

## Comparing Apology Patterns of Indonesian and Thai ELF University Students

Payung Cedar

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University

First Author: payungp@nu.ac.th

Asep Setiadi

Faculty of Management Science, Silpakorn University

Corresponding Author: setiadi\_a@su.ac.th

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### Abstract

The performance of speech acts, like apologies, between individuals from different cultural backgrounds who communicate using English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) can result in either harmony or conflict, but it frequently leads to misunderstandings due to their culturally subjective nature. The current study was undertaken to investigate how Indonesian ELF undergraduate students and Thai ELF undergraduate students apologized in English. The study employed a set of a Discourse Completion Test and involved 42 students majoring in English from a university in Indonesia and 32 students majoring in English from a university in Thailand. The subjects' responses were coded according to the apology strategy framework with six major strategies, one of which included nine sub-strategies.

The results showed that both Indonesian and Thai students predominantly utilized 13 apology strategies, which were largely similar but varied in their sequencing. Additionally, the apology strategies employed by Thai ELF students were associated with those utilized by Indonesian ELF students, signifying a statistically significant difference between the strategies used by the two groups ( $X^2 = 117.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Also, the results revealed variations in the categories of Explanation of account, Concern for the hearer, and Taking on responsibility. Accordingly, the Indonesian cohort exhibited a notably stronger inclination towards speaker-focused apology strategies than their Thai counterparts; conversely, the Thai group demonstrated a significantly greater preference for hearer-focused apology strategies than the Indonesian participants. Additionally, the nature of apologies used in both subject groups reveals the influence of cultural backgrounds, including religious beliefs and social values.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communication, Apology, Thai, Indonesian, English

## การเปรียบเทียบรูปแบบการขอโทษของนักศึกษาในระดับมหาวิทยาลัย ชาวอินโดนีเซียและชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลาง (ELF)

พยุ่ง ซีตาร์

ภาควิชาภาษาอังกฤษ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร

First Author: payungp@nu.ac.th

Asep Setiadi

คณะวิทยาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร

Corresponding Author: setiadi\_a@su.ac.th

ได้รับบทความ: 23 เมษายน 2567 ปรับปรุงแก้ไข: 20 กรกฎาคม 2567 ตอรับตีพิมพ์: 7 สิงหาคม 2567

### บทคัดย่อ

การแสดงวัจนกรรม เช่น การขอโทษระหว่างบุคคลที่มีพื้นฐานทางวัฒนธรรมที่แตกต่างกัน ซึ่งสื่อสารโดยใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลาง (English as a Lingua Franca) อาจส่งผลให้เกิดความสามัคคีหรือความขัดแย้ง แต่บ่อยครั้งที่มักนำไปสู่ความเข้าใจผิดเนื่องจากลักษณะทางวัฒนธรรมที่แตกต่างกัน การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาลักษณะการขอโทษเป็นภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาในระดับมหาวิทยาลัยชาวอินโดนีเซียและนักศึกษาชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลาง ว่ามีการขอโทษในภาษาอังกฤษอย่างไร งานวิจัยนี้มีกลุ่มตัวอย่างคือ นักศึกษาเอกภาษาอังกฤษจากมหาวิทยาลัยในอินโดนีเซีย จำนวน 42 คน และนักศึกษาเอกภาษาอังกฤษจากมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศไทย จำนวน 32 คน ตอบแบบสอบถามแบบเติมเต็มบทสนทนา (Discourse Completion Test) โดยคำตอบของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามถูกจัดหัดตามกรอบกลยุทธ์ในการขอโทษซึ่งประกอบด้วยกลยุทธ์หลัก 6 ประการ โดยหนึ่งกลยุทธ์หลักประกอบด้วย กลยุทธ์ย่อย 9 ประการ

