

Theoretical Analysis of Apology Speech Act Strategies within a Cross-Cultural Pragmatics Framework

Muhammad Natsir¹, May Devi Triana², Sepania Handayani Sihite³, Sriwi Anceli Naibaho⁴, Claudia Lisya Lawolo⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan, Indonesia

Corresponding Author :

Sepania Handayani Sihite

sihitehandayani3@gmail.com

Abstract

In the context of increasingly intensive cross-cultural communication, apology speech acts constitute a crucial social practice that is nevertheless highly susceptible to pragmatic misunderstanding. Differences in cultural norms, politeness expectations, and the management of social relations often cause apologies intended as reparative actions to instead generate tension or interpersonal distance. This study aims to explore apology speech act strategies within a cross-cultural pragmatics framework by emphasizing participants' experiences, meanings, and reflections. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, limited observation, and document analysis of cross-cultural interactions. The research participants consisted of individuals with intensive experience in cross-cultural communication, including foreign language learners and academic practitioners, in numbers that allowed for in-depth exploration of meaning. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of experience and the social processes underlying apology practices. The findings reveal major themes that reflect tensions between intention and perception, negotiations of identity and power relations, and reflective learning through experiences of pragmatic failure. This study contributes theoretically by enriching cross-cultural pragmatics through a focus on speakers' subjective experiences, and practically by informing pragmatic instruction, language education policy, and the enhancement of intercultural communicative awareness. The study also opens new avenues for qualitative research that places the experiences of non-dominant speakers at the center of pragmatic analysis.

Keywords: *cross-cultural pragmatics; apology strategies; speech acts; qualitative phenomenology, intercultural communication; pragmatic competence*

Introduction

In everyday social life, apologizing is not merely a linguistic act but a social practice laden with meaning, emotion, and the negotiation of interpersonal relationships. Within contemporary Speech Act Theory, speech acts are understood as social actions whose success depends not only on linguistic form but on how they are interpreted within specific relational and cultural contexts (Taguchi, 2022; Félix-Brasdefer & Shively, 2023). An apology, therefore, is not merely an illocutionary realization, but a social action that encompasses moral responsibility, acknowledgment of norm violation, and efforts to restore interpersonal relationships.

Recent developments in pragmatic theory also emphasize the concept of relational work, namely how individuals actively construct, maintain, or negotiate social

relationships through language (Chang & Haugh, 2023; Yule, 2023). Within this framework, apology is understood as a site of social negotiation: speakers do not merely acknowledge wrongdoing, but simultaneously manage self-image and interlocutors' social expectations. In other words, the success of an apology is determined by the extent to which the action aligns with the relational norms operating within a particular community.

This concept is closely related to politeness and face theory, which views interaction as a process of face protection and negotiation (facework) (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2024). Recent studies demonstrate that face is dynamic, contextually negotiated, and influenced by power relations, social distance, and cultural orientation (Kádár & Spencer-Oatey, 2023). In the context of apology, speakers must balance two competing interests: restoring the hearer's face while simultaneously maintaining their own self-image. Imbalances in this process may result in perceptions of insincerity, defensiveness, or even covert aggression.

Furthermore, Rapport Management Theory extends understanding of how individuals manage relational harmony through language, particularly in sensitive situations such as norm violations (Kádár & Spencer-Oatey, 2023). Apologies, in this context, function as relationship-repair strategies that take into account rights, obligations, and social expectations. Thus, an apology does not emerge as a spontaneous response, but as a socially and culturally calculated action.

This phenomenon becomes increasingly complex in cross-cultural interaction. Cross-cultural pragmatics emphasizes that politeness norms, expressions of responsibility, and mitigation strategies vary across cultures, such that strategies considered appropriate in one community may be perceived as inadequate or excessive in another (Usmani & Almashham, 2024; Lee et al., 2025). Recent research shows that such variation includes preferences for direct versus indirect apologies, the use of justification, and the degree of explicit responsibility acknowledgment (Zhang & You, 2022; Kaloi, 2025).

