-English speakers. Some of the more common intensifier verbs used by non-natives included 'terribly, truly, awfully'. On the other hand, native English speakers had the tendency to intensify their answers when talking to strangers more than when addressing a friend while non-natives did not. Other differences between the two groups included the use of more emotionals (oh!) and comments ('Are you all right?') by the native-English speakers. The researchers hypothesized that the reason for the higher number of emotionals or comments used by natives is due to the fact that they considered these interjections as a type of reinforcement to the apology. As an end note the authors also expressed the need for more research in apologies where the severity of offense is higher than the ones used in their study. As quoted in this study by Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein (1986), Cohen and Olshtain (1983) had an unusual finding that in some cases the higher the offence was the less the offenders expressed their apologies.

Unlike Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein's study (1986), Rastegar and Yasami (2014) only used non-native English speakers with different proficiency levels as participants to determine their preference for apologetic strategies. 16 Iranian speakers with four different English proficiency levels (Elementary, Intermediate, Upper-intermediate and Advanced) participated in their study and as method, like the majority of other researchers Rastegar and Yasami also used DCTs. Findings showed that although all groups preferred using IFID as a strategy for apologizing, higher proficiency constituted with the preference of using a combinations of strategies in the situations. For instance, while 40% of the elementary level students only used one type of strategy, in contrast only 5% of the advanced level students used one type of strategy, the rest of the advanced level participants preferred using a combination of apologizing patterns in their answers. Interestingly, only advanced level participants used a combination of three strategies, the rest of the groups did not produce any complex formula of apologizing that would consist of three different strategies in the same situation.

Tajeddin and Pirhoseinloo (2012) reported on findings of apologies strategy use among 67 Iranian English language students with different proficiency levels. In contrast to Rastegar and Yasami's study (2014) Tajeddin and Pirhoseinloo's research did not include students with lower English proficiency, the participants selected were able to use English language on an intermediate level and advanced level respectively. Like in the case of most apology related research, this study also relied on written DCT as a tool to elicit the answers from participants. Both groups predominantly used direct apologies (i.e. 'I am sorry.' 'I am very sorry.')

in favor of indirect apologies. The researchers argued that one reason for this could be pertinent to the fact that Iranians prefer using direct apologies without the need of explaining their actions in their own culture as well. The second reason for the preference of direct apology strategy use



hypothesized by the researchers, which is in accordance with what Mir (1992) had stated in her study, which is that the participants lack pragmatic competence and thus they use a simpler expression that fit their level. Tajeddin and Pirhoseinloo's study concluded that advanced learners did not use the expected strategies that most fit some of the situations included in the DCTs thus contradicting Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein's (1986) study about higher proficiency level equals to more native-likeness. The discrepancy between Olshtain, Cohen & Rosenstein's (1986) and Tajeddin and Pirhoseinloo's (2012) findings could be caused by Tajeddin and Pirhoseinloo's lower number of participants used in their study. There could be also differences between groups that researchers both categorized as 'advanced learners' as even though participants in both studies were classified as students with high level English skills, classifications may vary between different language institutes.

Upon reviewing the aforementioned literature, the researcher noted the lack of information provided in the studies concerning the non-native English speaker participants' chosen academic major. Some academic departments require the use of English language more than other departments, consequently some students may be much more exposed to English language than others within the same language proficiency group. This may result in slightly inaccurate data within these studies.

### **Summary of Apologies Strategy Use Among EFL Language Learners**

The reviewed literature shows that in the case of apologies strategies the most frequently used strategy is an explicit expression of apology such as ' I apologize, I am sorry.' (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Chamani & Zareipur, 2010; Holmes, 1989; Mir, 1992; Song & Liu, 2002). Although most situations only warrant the use of a short apology some researchers Tajeddin and

Pirhoseinloo (2012) and Mir (1992) argued that in many cases short apologetic expressions could be attributed to low language proficiency as students with lower language skills may fail to deliver a more complicated strategy. In order to not to risk making mistakes with more complicated expressions it was observed that participants with lower English proficiency rather use simpler constructions that they have more confidence in using. Offer of repair ('Let me make it up to you.') and explanation of the account (trying to explain why the offence had happened) were also among the most preferred ways of apologizing apart from an explicit apology. The remainder of the apologies strategies were only used in moderate numbers compared to the three main strategies with 'evading' used the least frequently among the participants of the reviewed studies. Mir (1992) offered three points in regards of the favoring of a few apologizing strategies over the others. First, L2 learners might not be aware that there are different strategies to choose from when faced a situation that requires apology. Second, Mir argued that poor language performance might cause lower ability in using pragmatic strategies in real-life situations. Finally, Mir's last point is slightly connected with her first point, namely that since when teaching apologizing teachers mostly focus on a few simple strategies such as 'I am sorry or I apologize' language learners will believe that these are the only strategies for expressing an apology and it's normal to only stick to these few apologies patterns.

Concerning apology strategy modifications and combinations in the reviewed literature, the researcher found that while all the studies provided details about preferred strategy choices among EFL language learners, only several studies remarked on how the strategies are combined or modified by the participants. Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein (1986) argued that higher language proficiency is proportionate with more varied use of intensifiers. Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein (1986) observed that in some cases advanced level EFL learners used more intensifiers with a more variety of expressions ('terribly', 'awfully', 'truly') than the native

speakers did. The study conducted by Bataineh and Bataineh (2006) also provided data of apology strategy and modification use among L2 learners. Consistent with other studies the researchers found that a high percentage of the participants only used one apology strategy for one situation presented to them in the DCTs. 8% of the students however, used an intensifier with the apology strategy while use of two apology strategies or apology strategy with two intensifiers in the same situation were almost negligent, close to 1%.

A variety of research in the area of apologizing have covered cross-cultural apologizing patterns in different languages, as well as differences between native and non-native English speakers` apologizing strategies. Additionally, some studies focused on how time spent abroad influenced students` socio pragmatic skills such as apologizing. Various language proficiency level are also addressed in some of the studies, though to the best knowledge of the researcher there hasn`t been any studies conducted that looked at how EFL students with different number of years studying English language differ in their apologizing patterns in various social situations. A study that compared different study-year groups would allow identifying whether there is any progress of students` pragmatic competence in using apology strategies in English language. Owing to this fact, there is clearly space in the apologies area for a study that investigates how students with different years in their academic studies choose to apologize in various contexts.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHOD**

The method section offers information about the pilot study as well as the participants and the instrument used for data collection, including a sample scenario from the Discourse Completion Task. Moreover, data collection and data analysis procedure with the adopted coding scheme for the research is also outlined.

