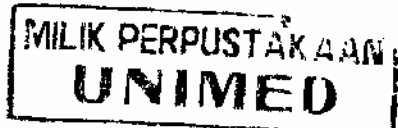


# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION



### 1.1 Background

English is one of the first foreign languages in Indonesia. The language has been one of the major foreign languages offered in the national curriculum from secondary to tertiary level of education. Even several universities in Indonesia have set up a diploma and a first-degree program for English, at which students can learn the English language and literature. At this program, English is learned as a foreign language not as a second language as most learners do not use English outside the classroom. It is assumed that the learners not only learn the language but also how to use it in the appropriate context. It is in the latter assumption that the learners should also learn the pragmatics of the language, i.e. the English speech acts. English apologies belong to one of the speech act categories. Therefore, the learners are also expected to acquire the apology and the strategies accompanying it, which according to Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstain (1986) and Olshtain & Cohen (1983:18) are called "the speech act set of apology". It includes the illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs).

In general, speech acts are acts of communication. To communicate is to express a certain attitude, and the type of speech act being performed corresponds to the type of attitude being expressed. For example, a statement expresses a belief, a request expresses a desire, and an apology expresses a regret. As an act of communication, a speech act succeeds if the hearer identifies, in accordance with the speaker's intention, the attitude being expressed.

Speech acts are the minimal terms on the scale and refer to the acts we perform when we speak: giving reports, giving advice, agreeing, complaining, and apologizing. Speech acts

can be defined in terms of discourse functions. Although a speech act can occur within various speech events (one can apologize as part of a two-party conversation or as part of a lecture), they are triggered by specific behaviour or discourse situations that need to be defined beyond one sociocultural context as well as within each such context. It may be that a person would need to apologize when hurting another person unintentionally no matter where the situation occurred. Yet different degrees of severity in the action or different circumstances related to the behaviour may call for different types of apologies and different intensities of such apologies in different cultures. We need to focus our descriptions of speech acts on non- language specific features as well as on situation- specific information.

Searle (1979:369) has classified the speech acts into five categories such as representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (see further discussion of this classification on 2.3). This thesis is dealing with apology speech act, which belongs to the speech act category of expressive together with the speech act of thanking, welcoming, congratulating, etc. As it expresses regret, the speech act of apology is used to restore relationships between a speaker and a hearer after the speaker has offended the hearer intentionally or unintentionally.

The topic of apology has enjoyed a quite extensive discussion in the literature. One of the earliest studies on apology is Goffman's (1971). He views apology as, a remedial interchange (work) with the function of changing the meaning that otherwise might be given into an act, transforming what could be seen as offensive into what can be seen as acceptable Goffman (1971). In line with Goffman, Marion Owen (1983) interprets remedial interchanges including apologies and accounts as those concerned specifically with repairing damage to

face, where face preservation itself becomes the object of the conversation for a time, however short.

In addition to the previous statements, Goffman (1971) also views apologies as remedial interchanges serving to re-establish social harmony after a real or virtual offence or in Olshtain, Cohen terms whether the offence is real or potential (1983:20). Apology is a communicative act in the production, of which an apologiser has to act politely, precisely consists of positive and negative politeness both in the vernacular sense and in the more technical sense of paying attention to the addressee's face wants (Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987).

Furthermore, in the discussion of human interaction, the avoidance based negative politeness and solidarity based positive politeness tenets of Brown & Levinson's theory (1987) are necessary for cross-cultural analysis or (studies of speech acts). However, the application of their framework has faced many hurdles. Researchers are not unanimous in what exactly constitutes politeness Fraser (1990). Blum-Kulka (1992:270) observes, "Systems of politeness manifest a culturally filtered interpretation of interaction, the social understanding of politeness being significantly affected by certain cultural notions."

Within the context of foreign language learning, learners are expected to use apology according to the ways it is used in the language. Generally, one of apologies usually used by the learners is perceiving excuses. In English, these excuses actually consist of two, they are *excuse me* and *I'm sorry*. It seems that learners may not understand the distinction function between them as their source language may not have such a distinction. They tend to use interchangeably those two different functions.

A distinction between the use of *excuse me* and *I am sorry* in apologetic behaviour was discussed by Borkin & Reinhart (1978) in their analysis. The study suggests that acquiring appropriate formulas for ritualistic apology is problematic for non-native speakers; however, substantive apologies are a more complex learning task. Coulmas (1981) in his analysis of gratitude and indebtedness notes that the function of much apologetic behaviour is ritualistic and that it varies cross culturally as shown in a number of western languages as opposed to Japanese. Olshtain (1983) notes that events that require apology have been shown to vary cross-culturally. Severity of the offence and the weight of contextual variables are also subject to cross-cultural variation (House, 1988, Vollmer & Olshtain, 1989). Olshtain (1989) in a study shows that preference for strategy choice varies contextually and cross-culturally.

Kasper (1993) examined how contextual factors in a variety of offence contexts are perceived by Thai and American informants. She also investigated the question of how the selection of apology strategies is determined by contextual factors. The patterns of intra-cultural and inter-cultural variability which are observable in the selection of apology strategies by Thai NNS (Non Native Speaker) of English as compared to NS (Native Speaker) of Thai and American English were also explored in her study.