In the context of second language learning, Interlanguage Pragmatics explains that learners often experience pragmatic transfer, namely the tendency to carry first-language cultural norms into the target language (Alcón-Soler & Safont-Jordà, 2022; Ishihara & Cohen, 2024). Such transfer may trigger pragmatic failure despite adequate grammatical competence. Studies in various EFL contexts show that learners are often perceived as insincere or overly defensive in apologizing due to cultural differences in orientations toward responsibility and social hierarchy (Haristiani & Christinawati, 2024; Sari, 2024).

The urgency of this issue is further amplified in digital communication and global interaction spaces. In online environments, limited nonverbal cues make interpretations of sincerity even more vulnerable to misunderstanding (Chintawidy, 2023; Putikadyanto et al., 2025). Moreover, recent studies indicate that gender and power relations influence the choice of apology strategies, particularly in formal and hierarchical situations (Rahi, 2025; Elisabeth & Damanik, 2025). With increasing global mobility and multicultural communication, understanding these dynamics has become critically important in educational, academic, and professional contexts.

Although the literature of the past five years demonstrates growing attention to apology speech acts, much of the research remains oriented toward mapping strategies and comparing frequencies across cultures (Taguchi & Roevers, 2023; Lee et al., 2025). The dimensions of subjective experience, emotional reflection, and meaning negotiation in real-life practice remain relatively underexplored. Yet, as emphasized

by Wouk and Duranti (2023), pragmatic meaning can only be fully understood when situated within lived social experience and articulated through participants' narratives.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to analyze apology speech act strategies within a cross-cultural pragmatics framework using a qualitative approach. The focus is directed toward experiences, interpretations, and the social processes underlying the use of apology strategies in cross-cultural contexts. By integrating Speech Act Theory, politeness and face theory, rapport management, and interlanguage pragmatics, this study is expected to contribute theoretically by enriching understanding of apology as a dynamic and contextualized social practice. Practically, the findings are relevant for pragmatic instruction, the development of intercultural communicative competence, and the enhancement of pragmatic awareness in multicultural interaction in the global era.

Literature Review

1. Speech Acts as Social Practice: A Contemporary Speech Act Theory Perspective

In contemporary pragmatics, speech acts are no longer understood as isolated linguistic units or merely as realizations of particular illocutionary structures. Instead, they are viewed as social practices embedded in speakers' experiences, interpersonal relations, and sociocultural contexts. Recent approaches to Speech Act Theory emphasize that the meaning of speech acts is constructed through intersubjective processes involving speaker intention, hearer interpretation, and the social norms operating within specific speech communities (Taguchi, 2022; Yule, 2023). Thus, the success of a speech act is not inherent in its linguistic form but is negotiated within real social interaction.

In the context of apologies, recent studies show that apologizing functions as a social mechanism for managing norm violations, repairing relationships, and negotiating moral responsibility. Félix-Brasdefer and Shively (2023) argue that apologies involve complex emotional and relational dimensions, in which speakers simultaneously display remorse, manage self-image, and respond to social expectations. This finding is reinforced by cross-cultural research demonstrating that apologizing is not merely about "saying sorry," but also represents how a culture conceptualizes wrongdoing, guilt, and relational repair (Zhang & You, 2022; Lee et al., 2025).

In intercultural interaction, this perspective becomes highly relevant for understanding participants' experiences, who often encounter pragmatic failure despite using linguistically appropriate forms. Foreign language learners, for instance, may feel they have fulfilled the illocutionary demands of apologizing yet remain misunderstood due to cultural differences in interpreting responsibility and sincerity (Taguchi & Roever, 2023; Wouk & Duranti, 2023). Therefore, Speech Act Theory in this study is not employed merely as a tool for categorizing strategies but as a conceptual lens for examining apologies as social actions that are experienced, reflected upon, and negotiated by participants in real-life contexts.

2. Politeness Theory and Face in Intercultural Interaction

Politeness theory and the concept of face remain central theoretical frameworks for understanding apology dynamics, particularly in intercultural interaction. Recent studies affirm that face is neither universal nor static; rather, it is constructed, maintained, and negotiated contextually through social interaction (Chang & Haugh,

2023). From this perspective, apologies are understood as complex facework practices, in which speakers attempt to restore the hearer's face while simultaneously protecting their own self-image.