#### **The Pilot Study**

As all the situations in the DCT were created by the researcher, a pilot test was carried out to test the validity of the data collection method. The pilot test was designed to help the researcher identify possible weaknesses of the main study and may highlight areas of the study that require modifications. Twenty participants were involved in the pilot test, ten freshmen and ten seniors from a different university than that of the one where the actual test is going to take place in order to avoid having some of the students participate in both the pilot and the actual test.

Each situation in the discourse completion tasks served to provide circumstances that also often occur in real life situations. One of the participants of the pilot test also provided comments that reinforced this aspect the researcher's DCTs "All of them are common problems, they make me have a chance to think about the situations." Each item in the DCT served its purpose well to elicit an apologetic response from the participants though in the case of Scenario 2 several students used requests instead of apologies. This item in the DCT will be replaced by a more suitable situation that are more likely to elicit apologetic answers from the participants than in the case of the original item.

Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) modified coding scheme was used to categorize the apology strategies. Regarding apology strategy use among participants in the pilot study, the data showed that both freshmen and senior students are readily able to use all apology strategies of the coding scheme although some of the strategies are more preferred than others among the two groups of participants.

Table 3.1

*Below a table shows frequency of freshman students' apology strategy use*

| <b>Apology Strategy</b>           | <b>Frequency of Use</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Explicit Apologies                | 46                      | 25%               |
| Evading                           | 8                       | 4%                |
| Promise of Forbearance            | 30                      | 16%               |
| Offer of Repair                   | 40                      | 22%               |
| Acknowledgement of Responsibility | 38                      | 21%               |
| Explanations                      | 23                      | 12%               |
| <b>Overall</b>                    | <b>185</b>              |                   |

Table 3.2

*The second table shows senior students' frequency of apology strategy use*

| <b>Apology Strategy</b>           | <b>Frequency of Use</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Explicit Apologies                | 45                      | 20%               |
| Evading                           | 4                       | 2%                |
| Promise of Forbearance            | 27                      | 12%               |
| Offer of Repair                   | 56                      | 25%               |
| Acknowledgement of Responsibility | 55                      | 24%               |
| Explanations                      | 38                      | 17%               |
| <b>Overall</b>                    | <b>225</b>              |                   |

Senior students generally produced more apology responses than freshmen students and as it is shown in the above two tables, seniors used more apology strategies within the same scenarios than freshmen did. For freshmen students the most favored apology expression was explicit apology followed by offer of repair and acknowledgement of responsibility. In the case of senior students, however offer of repair has been used most commonly with acknowledgement of responsibility as the second most preferred strategy with 24%. For senior students, applying explicit apology strategies were only the third most favored apology strategy. Using evading as an apology strategy can be considered negligent among both groups.

Table 3.3

*The below table showing the number of apology strategies used within the same situation by the participants*

| <b>Number of apology strategies</b> | <b>Freshmen</b> | <b>Seniors</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| One apology strategy                | 48              | 21             |
| Two apology strategies              | 55              | 59             |
| Three apology strategies            | 11              | 23             |
| Four apology strategies             | 0               | 4              |

The difference between the number of apology strategy in the DCT used by freshmen and senior participants is very apparent. Freshmen students favored the one apology strategy much more than senior students did, in contrast freshmen students were exceeded by senior students in using multiple apologies such as three or even four apologies within the same situation. Moreover, in the case of repeating the same apology strategy within the same situation freshmen students were also surpassed by senior students. One example from a senior student that used the same apology strategy, namely ‘Offer or Repair’ twice in the same situation. “What else can I do for you? Do you need a laptop right now? I can borrow you one from the office.” The researcher observance of using the same apology strategy twice within the same situation is that it serves in a way of a softener. By expressing the same apology strategy more than just once the students may lessen the severity of their offense as they really seem eager to remedy a case. “But I promise I will do my best with all my heart from now on. I won’t miss anything anymore.” “Sorry I am late! I’m sorry for the inconvenience I caused!”

None of the reviewed literature of apologizing touched upon this issue of using the same apology strategy several times within the same situation.

In the case of supplementary apology strategies, differences between freshmen and senior students can also be observed. While freshmen only used intensifiers “so, very” and premodifiers “oh, um” in several cases, for senior students it was far more common to use these strategies throughout the situations. Another prevalent difference between the two groups of participants was their choice of not expressing any apology. While in the case of freshmen students the researcher noted only one such case where a participant did not apologize at all in one situation, in contrast, senior students did not express any regret in more than ten cases. Senior students especially felt no need to apologize in one situation where the offender did not return the offended’s umbrella for one week. Three senior participants out of the ten just thanked their interlocutors for the umbrella without expressing an apology whereas all freshmen participants apologized for the late return of the umbrella.

Expressing concern “Are you ok? Are you hurt?” was also a preferred apology strategy both by freshmen and senior students. The situation where the driver bumped into another motorbike caused participants from both groups to express most of the uttered concerns toward their interlocutors. Expression of concern in the rest of the situations however, was very sparse from both freshmen and senior participants.

### **Participants**

Participants in the study were 35 freshman and 35 senior EFL students majoring in English at a university in central Taiwan. Most students in Taiwan are required to take English classes from grade 6 and once they are admitted to the university as English majors they will further expand their language abilities at an improved rate. A senior student has three years as an advantage over



freshman students learning English at university level, consequently senior student are expected to have better English language abilities than freshmen do.

### **Instruments**

The majority of the researchers who examined apologies strategies used written DCT to collect their data (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein, 1986; Mir, 1992; Tajeddin & Pirhoseinloo, 2012) though other less frequently used methods were also adopted by the researchers to elicit responses from the participants. Linnel et.al (1990) preferred the use of verbal DCTs that were written on cards and read out by the researchers waiting for a response from the participants. The written DCT method is overall considered a reliable data collection method in the field of pragmatics as the researchers can imitate real-life situations by setting up several discourses that the participants respond to.

As it was pointed out by Yuan (2001) WDCT also has its disadvantages when compared to other data collection methods such as oral DCT or observatory field notes. Yuan (2001) found that participants used more emotionals (e.g., oh, uhm) and more repetition when they were asked to provide their answers verbally whereas in the case of WDCT the number of repetitions and use of emotionals were less frequently used by the participants. Yuan (2001) also noted that field notes provided a more naturalistic data than verbal or written DCT, although DCT had the advantage of quickly eliciting data that the researcher required.

Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) was used as a means to collect the data with participants role-playing the hypothetical situations presented in WDCTs. WDCT is a tool that is used to elicit a response from participants. In the present research, each item in the WDCT is the own creation of the researcher, with scenarios that emulate everyday, real-life situations

(Appendix B). One example that is also created by the researcher to illustrate how one of these situational discourses looks like in the test:

Your club at the university has an important meeting that you are invited to. Club members really expect you to be there too because they want to discuss something important about the club and they need to hear your opinion as well. Something comes up for you at the end and you cannot go to this club meeting. What do you say to them?

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The participants were required to complete the discourse without the option of using a pre-defined answer. There were altogether 12 scenarios for the participants to answer and as the scenarios were created with the purpose of imitating real-life situations, the researcher included a variety of social factors in these scenarios: interlocutor relationship, power relationship, and the severity of offence in each situation. Some situations required the participants to apologize to a close friend for a lesser offence while other situations asked for an apology to the boss for a more severe offence. As the pilot study showed, scenarios with different factors (e.g., the social distance, power distance, and the severity of offence) prompt the language learners to vary their construction of apology strategies. If language learners are aware of the use of a variety of apology strategies, it is easier to identify the role of language proficiency on language learners' construction apology strategies.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Participants were given a consent form (see Appendix A) and a second piece of document that will consist of three parts. The second piece of document provided a brief description of the purpose of the research as well as a brief instruction on how to fill out the DCTs in the presented

paper. Participants were also asked to provide some basic background information. Participants were expected to provide their answers promptly after given the DCTs as their spontaneous answers were needed to serve as a more valid indicator of how they would respond in real-life situations. The researcher was present when the participants are completing the DCTs to supervise the participants and answer any question that arises if necessary.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis procedure included the use of a slightly modified version of the coding scheme that is adopted from the researchers' Olshtain and Cohen's study (1983) to code and classify the participants' apologetic answers in the following categories. Apart from the apology strategies that were observed in Olshtain and Cohen's study (1983), additional strategies were also added into the coding system that have been used by participants of the current study.

1. Explicit Apologies (I am sorry. I apologize)
2. Evading (It wasn't my fault.)
3. Promise of Forbearance (I will make it up to you somehow.)
4. Offer of Repair (Let me help you fix it.)
5. Acknowledgement of Responsibility (Sorry, it was my fault.)
6. Explanations (I was late because I was chatting with a friend.)
7. Expressing Concern (Are you alright?)
8. Asking for Forgiveness (Please forgive me.)
9. Intensifier ('so', 'very')

10. Premodifier ('oh', 'uhm')

SPSS ver.20 was used to categorize the strategies employed by the participants and frequency analysis was carried out to answer the first two research questions. To answer the third research question, independent-samples T test was conducted.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter reports on findings of apology strategy use by freshmen and senior students.

After providing their answers on the WDCTs, the two groups of participants' answers were coded and the apology strategies were categorized. The strategy choice and the frequency of apology strategies of freshmen and senior participants are listed in the below table.

**Frequency Distribution of Apology Strategies by Freshmen and Senior Students**

Table 4.1

*Frequency of apology strategies by freshmen and senior students*

| <b>Apology Strategy</b>           | <b>Freshmen</b> | <b>Seniors</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Explicit Apologies                | 317             | 342            |
| Evading                           | 48              | 44             |
| Promise of Forbearance            | 73              | 54             |
| Offer of Repair                   | 177             | 197            |
| Acknowledgement of Responsibility | 91              | 144            |
| Explanations                      | 92              | 77             |
| Expressing Concern                | 22              | 34             |
| Asking for Forgiveness            | 7               | 19             |

|              |            |             |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Intensifier  | 55         | 86          |
| Premodifier  | 27         | 49          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>909</b> | <b>1046</b> |

To answer Research questions 1 and 2, namely what were the most commonly used apology strategies by freshmen and seniors, the apology strategies are listed based on their frequency of use by the participants.

The researcher has identified two apology strategies that were most commonly used by freshmen, and three most commonly used strategies by seniors. Explicit apology and offer of repair were the two most favored by freshmen throughout the scenarios, whereas apart from explicit apology and offer of repair strategies, acknowledgement of responsibility was also a highly preferred strategy by seniors.

Five apology strategies, namely explanations, acknowledgement of responsibility, promise of forbearance, intensifiers and evading have been observed to be also fairly frequently used strategies by freshmen. In the case of seniors, four strategies, intensifiers, explanations, promise of forbearance and premodifiers were recorded to be also favored strategies within the scenarios.

For freshmen, the least favored strategies were identified to be premodifiers, expressing concern and asking for forgiveness, whereas seniors' least common strategies were evading, expressing concern and asking for forgiveness strategies.

Regarding apology strategy combinations, as Table 4.7 shows freshmen mostly favored expressing one and the combination of two and three strategies whereas seniors most frequently

expressed a combination of two, three and four apology strategies across the scenarios. The implications of expressing a combination of apology strategies within the same scenario will be further discussed in this research.

Table 4.2

*Percentage of apology strategies distribution among freshmen and senior students*

| <b>Apology Strategy</b>           | <b>Freshmen</b> | <b>Seniors</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Explicit Apologies                | 35%             | 33%            |
| Evading                           | 5%              | 4%             |
| Promise of Forbearance            | 8%              | 5%             |
| Offer of Repair                   | 19%             | 19%            |
| Acknowledgement of Responsibility | 10%             | 14%            |
| Explanations                      | 10%             | 7%             |
| Expressing Concern                | 2%              | 3%             |
| Asking for Forgiveness            | 1%              | 2%             |
| Intensifier                       | 6%              | 8%             |
| Premodifier                       | 3%              | 5%             |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>100%</b>     | <b>100%</b>    |

## Independent Samples T-test Results

With respect to the present study's third research question, namely if there were any significant differences in apology strategy use between the freshmen and the seniors, independent samples T-test showed that there was a statistically significant effect  $p = .025$  in the use of the total number of apology strategies between freshmen ( $N = 35$ ) and seniors ( $N = 35$ ).

Among the ten strategies that were used by the participants within the scenarios the researcher identified seven primary apology strategies, explicit apology, offer of repair, explanation, acknowledgement of responsibility, promise of forbearance, evading and asking for forgiveness. These primary apology strategies served to mitigate the offence between the interlocutors and to remedy a wrongdoing by the offender. Apart from the primary apology strategies the researcher has also identified three supplementary apology strategies, namely intensifiers, premodifiers and expressing concern. Intensifiers, premodifiers and expressing concern were used to supplement the primary apology strategies, these supplementary strategies were always observed to be exclusively used in a combination with one or several other primary apology strategies.

When comparing the frequency of the seven primary apology strategies between freshmen and seniors, T-test showed no significant difference between the groups,  $p = .132$ . From this result we can infer that when only looking at the seven main apology strategies among the participants, academic learning experience does not significantly affect the frequency of these seven primary strategies used by language learners.

