

The Similarities and Differences in Expressing Apology In English And Vietnamese

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Abstract

This paper was conducted to see on the similarities and differences in expressing apology in English and Vietnamese. So as to gather more believable data, the qualitative method including the review of literature and the analysis of some researches related to the topic. Based on the data collected from various types of books and dictionary and internet sources, the author pointed out the similarities and differences in expressing apologies in the two languages and the value of apology culture. As a result, we can improve our communication skills in the daily life.

Keywords— similarities, differences, expressing apology, English, Vietnamese

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English has become a global language which are widely used in almost every country. English is not just the mean of communication, but also the official language of many fields such as politics, culture, economics, sports, etc. The learning of English is thus, plays a vital role in the people's success.

When studying a language, it is essential to master the knowledge of the culture of that country and the knowledge of that language itself. English and Vietnamese language are of different culture, as a result, there are many differences between the two languages as those in grammar, lexicology, translation, phonetics, semantics and so on, and the understanding of these matters brings about good access to the languages.

Apologizing is a speech act used very often and naturally in our daily life. It plays an important role in communication. In day-to-day life, we are in interpersonal relationship. Therefore, we sometimes make mistakes or do something wrong and we have to apologize to others to maintain our conversations or social relation. In order to get a harmonious relationship, we should master the ways to express an apology. This has so long been the matter of our interest which encourages us to carry out a small study of verbal aspects of expressing apologies in English vs. Vietnamese.

The author has conducted this article entitled: "*Similarities and differences in expressing apology in English and Vietnamese*" with the hope that this paper

will contribute a small part to improve the quality of learning English as the second language in Viet Nam.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of apology.

From the view of Speech acts, apologies are expressive illocutionary acts. Kasper and Bergman (1993) defined apologies as compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which the speaker was causally involved and which is costly to the Hearer. This conceptualization is supported by Goffman's (1997) view of apologies as remedial interchanges serving to re-establish social harmony after a real or virtual offense.

Apology is called for when social norms have been violated, whether the offence is real or potential. It is assumed that there are two participants: an apologizer and a recipient of the apology. The act of apologizing requires an action or an utterance intended to "set things right" (Trosborg, 1987). In the decision to carry out the verbal apology, the speaker (S) is willing to humiliate himself or herself to some extent and to admit to fault and responsibility for the act. Hence the act of apologizing is face-saving for the Hearer (H) and face-threatening to S in Brown and Levinson's (1978) term.

Works on expressing apology.

A number of studies regarding the speech act of apologizing have been carried out by such authors as Kasper et al (1989,1996), Trosborg (1987,1995), Olshtain

(1989) and Phuong (2000). Studies of interlanguage apologizing have essentially addressed the same research question—the accessibility of apology strategies to non-native speakers. Kasper and Berman (1993) investigated perception and performance in native and non-native apology by means of a Dialogue Construction questionnaire, completed by three groups of informants: native speakers of American English, Thai and Thai non-native speakers of English. The DC data were coded into the five major categories summarized according to the semantic formula identified as constituting the apology speech act set (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Blum-Kulka et al, 1989).

(i) IFID (illocutionary Force Indicating Device), specifying the force of apology.

(ii) Upgrading, including element increasing apologetic force and Taking on Responsibility.

(iii) Downgrading responsibility or severity of offense, comprising of utterances reducing S's accountability for the offence or severity of offence.

(iv) Offer of repair, showing to remedy damage.

(v) Verbal redress, S showing concern for H, efforts to appease or promise of forbearance.

As an interlanguage study, Trobørg's paper (1996) dealt with the act of apologizing in complaint-apology situation as realized in the speech of Danish learners of English compared to native speakers' performance. She outlined 4 categories including 8 strategies in order to increasing directness.

Unlike interlanguage studies of apologizing, cross-cultural studies have laid a great emphasis on a comparison of the apology realization patterns cross-linguistically. Olshtain (1989) and Phuong (2000) are among the authors who carry out such a type of studies. Olshtain (1989) implemented a cross-cultural study focusing on similarities and differences of the realization patterns of apologies in four different languages: Hebrew, Australian English, Canadian French, provided by speakers of the four languages by means of the identical CCSARP discourse completion questionnaire (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989). The speech act set (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983) consist five main apology strategies- an IFID, an expression of responsibilities, an explanation or an account of the violation, an offer of repair, and a promise of forbearance. The other three units are intensifiers within the IFID, concern for H and minimizing the offence. Surprisingly, Olshtain found no correlation between the use of responsibility and the other three strategies and socio-pragmatic factors, which was opposed to Kasper's findings that Distance covaried with responsibility.