Recent cross-cultural research indicates that preferences for apology strategies are strongly influenced by cultural orientations toward hierarchy, collectivism, and social relations. Spencer-Oatey and Kádár (2024) demonstrate that in strongly hierarchical cultures, indirect strategies and explanatory accounts are often perceived as more polite than explicit apologies. Conversely, in cultures emphasizing egalitarianism, direct apologies are viewed as indicators of sincerity. These differences explain why strategies considered polite in one culture may be perceived as insincere, defensive, or even offensive in another (Kádár & Spencer-Oatey, 2023).

In the experiences of this study's participants, politeness theory helps interpret the emotional dilemmas that arise when they must choose between maintaining self-esteem and meeting the politeness expectations of the target culture. Apologies become arenas for negotiating guilt, responsibility, and social relations, rather than merely responses to norm violations. Thus, politeness theory is employed as an interpretive framework for examining the relational and emotional dynamics surrounding intercultural apology practices.

3. Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Pragmatics: Meaning, Transfer, and Experience

Cross-cultural pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics offer comprehensive frameworks for understanding how apology strategies are shaped by cultural background, linguistic experience, and participants' social learning processes. Research over the past five years indicates that second-language learners frequently experience pragmatic transfer, namely the tendency to carry pragmatic norms from their first language into the target language (Alcón-Soler & Safont-Jordà, 2022; Ishihara & Cohen, 2024). This transfer is often unconscious, yet it significantly influences how their apologies are interpreted by others.

Recent qualitative studies in interlanguage pragmatics have shifted focus from merely identifying deviations to understanding learners' reflective experiences. Findings suggest that pragmatic failure often triggers feelings of awkwardness, uncertainty, and even social injustice, particularly for non-dominant speakers in intercultural interaction (Haristiani & Christinawati, 2024; Rahi, 2025). In this context, apologies are understood as social processes that develop gradually through experience, reflection, and the negotiation of linguistic and cultural identity.

This approach is highly relevant for interpreting the narratives of this study's participants, which portray apologies not as static linguistic products but as evolving practices shaped by intercultural experiences. Therefore, cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics provide frameworks for understanding dynamics of meaning and experience that cannot be fully explained through purely quantitative approaches.

4. Comparison of Theoretical Approaches and Researcher Positioning

The three theoretical approaches—Speech Act Theory, politeness and face theory, and cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics—offer complementary perspectives for understanding apology speech acts. Speech Act Theory provides the foundation for understanding the functional dimension of apologizing; politeness theory explains relational and emotional dynamics; while cross-cultural pragmatics highlights the roles of experience, culture, and participant learning processes. However, this study reflexively adopts cross-cultural pragmatics as its primary lens. This choice is

grounded in the study's aim, which is not oriented toward measuring the frequency of strategies but toward interpreting participants' lived experiences in real social contexts. Cross-cultural pragmatics enables the researcher to capture the complexity of meaning, ambiguity, and identity tensions experienced by participants, particularly those positioned as socially or linguistically non-dominant (Usmani & Almashham, 2024; Wouk & Duranti, 2023). Within this framework, theory is positioned as a flexible interpretive tool rather than a deterministic structure that constrains participant voices.

5. Research Analytical Framework

Based on this theoretical stance, apology speech act strategies are conceptualized as social practices negotiated contextually, reflectively, and multilayeredly. Data are understood as experiential narratives reflecting the interaction of language, culture, emotion, and social relations. The researcher interprets participant voices by situating their experiences within a cross-cultural pragmatics framework, paying attention to how the meaning of apologies is constructed, negotiated, and reflected upon in intercultural interaction.