Cohen & Olshtain (1985) studied the types of deviations in the production of the speech act of apology by Hebrew learners of English. They pointed out that deviation from the target language could be due to the situation or grammatical and lexical factors. The same authors in a study focusing on the act of apologizing, refer to it as a "speech act set" Olshtain & Cohen (1983). Their discussion related to a group of students on the production of apologies by non-native speakers who vary in both the mother tongue and the target language. For example speakers of Russian and English learning Hebrew, speakers of Spanish learning English, a

speaker of Korean learning English and speakers of Chinese learning English. The possibility to identify culturally and stylistically in appropriate L2 utterances in apology situations was the finding of a study conducted by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) on a group of native Hebrew speakers who served as informants for apologies in English L2. Trosborg (1987) investigated the communicative act of apologizing as realized in the speech of Danish learners of English compared to native speaker performance. In his paper he provided an outline of apology strategies and an analysis of native/non-native communicative behaviour in terms of these strategies.

## 1.2 Problems

The present study is mainly concerned with how are the speech act sets of apology as perceived by Indonesian learners of English, i.e., the application of rule appropriateness in English apology. For this purpose, the students of the English Department, Faculty of Letters University of North Sumatra have been taken as the subjects of the study.

Studies concerned with cross-cultural comparative discourse (e.g., Gumperz & Tannen 1979, Tannen, 1982, Blum-Kulka 1982, Cohen & Olshtain 1981, Olshtain 1983, Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984 et al.) have shown that different cultures possess different rules of appropriateness. Thus, if our goal is to make our learners truly effective communicators in a second language, they require being aware of these rules of appropriateness in addition to mastering the phonology and grammar of that language.

The identification of the present problems of the study is generally based on the emphasis in second language teaching and learning theories that has shifted in recent years from a 'grammatical' or 'structural' approach to a 'communicative' one regarding as their

ultimate goal providing the learners with knowledge about and experience in using the socio-cultural rules of the new language. This socio-cultural competence has been shown to be an important component of communicative competence. The emphasis on this kind of competence has underscored the importance of cross-cultural speech act studies. The study of speech acts can provide us with better understanding and new insights into the interdependence of linguistic forms and socio cultural context.

Specifically, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the realization pattern of apology speech act as perceived by the subjects?
2. What kinds of apology strategies do the subjects use most often?
3. To what extent the strategies used deviate from those of the native speakers?
4. How do the distributions of the apology strategies vary across speech situations?
5. In what way is a choice of an apology strategy related to such social factors as social distance, social power, severity of offence, and obligation of apology?

### **1.3 Scope or Limitation**

As the writer has pointed out in the above section, this work is concerned with pragmatic study, i.e. speech acts. However, she limits this study to the description of speech act sets of apology only. Furthermore, a limitation of study should be made here that the description only focuses on the realization patterns of the speech act sets of apology, their frequency of use, deviation of usage, their distribution across selected speech situation, and their relationship to politeness factors such social factors as social distance, social power, severity of offence, and obligation of apology. Obviously, there are many types of speech acts that are equally important to be investigated and discussed in one research or study. The

writer leaves them to other researchers to do in different perspectives so that the study of speech acts is enriched in such a way that it covers various interesting topics.

The above limitation of study is given not without any practical reasons. As far as it is concerned with the speech act sets of apology perceived by the Indonesian learners of English, the writer has not yet found any research work on the same topic in the library.

#### 1.4 Objectives

This study attempts to investigate the speech act competence, particularly the speech act of apology of the Indonesian learners of English as a foreign language. As the study of learners' communicative competence is very important within the context of learning a foreign language, any investigation on the speech act competence will, therefore, be deemed necessary. A communicative competence includes linguistic competence on one hand, which will range from phonological, morphological to grammatical competence, and pragmatic competence on the other.

Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Identify the realization patterns of apology speech act in English.
2. Find out the most dominant apology strategies.
3. Find out how the strategies are deviated from the native speakers' apology.
4. Describe the apology strategies and their varieties across speech situation.
5. Explain the relationship between apology strategy to such social factors as social distance, social power, severity of offence, and obligation of apology.

### 1.5 Significance of Study

The significance of the study is to provide more information on the speech act sets of apology within the context of foreign language learning in Indonesia. This information comprises: the realization patterns of apology speech act in English; the description of the apology strategies and their varieties across speech situation; the relationship between apology strategy to such social factors as social distance, social power, severity of offence, and obligation of apology. As has been mentioned in the previous section, the study of speech acts, particularly of speech act sets of apology obviously can provide us with better understanding and new insight into how linguistic forms are interdependent with socio-cultural context.

### 1.6 Basic Assumption

The writer assumes that learner's ability to communicate effectively is not solely dependent on his or her grammatical competence or the learner's knowledge of the linguistic structure of the target culture but communicative competence, which is an ability to use the language appropriately in different situations. As the communicative competence includes how to perform the speech acts appropriately, his or her ability to communicate effectively should also be dependent on his or her knowledge of the speech act sets.

Learners are assumed to perceive the speech act of the foreign language as required by the context and with the strategies available at their disposal. In other words, usually one gives an apology because he or she makes mistakes or offences and it can be expressed in a different way for different culture.



It is also assumed that a speech act set is realized in terms of whom we speak to, where and when it is used. Therefore, choice of speech act strategies is closely related to social and situational parameters. We change our strategies according to hearers or situations.