In the case of the three supplementary apology strategies however, the frequency of these strategies between freshmen and senior students was again significant,  $p = .004$ . The biggest



difference in expressing apologies between the two groups of students was identified to be the use of these supplementary apology strategies. In the following, detailed descriptions are given on each individual apology strategy.

### **Primary Apology Strategies by Freshmen and Seniors**

The use of explicit apology was the most favored strategy both by freshmen as well as senior students with a slightly higher frequency of number by the seniors. As several researchers noted according to their findings (Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein, 1986; Mir, 1992; Bataineh and Bataineh, 2005; Linnel et al, 1992) explicit or direct apology is the most frequently used apology strategy by both native-English speakers and L2 learners in English language. A direct apology (I am sorry) is used to mitigate a wrongdoing by the offender. Explicit apology was most frequently used in *Situation 6* in the WDCT where a student is late half an hour for a field trip and consequently the whole class must wait for him to arrive.

The second most preferred strategy by freshmen and senior students was an offer of repair, a strategy that was often used in pair with an explicit apology. Just as in the case of explicit apology, the difference between the frequency of the use of offer of repair strategy among the two groups was not significant. The offer of repair was most commonly used in *Situations 1,10* and *11* where the offender caused damage and is trying to allay the problem by offering compensation.

Explanation and acknowledgement of responsibility were also frequently used strategies with explanation used as a strategy by both freshmen and seniors in a nearly same amount of frequency. Acknowledgement of responsibility however, was largely undersupplied by freshmen students compared to seniors. The total number of occurrence of the strategy by freshmen was

observed in 91 cases, whereas in the case of seniors the strategy was used in 144 cases. These figures demonstrate that seniors used this strategy 37% more frequently than freshmen students did. Apart from the more common acknowledging strategy 'It was my fault', acknowledging fault of the wrongdoer was also repeatedly observed in conjunction with an explicit apology strategy, e.g., 'I am sorry for arriving late and making you all wait for me.' A high number of students, especially senior students tended to add a supplement to their explicit apology and thus instead of using a brief apology such as 'I am sorry.' they expanded on why they are apologizing.

Examples from a freshman and a senior participant are given:

*F6 (number 6, freshman):* 'I am sorry. I will get up earlier next time.'

*S18 (number 18, senior):* 'I feel sorry for being late and made you wait for me for so long!'

The example by the freshman student is coded as explicit apology (I am sorry) and promise of forbearance (I will get up earlier next time). The senior student however, provided a longer apology in the form of expressing an apology (I feel sorry) as well as acknowledging the responsibility of fault as the second part of the sentence (...for being late and made you wait for me for so long!) is an apparent instance of accepting the blame and thus it was also coded as an acknowledgment of responsibility strategy. Apart from using regular acknowledging of responsibility strategy such as 'It was all my fault' or 'I take responsibility for this' it was observed that a higher number of senior students tended to expand on the reason why they felt sorry, e.g., 'Sorry for mishandling the money and making you bad business' than freshmen students. As more senior students chose to extend on an explicit apology in a way that it would also constitute as acknowledging responsibility for an offence, freshmen students eminently

undersupplied acknowledging of responsibility as an apology strategy compared with senior students.

Strangely, this issue has not been touched upon in the reviewed literature as most of the research concerning apologies mostly focused on the frequency of apology strategies while there was no consideration given to how a different way of expressing an apology could also mean a different effect of an apology. Saying 'I am sorry' and 'I am sorry for making you wait so long' both have the same purpose of mitigating an offence though the second example may be more effective as it also entails acknowledging one's error.

Although the frequency of explicit apologies were not too distinct between the groups, the researcher noted that the real difference concerning explicit apologies was the way it was used differently in the WDCTs by freshmen and seniors.

Promise of forbearance was also observed as one of the fairly commonly used apology strategies among freshmen and senior students. This was one of the few primary apology strategies that were undersupplied by senior students compared to freshmen students as this strategy was identified 73 times among freshmen and only 54 occasions among seniors. The use of this strategy was most frequent in *Situation 3* where the employee mishandled money and may be discharged by the boss. Like freshmen, seniors also favored promise of forbearance strategy in this situation although using acknowledging responsibility as a strategy by seniors was also very frequent.

In contrast with freshmen, scenarios that involved errors at a workplace, seniors more frequently used acknowledgment of responsibility strategy instead of promise of forbearance. A possible interpretation about senior students' underuse of this strategy and their favor of the

acknowledgement of responsibility in work-related wrongdoings could be accounted to their view of being more straightforward, acknowledging an error may have better results in a work-related incident than promising not to make the mistake again.

Table 4.3

*Apology strategy use across situations among freshmen*

| <b>Situation</b> | <b>S1</b> | <b>S2</b> | <b>S3</b> | <b>S4</b> | <b>S5</b> | <b>S6</b> | <b>S7</b> | <b>S8</b> | <b>S9</b> | <b>S10</b> | <b>S11</b> | <b>S12</b> |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Expli. Apol      | 28        | 35        | 19        | 27        | 15        | 40        | 12        | 17        | 30        | 35         | 28         | 28         |
| Offer of Repair  | 20        | 15        | 2         | 0         | 30        | 6         | 22        | 0         | 16        | 26         | 21         | 14         |
| Explanation      | 1         | 13        | 2         | 7         | 8         | 8         | 13        | 1         | 1         | 3          | 8          | 22         |
| Acknow. Resp.    | 5         | 18        | 1         | 22        | 20        | 0         | 14        | 2         | 8         | 6          | 9          | 1          |
| Promise of Forb. | 1         | 4         | 37        | 1         | 1         | 3         | 2         | 0         | 20        | 0          | 1          | 2          |
| Evading          | 4         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 6         | 29        | 1         | 1          | 0          | 1          |
| Asking for Forg. | 1         | 1         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0          | 1          | 0          |

Table 4.4

*Apology strategy use across situations among seniors*

| <b>Situation</b> | <b>S1</b> | <b>S2</b> | <b>S3</b> | <b>S4</b> | <b>S5</b> | <b>S6</b> | <b>S7</b> | <b>S8</b> | <b>S9</b> | <b>S10</b> | <b>S11</b> | <b>S12</b> |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|