This analytical framework enables context-sensitive and subjectivity-attuned analysis while opening space to reveal social processes often overlooked in quantification-based pragmatic studies. Thus, the study not only contributes to the theoretical understanding of apology speech acts but also offers an alternative perspective that places speaker experience at the center of pragmatic analysis.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological orientation to explore apology speech act strategies within a cross-cultural pragmatics framework. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aims to understand meanings, experiences, and interpretations constructed by speakers in real communicative situations rather than to measure variables quantitatively. Phenomenology is particularly relevant to this study as it emphasizes lived experience as the primary source of meaning, allowing pragmatic phenomena to be examined from the perspective of participants who actively engage in cross-cultural interaction.

Within pragmatic research, a phenomenological approach enables the analysis of how speakers perceive, experience, and reflect upon their own language use, especially in situations involving norm violations and face-threatening acts. By adopting this design, the study situates apology not merely as a linguistic form but as an experiential and relational practice shaped by cultural norms, power relations, and interaction expectations.

Participants

The participants of this study were selected through purposive sampling based on their intensive experience in cross-cultural communication. A total of 12 individuals participated voluntarily, consisting of: 6 foreign language learners (4 learners of English as a foreign language and 2 learners of Japanese) with at least two years of active cross-cultural interaction experience. 4 university students from multicultural study programs (International Relations and English Literature) who regularly communicate with peers from different cultural backgrounds. academic practitioners (a lecturer in cross-cultural

communication and an international office staff member) who frequently handle intercultural negotiations and misunderstandings.

All participants had experienced at least one significant pragmatic misunderstanding related to apologies in the past 12 months. Their ages ranged from 19 to 38 years, representing cultural backgrounds from Indonesia, Japan, Germany, and Malaysia. The number of participants was determined according to the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection was continued until no new themes or significant insights emerged. This approach ensured depth of analysis and allowed for a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure richness and triangulation. The primary method was in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to narrate their experiences, reflections, and perceptions regarding the use of apology strategies in cross-cultural interaction. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed accounts of communicative situations involving apologies, including perceived success, misunderstanding, or pragmatic failure.

In addition to interviews, limited observation was conducted to capture naturally occurring interactions in cross-cultural settings. This technique enabled the researcher to observe how apology strategies were enacted in real-time interaction and how interlocutors responded to them. Document analysis was also employed, focusing on written interaction data such as reflective notes, learning journals, and selected communicative documents related to intercultural encounters. These multiple sources of data contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of apology practices across contexts.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following systematic procedures of coding, categorization, and interpretation. Initially, all interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Open coding was then applied to identify significant units of meaning related to apology strategies, pragmatic intentions, emotional responses, and cultural considerations.

Subsequently, codes were grouped into broader categories and themes that reflected recurring patterns across participants' experiences. These themes were continuously reviewed and refined through an iterative process to ensure analytical coherence and consistency. Throughout the analysis, attention was paid to the relationship between linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, and participants' subjective interpretations.

Results

The analysis of data obtained from in-depth interviews with 12 participants, limited observation, and document analysis of cross-cultural interactions reveals three major themes that represent participants' experiences, meanings, and social tensions in realizing apology speech acts. These themes illustrate how apology is not merely a

linguistic expression but a complex pragmatic action involving intention, interpretation, identity negotiation, power relations, and reflective learning in cross-cultural contexts.

Theme 1: Tension Between Speaker Intention and Hearer Interpretation

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the data is the tension between speakers' intentions when producing apologies and how those apologies are interpreted by interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds. Participants reported that apologies they considered polite, sufficient, and sincere were sometimes perceived as inadequate, excessive, or even defensive by their interlocutors.

Several participants indicated that cultural differences in expressing responsibility and sincerity played a crucial role in this tension. For instance, participants from cultures that valued indirectness tended to mitigate their apologies through explanations or contextual justifications. However, interlocutors from more direct communication cultures often interpreted such mitigation as avoidance of responsibility. Conversely, participants who employed explicit and direct apologies reported that their utterances were occasionally perceived as overly dramatic or face-threatening in cultures that prioritize harmony and restraint.