Different from above studies, Phuong (2000) assumed these five strategies into two core categories: direct strategy via an IFID and indirect strategies including the others. As regards the selection of strategies, the noteworthy finding was the differences between English and Vietnamese in the level of directness and indirectness employed in informal as well as in powerful settings. In terms of the manipulation of lexico-modal markers, the data showed that in addressing the ten different conversational patterns, the English speakers used more lexico-modal markers than do the Vietnamese speakers, especially such modal markers as intensifiers, subjectivizers, downtoners and hedges. However, Vietnamese speakers provided more politeness markers than the English speakers. Despite of great significance of being the first cross-cultural study of apologies in English and Vietnamese, this study still possesses a conspicuous gap in its analytical framework. Due to the oversimplification of grouping apology strategies into two categories: direct and indirect, the manipulation of each of the strategies constituting the speech act apologizing seems to have been obscured. Hence, the actual wordings of apologies, especially the IFID, have not been carefully analyzed.

Throughout the above discussion of speech act theory, politeness theory and previous studies on apology, now we have had in mind panoramic view of the fundamental theoretical issue relating to the realization of the speech act set of apology.

Strategies used in expressing apology

Explicit expressions of apology

When an offence is committed, the speaker may choose to express his/her apology explicitly from a variety of apologetic formula called the illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID). There are different views on what the illocutionary Force Indicating Device is for the act of apologizing.

According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the verb "apologize" in the present indicative, with a first person singular subject is pointed as the explicit performative (the 'normal form' for the act of apologizing). On the contrary, Owen (1983) claims that "historical evidence warns us against setting up apologies as illocutionary acts in their own rights, with expressions of regret, request for forgiveness, and so on, regarded as "indirect", i.e. in some sense subsidiary and derived ways of performing the same act". Trobørg (1995) accepts Owen's claim to the effect that "historically a perceived equivalence of interactional function between the two utterances can be postulated" (Owen, 1983). She presents a set of explicit apology expressions which are categorized

into three subgroups with regard to level of formality and restrictions on occurrence. They are expression of regret, request for forgiveness and offer of apology.

Expressing regret and apology.

In terms of restriction on occurrence and activities, We classified the group into two smaller subgroups

* Positive expressions of regret and apology including "sorry" and "apology"

* Negative expression of regret and apology including "regret" and "afaid"

Requesting forgiveness

Table 1: IFIDs for Apologies in English and Vietnamese

Subformulate		IFIDs		
		English	Vietnamese	
1. Expressing regret and apology	Positive	be sorry	xin lỗi	
		apologize		
	Negative	regret	rÊt tiÕc	
		afaid	e r»ng, sî lµ	
2. Requesting forgiveness	a. excuse		xin lỗi	
		b. forgive		thø lỗi
				lîng thø
				bá qua
				bá qu,
				tha thø
				tha lỗi
	c. pardon		thø lỗi	
			lîng thø	
			bá qu,	
			tha téi	
			x, téi	
			©n x,	
2.0 Requesting sympathy		th«ng c¶m		
		hiÓu cho		
		ch©m tríc		

Acknowledgement of responsibility

With an effort to placate the offended party, the speaker often chooses to express responsibility for the offense which created the need to apologize.

- *Self-blame*

The speaker explicitly acknowledges the fact that it was his/her fault, including expression of deficiency and explicit self-blame. For example:

E.g - I'm so forgetful. (Tôi thật cẩu thả)

- You know I am bad at... (Tôi biết tôi không giỏi về....)

- It was a mistake (Đó là một sai lầm)

- I'm so careless (Đây là sơ suất của em)

- *Lack of intent*

The speaker explicit states that he/she hasn't intended to hurt the Hearer through his/her offence

E.g: - I didn't mean to up set you (Tôi không cố ý làm bạn khó chịu)

- I'm sorry, Professor. I did not intend to do so, I was going to note the name of the author, but I was so absorbed in writing that I forgot.