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ทั้งนักศึกษาอินโดนีเซียและนักศึกษาไทยใช้กลยุทธ์การขอโทษ 13 แบบเป็นหลัก ซึ่งมีความคล้ายคลึงกันเป็นส่วนใหญ่แต่มีลำดับขั้นตอนที่แตกต่างกัน นอกจากนี้ กลยุทธ์การขอโทษที่ใช้โดยนักศึกษาไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางมีความเกี่ยวข้องกับกลยุทธ์ที่ใช้โดยนักศึกษาอินโดนีเซียที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลาง แตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติระหว่างกลยุทธ์ที่ใช้ทั้งสองกลุ่ม ( $X^2 = 117.60, p < .05$ ) นอกจากนี้ ผลการวิจัยยังแสดงให้เห็นถึงความแตกต่างในหมวดหมู่ของการอธิบายเหตุผล ความหวังใจต่อผู้ฟัง และการรับผิดชอบ กลุ่มนักศึกษาอินโดนีเซียแสดงแนวโน้มที่เด่นชัดกว่าในการใช้กลยุทธ์การขอโทษที่เน้นผู้พูดเมื่อเทียบกับกลุ่มนักศึกษาไทย ในทางตรงกันข้ามกลุ่มนักศึกษาไทยแสดงให้เห็นถึงความต้องการกลยุทธ์การขอโทษที่เน้นผู้ฟังมากกว่าเมื่อเทียบกับนักศึกษาอินโดนีเซีย อย่างมีนัยสำคัญ นอกจากนี้ ลักษณะของการขอโทษที่ใช้ในทั้งสองกลุ่มแสดงให้เห็นถึงอิทธิพลของพื้นฐานทางวัฒนธรรม รวมถึงความเชื่อทางศาสนาและค่านิยมทางสังคม

**คำสำคัญ:** การสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม, การขอโทษ, ไทย, อินโดนีเซีย, ภาษาอังกฤษ

## Introduction

While English serves as a vital bridge connecting people from diverse linguistic backgrounds and cultures, it does not guarantee seamless communication devoid of issues stemming from linguistic and cultural disparities. Misunderstandings, breakdowns in communication, and even offense can commonly occur in intercultural communication, primarily due to speakers of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) lacking pragmatic knowledge on how to navigate the complexities of the target language. Consequently, they often revert to their first language (L1) norms. In addition, cultures carry varying expectations and norms regarding linguistic behavior in specific contexts, leading to potential clashes (Bowe, Martin, & Manns, 2014). Thus, for effective communication, ELF learners must possess not only linguistic proficiency but also pragmatic understanding of English (Hymes, 1966) in certain speech acts (e.g., apology, refusal, request and compliment response) in particular socio-cultural contexts properly. So far, studies on pragmatic competence have mainly been grounded around comparison of English utilized by ELF learners and native speakers (e.g., Abidi, 2022; Chiravate, 2019; Eslami, Raeisi-Vanan & Sarab, 2022; Saleem, Anjum & Tahir, 2021). However, the world of English has changed due to its unprecedented spread in which its non-native speakers have outnumbered those of natives and the language is now said to belong to everyone who uses it in communication, not restricted to native speakers (Crystal, 2003). As a consequence, it seems also to be equally important to gain knowledge on how English is used among non-native speakers, and that is what this study aimed for.

Apology, a common speech act in daily interactions (Salehi, 2014), exhibits cultural and linguistic variations (Meier, 2010). It serves as a means to restore harmony and rectify offenses within a community's norms (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). However, its culturally subjective nature often leads to misunderstandings, especially in intercultural communication. For instance, while Americans may view lateness as a serious offense, Israelis might not share the same sentiment (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Consequently, an Israeli's apology for tardiness may fall short of an American's expectations. Therefore, to ensure clear communication and avoid inadvertent offense, interlocutors are well-advised to develop an understanding of their counterparts' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Despite the scarcity of research comparing apology strategies across cultures within an English as a Lingua Franca context, particularly in Indonesia and Thailand, this study aims to bridge this gap by examining the apology strategies employed by students from these two countries.

## Research Questions

The study focused on answering the following questions:

1. What apology strategies were employed by the Indonesian ELF undergraduate students and the Thai ELF undergraduate students?

2. Was there a statistically significant difference in the utilization of apology strategies between the Indonesian ELF undergraduate students and the Thai ELF undergraduate students?

## Literature Reviews

### Pragmatic Competence

Language reflects the cultural values and norms of its society, embodied in the beliefs and expectations that guide communication among native speakers. Nevertheless, each culture has its own pragmatic conventions that its members follow to express thoughts and intentions in their language. Pragmatic competence is the “appropriate ways of performing speech acts according to the social context” (Schauer, 2009). Therefore, learners with sufficient pragmatic competence should be able to execute various speech acts with a strong awareness of the social context in communication, the pragmatic norms and rules of the target language and culture (Schauer, 2009), as well as the culture of their conversers.

### Apology

Apology is a speech act used to convey the speaker's psychological state (Searle, 1976). It functions as a remedial exchange to restore social harmony after an offense and to save face for both the speaker and the listener (Goffman, 1971; Trosborg, 1995). Numerous studies have examined the performance of apologies across cultures, taking into account social factors.