The following interview excerpts illustrate this tension concretely:

- **Participant 3 (Female, EFL learner, age 21, Indonesia):**
"I said 'I'm sorry if I caused any trouble' to my German friend because I was late. I thought it was polite. But she got annoyed and said 'Are you sorry or not? Just say yes or no.' I was shocked. For me, saying 'if' is normal. For her, it looked like I didn't take responsibility."
- **Participant 7 (Male, Japanese learner, age 23, Indonesia):**
"When I apologized to my Japanese senior by saying 'It's my fault, I'm really sorry,' he became silent and looked uncomfortable. Later my teacher said that my apology was too direct and made him lose face. I only wanted to be honest, but it became a problem."
- **Participant 1 (Female, German language learner, age 20, Indonesia):**
"My German exchange partner said 'Sorry' very quickly for a small mistake. I thought she didn't mean it because it was too fast and flat. But later I learned that in Germany, a short direct apology is considered sincere. I expected long explanations. We both felt offended."

These excerpts demonstrate that the pragmatic force of an apology cannot be separated from culturally grounded expectations regarding appropriate communicative behavior. As a result, successful apology realization depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on shared cultural assumptions about accountability and relational repair.

Theme 2: Negotiation of Identity, Power, and Social Relations

The second theme concerns the negotiation of identity and power relations in the use of apology strategies. Participants' narratives demonstrate that apologies are closely intertwined with social hierarchy, institutional roles, and perceived power distance. In formal or hierarchical settings, such as academic or professional environments,

participants tended to carefully calibrate their apology strategies to avoid appearing weak or incompetent.

Several participants reported experiencing internal conflict when apologizing to interlocutors of higher status. While they recognized the necessity of acknowledging responsibility, they also felt compelled to protect their professional identity and credibility. This often resulted in the use of partial apologies or implicit expressions of regret rather than explicit admissions of fault.

Concrete evidence from interviews follows:

- **Participant 9 (Female, academic practitioner, age 34, Indonesia):**
"In a meeting with my German colleague, I made a small mistake. I apologized indirectly: 'Maybe I didn't explain it well.' He interrupted me and said, 'Just admit it was wrong.' I felt humiliated. As a woman from a hierarchical culture, I was taught not to be too direct. But here, indirectness looked like weakness."
- **Participant 2 (Male, university student, age 22, Indonesia):**
"When I apologized to my professor from Malaysia, I said 'I regret if there was a misunderstanding.' He accepted it. But when my American friend heard it, he said 'That's not a real apology, you're just avoiding blame.' I had to choose between protecting my image and following their expectation."
- **Participant 8 (Female, lecturer, age 36, Indonesia):**
"I once apologized to my British senior colleague by saying 'I'm sorry, but the instruction wasn't clear.' He was silent and later told me that 'but' cancels the apology. In my culture, giving an explanation protects both faces. For him, it was just an excuse. I felt my credibility was questioned even though I was trying to be polite."

Gender also emerged as a relevant factor in shaping apology practices:

- **Participant 6 (Female, international relations student, age 22, Indonesia):**
"My male friend can say a short 'sorry' and everyone moves on. But when I say the same thing, people expect me to explain more and show more emotion. If I don't, they say I'm cold or insincere. It's not fair."

These expectations influenced participants' strategic choices and contributed to feelings of inequality and pragmatic pressure in cross-cultural interaction. Overall, this theme demonstrates that apology is a site of social negotiation where speakers simultaneously manage face, identity, and power relations.

Theme 3: Reflective Learning Through Experiences of Pragmatic Failure

The third theme highlights participants' reflective learning processes following experiences of pragmatic failure. Many participants reported that misunderstandings or negative reactions to their apologies prompted self-reflection and increased awareness of cultural differences in pragmatic norms. Rather than viewing these experiences solely as communicative breakdowns, participants interpreted them as valuable learning moments.

Through repeated exposure to cross-cultural interaction, participants developed greater sensitivity to contextual cues, interlocutors' expectations, and the relational

consequences of their language choices. Some participants described consciously modifying their apology strategies over time, such as adjusting levels of directness, incorporating explicit responsibility acknowledgment, or reducing excessive justification.