(Xin lỗi giáo sư. Em không cố ý đâu ạ. Em đã định chú thích tên tác giả nhưng mãi viết nên em quên mất)

- *Admission of facts*

The speaker does not deny his/her involvement in the offence but attempts to avoid openly accepting his/her responsibility.

E.g: - I forgot about it. (Tôi quên khuấy mất.)

- I haven't done that for you. Tomorrow is OK? I promise I will Finish it for you.

(Em à , anh chưa kịp làm cho em mất rồi. Thôi để ngày mai nhé. Anh hứa sẽ cố gắng làm xong cho em.)

Explanation or account

- *Implicit explanation*

E.g: - Such thing are bound to happen, you know

(Những chuyện như thế sẽ xảy ra, anh biết rồi đấy)

- Traffic is always so heavy in the morning.

(Sáng nay xe cô đông đúc quá)

- *Explicit explanation*

E.g: - Sorry, I'm late, but my car broke down

(Xin lỗi tôi đến muộn, nhưng xe ô tô của tôi bị hỏng)

- Oh, sorry! Let me clean it up for you. " Sympathize with me". That boy did not take enough notice.

(Ôi xin lỗi cậu! để tôi lau sạch giúp cậu. Cậu thông cảm nhé. Cậu bé kia chẳng để ý gì cả)

Minimization

- *Minimizing the degree of offense*

The speaker argues that the supposed offence is of minor important, in fact is hardly worth mentioning.

E.g: - I'm sorry, but I did not think it would matter

(Tôi xin lỗi nhưng tôi không nghĩ điều đó đáng để bận tâm)

- Oh, what does that matter, that's nothing

(Ồ vấn đề đó có là gì đâu)

- *Querying preconditions*

the speaker queries the preconditions on which the offence is committed.

- Well, everybody that, what is love then?

- We are all creatures of influence.

- *Blame themselves*

The offence committed by S can be partly excused by S blaming both of them for the offense.

- Sorry, perhaps both of us did not pay attention
What to do now?

(Xin lỗi có lẽ hai chúng ta đều không chú ý. Thế nào bây giờ?)

- *Pretend not to notice the offence*

- Professor, what has happened? I don't understand

(Thưa giáo sư có chuyện gì xảy ra vậy ạ, em không hiểu.)

- *Future task-oriented remark*

- Let 's go to work then!

- *Humor*

In order to pacify the Hearer, the Speaker may add some humorous sense to his response.

E.g: - Oh, what a terrible mistake. Broke the appointment with you. But don't worry as I never break an appointment the 4th time. I myself will bring it to your house tonight.

(Ầy thật có lỗi quá. anh đã sai hẹn với em. Nhưng em yên tâm vì chưa bao giờ anh qua hẹn đến lần thứ tư đâu. Anh sẽ tự tay mang đến nhà cho em vào tối nay.)

- *Appeaser*

The Speaker makes an effort to appease the Hearer by employing compensatory offers which are not directly connected with the Speaker's offense.

E.g: - I'm sorry. I am repairing your watch. Please, wait a minute. I will try to finish it. Please, sit down and take a cup of tea.

(Xin lỗi chị. Đồng hồ của chị em đang sửa. Xin chị ngồi chờ một lát em cố gắng sửa xong. Mời chị ngồi uống trà.)

Opting out

The Speaker completely rejects responsibility for the offense.

- *Explicit denial of responsibility*

The Speaker explicitly denies that an offence has occurred or that he/she has responsibility for that.

- It was not my fault. (Đó không phải là lỗi của tôi)

- *Blame the hearer*

The Speaker denies his/her responsibility by blaming the Hearer.

E.g: - It's your fault. (Đó là lỗi của anh)
 - You - go- like-that? Must be careful.
 (Cậu đi đứng thế à? Phải cẩn thận chứ)

- *Pretend to be offended.*

The Speaker acts as if he/she was the offended partly.

E.g: I'm the one to be offended. (Tôi là người bị hại)

III. METHODS

The study is done with the review of literature and the consideration of some previous research on the topic. Besides, the typical examples are extracted from various types of books and dictionary and internet sources as well.

In this paper, we just make a small investigation into some kinds of structures used for expressing apologies in Vietnamese and English and then point out the similarities and differences in expressing apologies in the two languages.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Similarities in expressing apology in English and Vietnamese.