### Previous studies on apology strategies

Several studies have investigated the practice of apologizing across various speech and cultural groups, considering factors such as gender, native and non-native speaker status, and proficiency level. Regarding gender, previous studies have shown minor effects on apology strategy use (Al-Sallal & Ahmed, 2020; Ghanbari et al., 2015; Hassan, 2014; Saleem, Azam & Saleem, 2014). Concerning L2 learners, there is a tendency for them to employ the apology norms of their L1 culture (Alfattah, 2010; Fareh, et al., 2023; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Parsa & Mohd Jan, 2015; Qorina, 2012; Suszczynska, 1999; Thijittang, 2010). Proficiency level's impact on apology performance remains inconclusive, with some studies showing marked effects (Hamidi & Khodareza, 2014; Istifci, 2009; Rastegar & Yasami, 2014), while others did not find significant differences (Khorshidi, Mobini, & Nasiri, 2016). Additionally, numerous apology studies have been conducted in various contexts, such as Indonesia (Abudin & Sundari, 2021; Adrefiza, 2010; Ardiati, 2023; Maruti; 2022;

Qorina, 2012; Ramlah & Sartini, 2023; Siregar, 2021; Wouk, 2006) and Thailand (Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Intachakra, 2004; Prachanant, 2014; Thijittang, 2010), as demonstrated below.

### Apology Studies in Indonesia and Thailand

Only a limited number of studies have been conducted in Indonesian and Thai contexts. In the Indonesian setting, Wouk (2006) explored the implementation of apology strategies among Lombok Indonesians in their native language and investigated the influence of gender on their choice of apology strategy. Additionally, Indonesians tended to provide specific explanations and avoid overt acceptance, possibly to mitigate the level of responsibility. Similarly, Abudin, & Sundari (2021) who studied apology strategies employed by Indonesian public figures in social media revealed that Indonesians most frequently utilized explanation in their apology. Through Maruti's (2022) qualitative study, Indonesians employed such direct open strategies as praising, sympathizing, seeking opinions, making offers, admitting mistakes, and repeating apologies. However, the findings by Siregar (2021) from a Discourse Completion Test questionnaire and interviews with ten students purposively selected showed that the Indonesian students most frequently used indirect apology and recognition of responsibility. Ramlah, & Sartini (2023) inserted that Indonesian participants, Javanese and Madurese, frequently employed direct tactics and explanation according to the age of their conversers. Adrefiza (2010) revealed that Indonesian participants predominantly utilized overt apologies, which were evident across multiple strategies. Comparing the explicitness of apologies in Bahasa Indonesia and Australian English by native speakers, Adrefiza (2010) discovered that Indonesians favored speaker-oriented strategies, such as directly requesting forgiveness like **forgive me**. Conversely, Australians tended to be more hearer-oriented in their apologies, employing expressions of regret such as *sorry*; however, Indonesians tended to be more elaborate and less direct, as well as more monotone in their apologies compared to Australians. In her study, Qorina (2012) noted certain impacts of study duration on the utilization of apology strategies among ELF university students. Despite this, she observed that participants across various semesters displayed a consistent inclination to employ expressions of regret most frequently, along with incorporating alerts and explanations in their apologies. Additionally, she reported some indications of pragmatic transfer. In contrary, Ardiati (2023) concluded that Indonesian apologies were straightforward, using Cooperative Principles and irony, while Japanese apologies were more elaborate, emphasizing politeness and consideration for the hearer's feelings. An example of an Indonesian apology could be: "To my wife, I would like to apologize profusely, and to my extended family and community" (Ardiati, 2023). In contrast, a Japanese apology might sound like: "But sorry, I don't have

time to talk about it. I've thought about it well, after all, my feelings are very clear!" (Ardiati, 2023).

In the realm of Thai cultural dynamics, Bergman, & Kasper (1993) undertook an investigation into the perceptions of offenses and contextual interpretations among individuals of Thai and American descent. Their study delved into how these perceptions influenced the way individuals from these cultural backgrounds conveyed and executed apology strategies. The results showed a significant alignment in the perceptions shared by both cultural backgrounds regarding internal contextual factors such as the severity of the offense, the perceived obligation to offer an apology, the likelihood of the apology being accepted, and the perceived loss of social standing by the offender. Similarly, there was a consensus in the assessment of external contextual factors, particularly the influence of social distance on apology dynamics. However, noticeable disparities emerged in the evaluation of factors impacting apology practices in specific instances of offense.