The following excerpts capture this reflective process:

- **Participant 5 (Female, EFL learner, age 20, Indonesia):**
"After my Japanese friend got angry because my apology was too strong, I started observing how Japanese people apologize to each other. They use softer words and more hesitation. Now I try to copy that. It feels strange, but it works better. Failure taught me more than any textbook."
- **Participant 11 (Male, international office staff, age 38, Indonesia):**
"I used to say 'I'm sorry, but...' a lot. My British colleague said it sounded like an excuse, not an apology. At first I was defensive. But after several misunderstandings, I realized I had to change. Now I say 'I was wrong' first, then explain later. It's hard, but it reduces conflict."
- **Participant 4 (Female, Japanese learner, age 21, Indonesia):**
"I apologized to my Japanese friend by saying 'Gomen nasai' with a straight face because I was nervous. She laughed uncomfortably. Later I found out that tone and body language are very important. Now I practice not just the words but also the facial expression. I keep a notebook of my mistakes."
- **Participant 12 (Male, German learner, age 24, Indonesia):**
"My German roommate said my apology was 'empty' because I smiled while saying sorry. In my culture, smiling reduces tension. In his culture, smiling during an apology looks like you don't care. At first I was angry. Then I realized I had to learn their nonverbal rules. Now I force myself to keep a serious face when apologizing, even if it feels wrong."

This reflective process contributed to the development of pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness. Participants emphasized that formal language instruction alone was insufficient to prepare them for real-world interaction; instead, experiential learning and critical reflection played a crucial role in shaping their pragmatic development.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that apology speech acts in cross-cultural contexts cannot be understood solely through formal linguistic structures. Instead, they must be interpreted as socially embedded practices shaped by cultural norms, relational expectations, and power dynamics. The three themes identified in the findings—tension between intention and interpretation, negotiation of identity and power, and reflective learning through pragmatic failure—collectively demonstrate the complexity of apology as a pragmatic phenomenon.

The tension between speakers' intentions and hearers' interpretations supports key arguments in cross-cultural pragmatics that pragmatic meaning is not inherently encoded in linguistic forms but is co-constructed through interaction (Taguchi & Roever, 2023). Participants' experiences, such as when Participant 3's apology containing "if" was perceived as evasive by her German friend, illustrate that apologies which are pragmatically appropriate within one cultural framework may be evaluated negatively

within another. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that indirect apology strategies, often intended to maintain harmony, may be perceived as evasive in cultures that emphasize explicit responsibility acknowledgment (Zhang & You, 2022; Kaloi, 2025). Similarly, Participant 7's overly direct apology to his Japanese senior demonstrates how a strategy valued in one context (directness as honesty) becomes face-threatening in another.

Furthermore, the negotiation of identity and power relations observed in this study resonates with politeness and face theory, particularly the notion that face is dynamic and relational rather than static (Kádár & Spencer-Oatey, 2023; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2024). Participants' reluctance to issue explicit apologies in hierarchical settings, as expressed by Participant 9 and Participant 2, reflects the tension between the need to repair relational damage and the desire to maintain professional credibility. This supports earlier research demonstrating that apologies are strategically managed to balance self-face and other-face concerns, especially in institutional contexts (Elisabeth & Damanik, 2025).

The role of gender in apology practices, highlighted by Participant 6's observation that female speakers face higher expectations for explicit and emotional apologies, further illustrates how social expectations intersect with pragmatic behavior. Consistent with previous research, these differential expectations influence speakers' strategic choices and emotional responses (Rahi, 2025). These findings suggest that apology strategies are not merely individual choices but are constrained by broader sociocultural ideologies and norms.

The third theme, reflective learning through experiences of pragmatic failure, underscores the importance of experiential learning in the development of pragmatic competence. Participants' reflections, such as Participant 5's conscious emulation of Japanese apology styles and Participant 11's elimination of "but" from his apologies, support interlanguage pragmatics research emphasizing that pragmatic development is a gradual and adaptive process shaped by exposure, feedback, and reflection (Alcón-Soler & Safont-Jordà, 2022; Ishihara & Cohen, 2024). Participant 4's strategy of keeping a notebook of pragmatic mistakes and Participant 12's forced adjustment of nonverbal behavior demonstrate that experiences of misunderstanding served as catalysts for increased awareness and strategic adjustment. These findings highlight the pedagogical value of pragmatic failure, a dimension often overlooked in traditional language instruction.