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|                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Expli. Apol      | 33 | 34 | 23 | 23 | 25 | 38 | 15 | 28 | 27 | 30 | 32 | 39 |
| Offer of Repair  | 23 | 16 | 4  | 2  | 31 | 6  | 21 | 2  | 19 | 32 | 25 | 19 |
| Explanation      | 1  | 14 | 1  | 2  | 7  | 6  | 14 | 1  | 0  | 2  | 3  | 25 |
| Acknow. Resp.    | 9  | 18 | 9  | 18 | 11 | 22 | 2  | 7  | 17 | 4  | 18 | 7  |
| Promise of Forb. | 0  | 3  | 25 | 0  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 0  | 13 | 0  | 0  | 2  |
| Evading          | 2  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 7  | 19 | 5  | 1  | 1  | 2  |
| Asking for Forg. | 0  | 1  | 10 | 1  | 0  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 1  |

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Evading was predominantly used at *Situation 8* where the offender hurt a friend's feelings by telling her that her new shoes do not look good on her. Both freshmen and seniors used evading in the same way in this situation as they tried to mitigate their offence by claiming that they did not mean to offend or that they were only joking and asked the friend not to take offense. In terms of the use of evading as a strategy, it was found on both groups of students in an almost equal amount of instances (48 occurrences by freshmen and 44 by seniors) where they tended to ask for forgiveness as a strategy, despite the frequency difference (the use of this strategy was observed 7 times among freshmen and 19 times among seniors). An other remarkable difference between the two groups concerning the use of asking for forgiveness strategy was how they were used across the situations in the WDCTs.

As Table 4.3 indicates, freshmen tended to use this strategy evenly, the strategy use was spread out between most of the situations with the frequency of the occurrence being low in each

of the situations. In contrast, as it can be seen from Table 4.4, the great majority of the occurrence of this strategy by seniors was observed in *Situation 3* where the boss is threatening the student to be fired over mishandling money at the shop. Given that freshmen used this strategy unevenly across the situations whereas most senior students used it in one situation shows that seniors had better perception in judging the situations and identifying the most fitting situation for this strategy. This difference in perception between the groups could also be attributed to seniors' advanced level of English knowledge from their years spent studying at university.

Interestingly, looking at asking for forgiveness as an apology strategy has been outside of the scope of apology studies as none of the researchers touched upon the use of this strategy among language learners in the reviewed literature. The findings of this study indicated great difference between the situational use of this strategy between freshmen and seniors and thus there should be other apology studies that could report on asking for forgiveness strategy use for better awareness about this particular strategy.

Apology strategies observed in the present study with the highest number of occurrence are very similar with that of findings of other apology research (Linnell et. al., 1990; Mir, 1992; Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein, 1986; Tajeddin & Pirhoseinloo, 2012). The above mentioned studies also reported high frequency use of explicit apology, and offer of repair, and several other apology strategies such as explanations, acknowledgement of responsibility, offer of repair and promise of forbearance. In this degree, data of this study reinforce findings of other apology studies regarding the most preferred apology strategies by language learners.

## Intensifiers, Premodifiers and Expressing Concern in Apologies

Apart from the most common apology strategies, several other strategies were also observed within both groups of participants such as intensifiers ‘so, very’, premodifiers ‘oh, uhm’ and expressing concern ‘Are you ok?’. Although intensifiers, premodifiers and expressing concern could be regarded as apology strategies, these strategies can be seen as softeners, their function was to supplement apology strategies. By using these strategies the wrongdoer reinforces an apology for a more successful outcome of a mitigation of an apology. Intensifiers were exclusively used with an explicit apology e.g., ‘I am *so* sorry.’ when the participants expanded on why they are expressing an apology e.g., ‘I am sorry for mishandling that money.’ then the intensifier ‘very’ was predominantly used (I am very sorry for being late today.), whereas in cases of a short apology (I am so sorry), the intensifier ‘so’ was more commonly used. Comparing the use of these strategies between the two groups of participants, the researcher observed a notable difference between the frequency of intensifiers, premodifiers and expressing concern in the WDCTs. Findings show that in each case freshmen greatly undersupplied the use of these strategies compared to seniors. The following will look at these strategies separately.

Table 4.5

*Frequency of intensifiers, premodifiers and expressing concern by freshmen*

| Situations   | S1 | S2 | S3 | S4 | S5 | S6 | S7 | S8 | S9 | S10 | S11 | S12 |
|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|
| Intensifiers | 8  | 7  | 4  | 0  | 1  | 17 | 0  | 0  | 4  | 5   | 4   | 5   |
| Premodifiers | 5  | 7  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 7   | 2   | 1   |

Expr. Concern 1 0 0 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 21 0

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Intensifiers were marked in 55 occasions in the WDCTs by freshmen and 86 occasions by seniors, indicating a 26% higher frequency rate by seniors. The most cases where an apology was intensified by the participants were at *Situations 1, 2, and 6* (breaking teacher’s laptop, making the whole class wait for a long time and forgetting meeting with a friend). The findings of the present study about the use of intensifiers correspond with findings of Cohen, Olshtain and Rosenstein (1986) where they observed a higher number of intensifiers used in situations where the offence was more severe.

Table 4.6

*Frequency of intensifiers, premodifiers and expressing concern by seniors*

| <b>Situations</b> | <b>S1</b> | <b>S2</b> | <b>S3</b> | <b>S4</b> | <b>S5</b> | <b>S6</b> | <b>S7</b> | <b>S8</b> | <b>S9</b> | <b>S10</b> | <b>S11</b> | <b>S12</b> |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Intensifiers      | 26        | 6         | 6         | 1         | 5         | 17        | 0         | 3         | 6         | 5          | 5          | 6          |
| Premodifiers      | 10        | 5         | 0         | 0         | 10        | 0         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 16         | 3          | 0          |
| Expr. Concern     | 5         | 1         | 0         | 3         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 2          | 23         | 0          |

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When compared intensifier use between native and non-native English speakers Linnel et. al. (1992) and Cohen and Olshtain (1981) found that native-English speakers generally used intensifiers in a higher frequency across the situations than non-native language learners. Consequently, seniors could then be viewed as more native-English like than freshmen in regards of the frequency of intensifiers used by them across the scenarios.



The researcher of this study also noted an occurrence with freshmen students' use of intensifiers, namely the exaggerated use of intensifiers. While seniors never repeated an intensifier within the same explicit apology twice, in three cases it was observed that freshmen used intensifiers repeatedly 'I am so so so sorry.' The overusing of intensifiers indicates that although freshmen have knowledge about using intensifiers in apologies, they still need more exposure to the language to use intensifiers in a more competent way to gain forgiveness for a wrongdoing.