In terms of employing apology strategies, similarities were found between Thai-English Interlanguage (IL) users and American English native speakers (NS) in their utilization of upgrading and canonical strategies. Specifically, both groups commonly employed strategies involving face-threatening acts, attributing responsibility to the offender, and anticipating negative consequences (IFID). However, differences were noted in their use of context-dependent strategies, suggesting varying approaches to contextually appropriate apology behavior. Furthermore, Thai IL users displayed a tendency to incorporate elements from indigenous Thai apology patterns into their apologies.

Thais, interestingly, exhibit a distinct approach to apologies compared to Western cultures. **They tend to prioritize apologies for social blunders that could disrupt harmony within the group, while placing less emphasis on minor inconveniences.** This focus on social consequences is reflected in their more frequent use of apologies and a wider range of apology strategies compared to English speakers (Intachakra, 2004; Thijittang, 2010).

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## Methodology

### Participants

The study included two groups of subjects, comprising 42 Indonesian ELF students and 32 Thai ELF students. These participants were first-year undergraduate students majoring in English at Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia, and Naresuan University, Thailand, respectively. Their ages ranged from 17 to 19 years old. Participants were recruited based on their voluntary willingness to participate in the study. To ensure the authenticity of their responses, the students received no prior training on apology strategies or techniques. This allowed the study to observe their natural use of apologies in English, reflecting their existing knowledge and cultural background.

### Instruments

The research employed a Discourse Completion Test or DCT questionnaire written in English, which was adapted from several previous studies on apologies, including Bergman, & Kasper (1993), Olshtain, & Cohen (1983), and Thijittang (2010). This questionnaire comprised 15 apology scenarios that varied in terms of the social status and social distance of the interlocutors, as well as the severity of the offense. The utilization of the DCT questionnaire was chosen for its flexibility in controlling certain variables and sociocultural features (Golato, 2005), as well as its capacity to efficiently gather a large amount of data (Wouk, 2006). Moreover, it has been widely applied in studies of interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010), and has been utilized in numerous previous studies on apology strategies, such as those conducted by Blum-Kulka, & Olshtain (1984), Prachanant (2014), Qorina (2012), and Wouk (2006). However, to ensure the questionnaire's validity, three field experts evaluated it and suggested no revisions. Subsequently, a pilot study involving fifteen first-year Thai students and ten first-year Indonesian English majors, not included in the main study, was conducted. The pilot study results, encompassing both the instructions and questions, were then analyzed and used to refine the questionnaire for reliability. In compliance with ethical norms, a consent form accompanied the questionnaire to provide participants with the opportunity to indicate their willingness to participate or to object.

### Analytical Framework

Several frameworks for apology strategies have been frequently referenced in the literature, including those proposed by Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper (1989), Blum-Kulka, & Olshtain (1984), and Olshtain & Cohen (1983). In the present study, the framework developed by Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper (1989) and Olshtain, & Cohen (1983) was

deployed. This framework comprises six major strategies and nine sub-strategies, distributed as follows:

1. Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) (e.g. “I’m sorry” “I apologize” “Forgive me”)
2. Explanation of account (e.g. “The traffic was terrible.”)
3. Taking on responsibility
  - 3.1 Explicit self-blame (e.g. “It is my mistake.”)
  - 3.2 Lack on intent (e.g. “I didn’t mean it.”)
  - 3.3 Expression of self-deficiency (e.g. “I was confused.”)
4. Expression of embarrassment (e.g. “I feel awful about it.”)
5. Self-dispraise (e.g. “I’m such a dimwit.”)
6. Justify hearer (e.g. “You’re right to be angry.”)
7. Refusal to acknowledge guilt
  - 7.1 Denial of responsibility (e.g. “It wasn’t my fault.”)
  - 7.2 Blame the hearer (e.g. “It’s your own fault.”)
  - 7.3 Pretend to be offended (e.g. “I’m the one to be offended.”)
4. Concern for the hearer (e.g. “Are you all right?”)
5. Offer of repair (e.g. “I’ll pay for the damage.”)
6. Promise of forbearance (e.g. “It won’t happen again.”)