1.1. Expressions of apology

1.1.1. Overall use of expression of apology

English and Vietnamese tend to choose Expression of Apology in a majority of situations to approximately similar degrees. The fact that expression of apology were employed at a fairly high rate by English and Vietnamese subjects in all the constellations of P and D indicates no correlation between the social dimensions (P,D) and the of compliance of Expression of Apology. Thus the great similarities between the two language groups have been pointed out.

1.1.2. Use of sub-formulate of IFIDs

The two language groups are still significantly similar in providing Positive Regret and Apology in almost all of the situations studied (Kieu, Thi HongVan. (2000). *Apology in English and Vietnamese*, pp.50)

1.2. Acknowledgement of responsibility.

When a speaker exploits a direct expression of apology such as "I'm sorry" or "I apologize", he/ she implicitly acknowledges his/ her involvement in the offence. Yet, an explicit expression of Responsibility is often added to an Expression of Apology in sincere apology (Olshtain, 1989).

The result shows that Es and Vs exhibited the same trend towards their preference for Responsibility although Vs were prone to opt for more Responsibility than Es in almost all of the situations and significantly in powerless and equal power unfamiliar settings.

In addition, the two languages show their agreement on using the least Acknowledgement of Responsibility.

English and Vietnamese people were similar to each other in affording a greater amount of Responsibility in familiar settings in unfamiliar ones in all types of power situations. It proves that the context-external factors Distance correlated negatively with the choice of this strategy in both English and Vietnamese. Es and Vs agree on expressing more Responsibility for the offensive act, the closer they were to the offended party and conversely, the more distant the relationship to the offended person, the less they were prone to acknowledge their responsibility.

Nevertheless, the context-external factor Power was not found to be dramatically associated with both Vietnamese and English compliance of the Responsibility in their apologies.

1.3. Remedial support

1.3.1. Offer of repair

The two language groups show a close agreement on the tendency towards repairing or compensating for the damage. Both groups in all situations provided this strategy but the need for Offer of Repair significantly varied with the situation. (Kieu, Thi HongVan. (2000). *Apology in English and Vietnamese*, pp.66)

1.3.2. Promise for forbearance

Promise of forbearance only occurred as supportive moves in the two languages. The most common promises in English data were "I will never do it again" or "It won't happen again". In Vietnamese data, apart from a statement similar to that in English "Em sẽ không bao giờ làm thế nữa ạ", another common expression can be observed "Em sẽ rút kinh nghiệm lần sau."

2. Differences in expressing apology in English and Vietnamese.

2.1. Overall use of expressions of apology.

According to Hong Van (Kieu,Van.(2000). *Apologies in English and Vietnamese*), only a few statistically significant differences were found in terms of the frequency of apology strategy usage, especially that of Explicit Expressions of Apology and Acknowledgement of Responsibility. English people offer much less Expressions of Apology than Vietnamese people. The use of Expressions of Apology in English and Vietnamese can be

ascribed to the matter of cost, which is perceived differently by the two groups in different cultures.

In communication, the English avoided admitting responsibility for the serious offense which would be concomitant with an explicit apology. Unlike the English, the Vietnamese have a sentiment-respectful Eastern living style with flexible behavioral principles (them, 1997:612). A sincere apology for the committed offense in this case may be accepted by a Vietnamese professor. And it may be more costly for Speaker if he/she does not apologize explicitly and sincerely. Therefore, most of the Vietnamese people offer explicit apologies in communication.

2.2. The use of sub formula of IFIDs.

Another striking finding is that of the difference between English people and Vietnamese people in their suppliance of the subformula Requesting Forgiveness. The data obtained from the study of Hong Van. (2000) indicated that the English do not use Requesting Sympathy for apologizing while it is a fairly popular way of apologizing in Vietnamese. In general, the linguistic form of Requesting Sympathy is that of a subject-omitted statement with a frequent presence of either verb : Xin(beg) or mong (wish). Requesting Sympathy can be used alone or together with some form of Forgiveness like " thứ lỗi " or " tha thứ ".

- Xin/mong bác thông cảm. (beg/wish -you-sympathize)

- Mong chị thứ lỗi và thông cảm cho cửa hàng.
(beg - you - forgive - and - sympathize - for shop)

- Em rất mong thầy thông cảm và tha thứ cho em.
(I - very - wish - teacher - sympathize - and - forgive - me)

The difference in expressing apology between English and Vietnamese found in terms of the use of Requesting Forgiveness. Rarely do the English employ the subformula for their apologies, which is consistent with the finding in Trosborg (1995) that " request for forgiveness was not used at all". On the contrary, the Vietnamese afford Forgiveness in all situations with the highest proportion.