Just as with the case of intensifiers, findings show that freshmen also undersupplied premodifiers as a strategy. Freshmen used premodifiers in 27 occasions whereas seniors used this strategy a great deal more, overall 49 occasions which indicates a 45% higher frequency of this strategy by senior students. The use of premodifiers were equally favored by students in *Situation 1, 2 and 10* (breaking teacher's laptop, forgetting arranged time with a friend and spilling juice on carpet) whereas in the case of *Situation 5* (no wallet when paying at a restaurant) premodifiers were almost exclusively used by seniors only. In *Situation 5* only two of the freshmen used premodifiers in contrast with 10 cases by seniors.

Apart from intensifiers, premodifiers were also in focus in Olshtain Cohen and Rosenstein's (1986) study and their data showed that native-English speakers also favored using premodifiers over advanced level non-native English speakers in English language. Frequent use of premodifiers before an apology can mean more native-likeness as it is naturally used by native-English speakers in certain situations and thus seniors using a greater number of this strategy again reflects more native-likeness of the senior students.

It is apparent that students' academic learning experience as an English major advanced their understanding of how English is used in daily-life situations and how best to utilize the use of premodifiers and intensifiers for the best results. Senior students were more aware that the more premodifiers and intensifiers they use in the right situations the more native-like they may sound.

Regarding frequency of intensifiers and premodifiers in the current study, when compared with that of Yuan's (2001) findings regarding WDCT we can observe some differences of the use of these strategies within the two studies.

Yuan (2001) noted that when replying to scenarios, premodifiers and repetition in the WDCT was rarely observed by the participants in his study. In contrast, when Yuan (2001) looked at how participants replied to scenarios verbally (Verbal DCT) instead of writing he noted that students used a great amount of premodifiers as well as repeating the same apology strategy within the same situation. Similar to Yuan's (2001) observations in the verbal DCT, in the present study, the researcher observed that participants, including freshmen used a great amount of premodifiers and also in some cases they repeated the same apology strategies in the WDCT. Example from a freshman's answer on the WDCT:

*Freshman 28-Situation 10*

'Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to! It's slipt. I'm so sorry. Let me clean it up for you guys.'

Findings of this study regarding the use of premodifiers and reuse of strategies in the WDCT contradicted the findings of Yuan's (2001), which implies that it may be related to language awareness. Given the high-level English skills of freshmen and seniors, even though they had to provide their answers in a written form, they were aware that using strategies such as

premodifiers and repeating the same strategy would make their responses look more real life like and more authentic.

Expressing concern ‘Are you all right? Did you get hurt?’ was less frequently observed among freshmen and seniors when expressing an apology. Freshmen and seniors predominantly used this strategy at *Situation 11* where the offender bumped into another person’s scooter causing a slight dent on the offended’s scooter. Students at this situation started out with an expression of concern and then added other common strategies such as offer of repair and explicit apology. Just as in the case of intensifiers and premodifiers, freshmen also undersupplied expressing concerns compared with seniors throughout the situations. Concurring with other research (Rose, 1998; Trosborg, 1987), compared with other strategies such as explicit apology, explanation and offer of repair, expressing concern was a less preferred strategy among both groups of students, although we can see a difference in the frequency of the use of this strategy in the scenarios of the WDCT. Senior students were observed to use this strategy 36% more often than freshmen students.

In all three cases of using ‘supplementary’ apology strategies, namely the use of intensifiers, premodifiers and expressing concern, it was found that freshmen greatly undersupplied the use of these strategies compared with seniors. Research data of Cohen & Olshtain (1981) and Linnel et. al. (1992) showed similar findings with L2 learners undersupplying these strategies compared with native-English speakers in English language. By demonstrating a frequent use of the aforementioned strategies, senior students can be seen as more native-like than the freshmen students of this study. This difference between frequency of use of some of the less common apology strategies, namely premodifiers and expressing concerns between freshmen and seniors can also be attributed to the disparity of the exposure to English language as university students.

### Strategy Combinations by Freshmen and Seniors

Table 4.7 reports on findings of freshmen and seniors using combinations of apology strategies in situations in the WDCTs.

Table 4.7

*The table below shows the frequency of apology strategy combinations in the situations by freshmen and senior students.*

| <b>Number of apology strategies</b> | <b>Freshmen</b> | <b>Seniors</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| One apology strategy                | 73              | 55             |
| Two apology strategies              | 171             | 125            |
| Three apology strategies            | 91              | 129            |
| Four apology strategies             | 34              | 60             |
| Five apology strategies             | 8               | 17             |
| Six apology strategies              | 4               | 3              |

An other striking difference between freshmen and senior participants was the frequency of combined apology strategies in the WDCT situations. Overall, freshmen used one apology and a combination of two apology strategies much more frequently than seniors whereas in the case of combining three, four and five apology strategies seniors greatly outperformed freshmen students. It was observed that a combination of four and five apology strategies occurred almost twice as many times with seniors than with freshmen.

The lowest number of combinations was observed in *Situation 7* both by freshmen and seniors where the wrongdoer did not help brother/sister clean the house and instead went to cinema with friends. Offer, explicit apology and explanation strategies in this situation were frequent among the participants either used as an only apology strategy or some form of combination of these. The highest number of apology strategy combinations both by freshmen and seniors was marked at *Situation 2*. In this situation the wrongdoer forgot a meeting with a friend for the second time and now has to explain himself or herself to the friend who is on the phone calling. Explicit apology and acknowledgement of responsibility were frequently observed in combination with the use of added intensifier (e.g., very, so).

### **Lack of Expressing an Apology Strategy**

Apart from expressing apologies to mitigate an offence, it was also observed that in the case of two situations (*Situation 4 and Situation 8*), the participants did not feel the need to use any apology strategy. In *Situation 4*, an umbrella was returned to a friend after three weeks and in *Situation 8*, a friend felt offended for being told that her new shoes did not look too good on her. Although there were several students from both groups that felt no need to express any apology in either of these two situations, the frequency of not using any apology strategy between freshmen and senior students was striking (*Table 4.8*).

Table 4.8

*Lack of apology by participants in Situation 4 and Situation 8*

|          | <b>Not expressing apology in<br/>Situation 4</b> | <b>Not expressing apology in<br/>Situation 8</b> |
|----------|--|--|
| Freshmen | 4  | 8  |
| Seniors  | 8  | 3  |

As shown from the table above, freshmen did not feel the need to apologize for returning the umbrella after three weeks in four occasions, whereas in the case of seniors this number was observed in eight occasions. This shows that the seniors felt the need not to express apology in this situation twice as much as freshmen did. Instead of expressing apology, the students often only thanked their interlocutors for borrowing them the umbrella or in some cases they only remarked ‘Here is your umbrella’ without the need to express their gratitude.