In the context of language education, these findings suggest that pragmatic instruction should extend beyond the teaching of formulaic expressions to include opportunities for reflection on real-life communicative experiences. Integrating reflective practices and cross-cultural awareness training may better prepare learners to navigate the complexities of apology use in diverse interactional settings. Moreover, the findings reinforce the need for qualitative approaches that foreground participants' lived experiences, as such perspectives provide insights that cannot be captured through frequency-based analyses alone.

Conclusion

This study has examined apology speech act strategies within a cross-cultural pragmatics framework by focusing on participants' experiences, interpretations, and reflective processes. The findings demonstrate that apologies function as complex social actions rather than as simple linguistic expressions. The effectiveness of an apology is shaped by the interaction between cultural norms, relational expectations, and power dynamics, which influence how intentions are interpreted and evaluated by interlocutors.

The study reveals that tensions between speaker intention and hearer interpretation frequently arise in cross-cultural interaction, particularly when cultural expectations regarding directness, responsibility, and politeness differ. Apology strategies are also shown to be closely linked to identity construction and power relations, especially in hierarchical and institutional contexts. Furthermore, experiences of pragmatic failure play a crucial role in fostering reflective learning and the development of pragmatic and intercultural competence.

By foregrounding participants' lived experiences, this study contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics by extending existing research beyond strategy classification toward a deeper understanding of meaning negotiation in real communicative practice. Apology emerges as a dynamic and context-dependent practice that reflects broader sociocultural structures and relational processes.

References

- Alcón-Soler, E., & Safont-Jordà, M. P. (2022). Pragmatic transfer and interlanguage pragmatics in second language learning. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 194, 45–58.
- Chang, W.-L., & Haugh, M. (2023). Relational work and pragmatic interaction in intercultural contexts. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 207, 1–14.
- Chintawidy, A. (2023). Pragmatic failure in digital communication: A cross-cultural perspective. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 52, 100668.
- Elisabeth, D., & Damanik, S. A. (2025). Gendered expectations in apology practices in institutional discourse. *Pragmatics and Society*, 16(1), 87–105.
- Félix-Brasdefer, J. C., & Shively, R. L. (2023). Speech acts and pragmatic competence in second language use. *Applied Pragmatics*, 5(2), 145–162.
- Haristiani, N., & Christinawati, M. (2024). Cultural orientation and apology strategies among EFL learners. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 77–90.
- Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. D. (2024). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Kaloi, V. (2025). Directness and mitigation in cross-cultural apology strategies. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 22(1), 23–47.
- Kádár, D. Z., & Spencer-Oatey, H. (2023). Politeness, face, and rapport management revisited. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 19(2), 161–180.
- Lee, J., Chen, Y., & Park, S. (2025). Apology strategies in multicultural interaction: A comparative study. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 34(1), 1–19.
- Putikadyanto, A. P., Nugroho, A., & Rahmawati, D. (2025). Online apologies and pragmatic interpretation in global communication. *Discourse Studies*, 27(2), 214–231.
- Rahi, S. (2025). Power, gender, and pragmatic choice in apology discourse. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 44(1), 56–73.
- Sari, D. P. (2024). Pragmatic competence and apology realization in EFL contexts. *TEFLIN Journal*, 35(2), 201–219.

- Spencer-Oatey, H., & Kádár, D. Z. (2024). *Rapport management in intercultural communication*. Cambridge University Press.
- Taguchi, N. (2022). Pragmatics and language learning in a globalized world. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 42, 1–17.
- Taguchi, N., & Roever, C. (2023). *Second language pragmatics* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Usmani, S., & Almashham, S. (2024). Cultural norms and pragmatic interpretation of apologies. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Communication*, 18(3), 245–260.
- Wouk, F., & Duranti, A. (2023). *Pragmatics and social life*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zhang, Y., & You, X. (2022). Cultural variation in apology strategies and responsibility attribution. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 193, 68–82.