In English, "excuse", "forgive" and " pardon" can be used in polite expressions to lessen the force of what the Speaker says or used in mild apologies (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1990). For example:

- Excuse me for being late.

- I'll never forgive her for such an insulting behaviour.

- I am sorry, I am late. Forgive me.

- Pardon me for asking.

Compared to English, Vietnamese has more linguistic forms of Requesting Forgiveness:

thứ lỗi, lượng thứ, bỏ qua, bỏ quá, tha thứ, tha lỗi, tha tội, xá tội, ân xá. Among these forms

" thứ lỗi, lượng thứ, bỏ quá" also used in polite expressions like " excuse, forgive and pardon" in English. " bỏ qua" is a neutral word, which can be opted for in many kinds of settings. "tha thứ, tha lỗi, tha tội, xá tội, ân xá " can be provided for very serious offenses. All these forms can be used by the Speaker to request forgiveness from the Hearer. With a variety of forms and a wider range of utility, Requesting Forgiveness in Vietnamese will, obviously, be used more frequently than that in English for substantive apologies.

- Mong thầy lượng thứ ạ

(wish - teacher - forgive)

- Mong anh bỏ quá cho.

(wish - you - forgive)

With respect to Positive Regret and Apology, the Vietnamese seem to opt for this formula less than the English in a majority of situation. Besides, the Vietnamese opt more Regret than the English.

2.3. Acknowledgement of Responsibility.

The statistic results (Kieu, Van.(2000). Apologies in English and Vietnamese) shows that The Vietnamese were prone to opt or more Responsibility than the English in almost all of the situations and significantly in powerless an equal power unfamiliar settings.

- I am sorry but the watch has not been repaired yet.

(Rất tiếc là chị vẫn chưa sửa xong chiếc đồng hồ đó cho em)

The difference expressed clearly through the age of Speaker and Hearer. The age of the Hearer relative to the Speaker relates to the use of Responsibility in Vietnamese. The Vietnamese subjects are likely to exploit much fewer expressions of Responsibility when the offended party at lower age than at greater age in all the setting. On the contrary, the difference of age in expressing apology in English is not significant.

2.4. Explanation or Account.

It is interestingly noticeable that the Vietnamese provide more Explanation than English in all the settings. The level of Explanation in the Vietnamese is appropriately twice as high as that in the English.

- I am sorry for the delay. I had an unexpected meeting.

(Xin lỗi chị. Tôi bận họp đột xuất. Chị chờ có lâu không ?)

3. Possible culture shock.

Culture shock is not a clinical term or medical condition. It is simply a common way to describe the confusing and nervous feelings a person may have after leaving a familiar culture to live in a new and different culture. When we move to a new place, we are bound to face a lot of changes. That can be exciting and stimulating, but it can also be overwhelming. You may feel sad, anxious, frustrated, and want to go home

But how about culture shock happening between native and non – native speakers of a language, and of English or Vietnamese in particular, because of unawareness of culture differences. “Communication breakdown” between them is unavoidable. Culture shock results from different values, perceptions, norms that lead to difference as well as misinterpretation in both verbal and non – verbal communication.

Unlike Vietnamese people, we often say “xin lỗi” for the wrong things being done by us. English people often say “sorry” for things that they do or not do. For example, they say “sorry” for missing someone's birthday party, etc. When seeing a terrible accident, the English often say “ sorry”. In this case, they feel regret for the injured not because they cause the accident. If this word made in Vietnam in an accident, the utterer might be blamed for causing the accident.

V. CONCLUSION

As we know, apologizing is normal in our daily life. It plays an important role in communication. It is not easy for learners of English to express apology appropriately. From the contrastive analysis aspects, we hope that it will help students know something to improve their knowledge of expressing apology. Besides, we also hope that this paper can provide useful ideas and knowledge to teachers to apply this field in language teaching.

To sum up, due to the limitation of materials and knowledge, our paper remains some weaknesses, however, we do hope readers can benefit some valuable points which are taken into consideration in this paper.

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