In *Situation 8*, we can observe the opposite of *Situation 4* in terms of not expressing apology by the students. 8 freshmen felt that there was no need to apologize for hurting their friend’s feelings whereas only three senior participants felt the need to stand up to their friend and tell her that the shoes are really not a good suit for her.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This section includes a summary of the research as well as the findings and the major implications of the study. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research based on the findings of the current study are also discussed in this part.

#### **Summary of the Study**

The research was carried out with the participation of two groups of students in different academic years, freshmen and seniors to highlight differences and progression of English majored Taiwanese ESL students' use of apology strategies.

Apology research has been found to be abundant in comparing cross-cultural (Bataineh & Bataineh 2008, Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984, Song & Liu 2002, Suszczyriska 1999) and inter-language apology patterns (Linnell et. al., 1990; Mir, 1992; Mirzaei, Roohani & Esmaeili 2012), however literature review showed a lack of those studies that compared groups of students with different proficiency level (Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein, 1986; Rastegar and Yasami, 2014; Tajeddin and Pirhoseinloo, 2012). Moreover, research is even more sparse in comparing apology strategy use among university students in different academic years (Koike, 1996; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). The present study is a good fit for filling the gap in those research that compared pragmatic competence through various speech acts usage among different academic years.

The method and the instrument of the present study involved the use of written discourse completion tasks (WDCT) and the subjects (35 freshmen and 35 senior students) who were all English major students were asked to give prompt replies to different scenarios within the WDCT.

The students' answers were categorized and coded, frequency of the various apology strategies as well as differences in the use of apology strategies among the two groups of students were recorded. For categorizing the answers of the participants and determining the differences in apology strategy use among the two groups of participants SPSS ver.20 was used. A pilot study was carried out to test the validity of the method and make amendments in the situations in the WDCT. After the revision of several small issues of the WDCT and conclusions drawn from the pilot study, the main study was carried out.

### **Summary of the Major Findings**

From the analysis of the WDCT, the researcher was able to identify the most commonly used apology strategies by freshmen and seniors as well as determine differences in apology strategy use between the freshmen and seniors. The two most commonly used apology strategies by freshmen were explicit apology followed by offer of repair while apart from explicit apology and offer of repair, acknowledgement of responsibility was also a very commonly used strategy by seniors. These strategies were often observed within the same situation in combination. Apart from the most commonly used apology strategies, there were several other strategies that were also frequently used by the participants.

Five strategies, explanations, acknowledgement of responsibility, promise of forbearance, intensifiers and evading were also recorded as fairly commonly occurring strategies among freshmen, whereas intensifiers, explanations, promise of forbearance, and premodifiers were commonly observed strategies by seniors. The three least preferred strategies by freshmen were identified to be premodifiers, expressing concern and asking for forgiveness. Seniors least favored the use of evading, expressing concern and asking for forgiveness.



In terms of using apology strategies a significant difference was noted in the use of acknowledgment of responsibility among the participants. While freshmen often used a simple form of apology (e.g., I am sorry!) seniors felt the need to express a longer apology (e.g., ‘Sorry for coming late and making you wait so long’) By using a longer and more extended apology expression seniors also expressed an acknowledgement of responsibility which results in a much higher frequency in the acknowledgement of responsibility strategy among seniors.

The use of apology strategy combinations among the participants also conforms seniors’ prominence compared to that of the freshmen. One apology strategy and the combination of two and three apology strategies were more preferred by freshmen whereas three, four and five apology strategy combinations were recorded in greater frequency among seniors. In short, unlike freshmen, seniors did not prefer the use of only one or two apology strategies instead, they preferred using a combination of three, four and five strategies in the same scenario more frequently.

Looking at all apology strategies T-test showed that there was a significant difference in the frequency of the apologies between freshmen and seniors. In the case of the frequency of the seven primary apology strategies, the difference between the two groups of students was not significant. Regarding supplementary apology strategies however, T-test indicated a statistically significant effect between freshmen and seniors. These findings clearly indicate that academic learning experience has the greatest influence on how students express supplementary apology strategies in English language.

It was clear from the findings that there was a distinctive difference between the two groups of students in terms of their apology strategy preference. The findings of this study were

somewhat similar to that of Koike (1996) in that Koike also identified differences in pragmatic competence among freshmen and senior students via the speech acts used by participants. We can also conclude that senior students in the present study acted more native-like when expressing several apology strategies. Linnel et. al. (1992) and Olshtain, Cohen and Rosenstein (1986) recorded that premodifiers and intensifiers in higher frequency is more common among native-English speakers and the same was also observed among senior students in the present study. Academic learning experience in English language thus plays a great role in becoming more native-like in apologizing.

### **Implications of the Findings of the Study**

As the findings provided a clear view on how English-majored students in their freshmen and senior years use apology strategies differently, we can establish several pedagogical implications. There are many different ways that students can choose to express an apology and some apology strategies may be more common than the others. Classroom teachers should raise students' pragmatic awareness through various methods for the students to gain a better understanding of how speech acts are used naturally and similarly with that of more competent language users. Relevant research (Kasper, 1996; Rose & Kasper, 2001) show that students benefit most from explicit instruction. Students receive direct instructions on how to produce apology strategies. Teachers may also use corpora to show different apology forms from natural settings.

When looking at different mitigating patterns, teachers should also concentrate on the less common apology strategies so that learners will get acquainted with the strategies and can choose an appropriate apology. The researcher identified several apology strategies that were less commonly used by the participants in this study. Apart from a lower frequency use of these

strategies freshmen students also used these strategies in a more irregular way across the situations. By calling students' attention to different apology strategies they also develop awareness of appropriate use of these strategies.

Teachers could also focus more on assessing pragmatic abilities of students by testing how students perform a variety of speech acts. Without assessing students on their knowledge of speech acts including apologies, the teachers would not be aware of which areas students are lacking and need improvement. Some of the methods for assessing students' pragmatic abilities could be in a form of written-verbal DCT or playing a short audio excerpt and asking students to predict which speech act the speaker is going to use.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One of the limitations of the study was that it did not address the participants' L1 transfer in the use of L2 apology strategies. The students' mother tongue may play a role in how they choose to express an apology. Apart from L1, the culture and the background of the students may also influence the choice of apology.

Regarding the variables in the research, the present study only focused on one variable, namely the students' academic learning difference. Gender differences in apology choice are also often observed in apology research. The research did not seek to identify how freshmen and seniors apologize differently based on different factors such as social status, relationship between the offender and the offended and severity of offence.

WDCT, which involved asking students for written replies to situations, was the tool used for the data collection for this study. Yuan (2004) found that verbal DCT may provide more natural

data as participants tended to use more premodifiers and intensifiers in the verbal DCT. Even though the present study used WDCT, the researcher found that the participants used premodifiers and intensifiers in writing in a large number as well.

Lastly, students' grammatical accuracy in answering the situations was not observed. Although their grammatical accuracy was outside of the scope of this study, the researcher deemed the students' answer inappropriate when there was a pragmatic failure in their answer and would not count it an effective use of apology strategy. The following example illustrates such a situation:

*Freshman 7, Situation 1* (student bumps into professor and consequently the professor drops his laptop)

*'Good morning, professor. I have seen your laptop broken and my friend is major to fix it.'*

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

There has been only a limited number of research that looked at the effects of academic learning experience in pragmatic development. To the best knowledge of the researcher, no studies discussed how students' academic learning experience influences their apology strategy choice. There is definitely more room in comparing English majored EFL students in different academic level and determining how their years of study at university changed their abilities in using different speech acts, especially apology speech act. Other studies could look at whether there is a difference among males and females in different academic level in their apology choice. Different factors within situations such as the severity of offence could also be the focus of studies to determine whether students with advanced academic learning experience apologize

differently in more severe situations (i.e., whether there are more premodifiers or intensifiers used by the advanced group).

Apart from focusing on different factors in the situations, the means regarding how the data are collected in apology research could also be the aim of future research. The number of those apology studies that used verbal DCT as a method have remained very few (Linnell et al, 1992) compared to using the written DCT method (Mir, 1992; Suszczyriska, 1999; Song & Liu, 2002). Even though prior researchers considered different variables when observing students' apology patterns, it is hard to set a comparison between two already existing studies. Studies could be conducted with the possible aim of recording differences in the participants' apology strategies when they gave answers orally and on written form. If the variables are the same and only the data collection method is different, then differences in students' answers could be attributed to the data collection method.

Given the present study's findings on asking for forgiveness strategy among freshmen students, more research is required with a focus on this special strategy with the involvement of lower and higher proficiency language learners. If we learn more about why lower proficiency language learners can't identify the most fitting situations for this strategy then teachers will be able to help students in mastering this specific apology strategy.

### **Conclusion**

This research was conducted to determine differences in apology strategy choice between English majored Taiwanese freshmen and senior students. The reviewed literature clearly called for more research in the area of apologizing where English learners at their different academic

progress are compared to determine whether the years of English learning at university level is related to their construction of apology strategies. The main findings of this study showed a clear difference about several aspects of freshmen and seniors' apology strategies; observing these differences allows us to infer some important pedagogical implications that may be of aid to professors in developing lesson plans.

More research is called for on the apology speech act that observes how students utilize the language when expression of an apology is needed. Competence in using the language does not only mean avoiding miscommunications, but also means an expression of oneself that resembles utterances of native speakers. Research of this kind will be of great help to teachers who are helping students to act more native-like when conveying their meaning in an apology.

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**Appendix A**  
**Consent Form**

You are being invited to take part of the study by Attila Muszka on Taiwanese students' apology strategy use in English. The study involves completing open-ended questionnaire by you that will be analyzed by the researcher. Taking part in this study is voluntarily, the information you supply will be used for the purposes of this research only. You agree that research data collected may be published and your name will not be disclosed as a participant of the research. If you have any questions about this research please feel free to contact me at:

Researcher: Attila Muszka

**Consent Statement(s)**

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in this project.

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Student status** (please circle):

- A. Freshman
- B. Sophomore
- C. Junior
- D. Senior

Student's major: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Written Discourse Completion Task

Please respond to the questions below as honestly and realistically as much as you can.

1 You are on your way to the class at school when suddenly you bump into a professor of yours that makes him drop his laptop on the floor and it gets broken. What do you say to him?

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2 You arranged to meet with a friend at a place in the city where you have not been before. After looking for the place for more than 45 minutes you still cannot find the place and your friend. Your friend is calling you now and is asking you why you still haven't arrived at the place where you were supposed to meet. What do you say?

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3 Your boss is very disappointed with you because you could not finish your job by the required deadline. She says if it happens again she will fire you. How do you respond?

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4 You borrowed an umbrella from you friend and you only returned it to him after three weeks. What would you say to your friend?

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5 After finishing eating at a restaurant you wish to pay for the meal but you notice that you forgot to bring money with you. How do you respond?

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6 You are going on a field trip with your class and you arrive half an hour late, making the whole class wait for you. What do you say to them?

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7 You promised to help your sister/brother cleaning the house but at the end you decided to go and see a movie with your friends. What do you say to your sister/brother?

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8 The teacher assigned you to do a project with a classmate of yours that you do not really know. You were supposed to meet with this classmate at the library to do your project together but you completely forgot about your meeting. 40 minutes after waiting for you, your classmate is calling you and asking you where you are. What do you say to her?

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9 You are doing a part-time job selling drinks at a tea shop. Your boss is very angry with you because you mishandled some money at the workplace. What do you say to him?

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10 You are at your cousin's home eating dinner together. The glass in your hand suddenly slips and you spill orange juice on the carpet. What do you say?

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11 You are driving your motorcycle on the street when the light turns red. You notice the light turning red too late, press the break and you crash into the motorcycle before you. Both your and the other persons' motorcycle gets damaged a little. What do you say?

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12 Your club at the university has an important meeting that you are invited to. Club members really expect you to be there too because they want to discuss something important about the club and they need to hear your opinion as well. Something comes up for you at the end and you cannot go to this club meeting. What do you say to them?

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## APPENDIX C

### Sample responses of participants to DCT

#### *Scenario 11:*

You are driving your motorcycle on the street when the light turns red. You notice the light turning red too late, press the break and you crash into the motorcycle before you. Both your and the other persons' motorcycle gets damaged a little. What do you say?

F1 (Freshman student number 1):

'Sorry, I will pay my money to fix your motorcycle. It's my responsibility.'

F23:

'I didn't mean it. Sorry, really.'

S20 (Senior student number 20):

'I'm so sorry and I will call the police. Let them take care of it.'

S5:

'I'm sorry! Did you hurt I'm sorry that your motorcycle gets damaged! Could you just move to the road side first?'

#### *Scenario 6:*

You are going on a field trip with your class and you arrive half an hour late, making the whole class wait for you. What do you say to them?

F6:



‘I am sorry. I’ll get up earlier next time.

F18:

‘Sorry, I am not do that delibaretly just for some reasons. Sorry my classmates.’

S30:

‘I’m sorry for my coming late because I got trouble during the way.’

S32:

‘I am so sorry for letting you guys wait for me. My alarm didn’t ring this morning. Let’s get move.’