Source: Olshtain, & Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper (1989) as cited in Bowe, Martin, & Manns, (2014)

### **Procedure**

After the DCT questionnaire written in English was verified for its reliability and validity, it was employed for data elicitation, which was distributed in a classroom setting after class in the same week of the second semester in both universities. The procedure commenced with an introduction that outlined the study's objectives and purpose. This was followed by a detailed explanation of the DCT questionnaire, including instructions for completion and a clear presentation of expectations for participant behavior during the process in the students' first language (Thai or Bahasa Indonesia). The students were also given the chance to deliver questions about the study and advantages and disadvantages of being the subjects of the research, to fill in the consent and identity form, and to leave the venue upon their objection. Then, they were told to spend 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. During the process, each student was required to work independently and was not allowed to consult with friends, phones, books or dictionaries, and other resources that could impede the completion of the study. The last student who completed the questionnaire in both groups spent approximately

an hour doing so. Realizing the importance of maintaining others' privacy, all information regarding individual students was kept confidential. The procedure was carried out in Thailand and Indonesia consecutively. Then, the completed questionnaires of the two groups were analyzed using simple statistics (frequency and percentage) and Pearson's chi-square test).

### **Data Coding**

The analysis involved tallying the frequency of apology strategy usage within the framework, followed by intergroup comparisons and contrasts of the results. Initially, the subjects' questionnaire responses were categorized into the set of apology strategies or semantic formulas outlined by Olshtain, & Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), widely utilized and adapted in previous apology studies (see the aforementioned Analytical Framework). Data coding was conducted by three coders, comprising the researchers and an English native speaker, to warrant result validity. Coding reliability was ensured through adherence to consistent coding guidelines and independent work by the coders. Any discrepancies encountered during coding were resolved through discussion referring to the guidelines. Subsequently, data frequencies and percentages were tabulated and primarily analyzed using statistical analysis software. Finally, Pearson's chi-square test was conducted to determine any significant difference in the use of apology strategies between the Indonesian ELF undergraduate students and their Thai counterparts. It should be noted that some participants answered one question with multiple strategies.

### **Results**

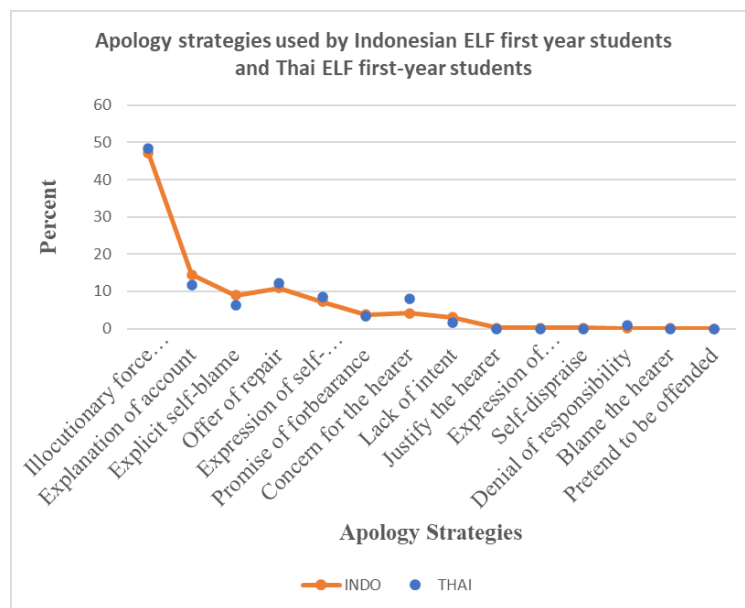
The results addressing the two research questions are presented in two sections: 1. Findings concerning the overall frequency of each apology strategy employed by Indonesian and Thai ELF students and 2. findings regarding significant differences between the apology strategies utilized by students in both groups.

#### **Findings concerning the overall frequency of apology strategies employed by Indonesian and Thai ELF students**

Addressing the initial inquiry concerning the apology strategies utilized by Indonesian and Thai ELF students, the findings are presented in Table 1 and further elaborated upon in Figure 1.

**Table 1** Apology strategies used by Indonesian ELF first-year students and Thai ELF first-year students

No	Apology strategies	INDO (n=42)		THAI (n=32)	
		Raw	%	Raw	%
1	Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs)	676	47.04	368	48.42
2	Explanation of account	207	14.41	89	11.71
3	Explicit self-blame	128	8.91	48	6.32
4	Offer of repair	157	10.93	93	12.24
5	Expression of self-deficiency	104	7.24	65	8.55
6	Promise of forbearance	54	3.76	25	3.29
7	Concern for the hearer	59	4.11	60	7.89
8	Lack of intent	44	3.06	13	1.71
9	Justify the hearer	2	0.14	0	0.00
10	Expression of embarrassment	2	0.14	0	0.00
11	Self-dispraise	2	0.14	0	0.00
12	Denial of responsibility	1	0.07	7	0.92
13	Blame the hearer	1	0.07	0	0.00
14	Pretend to be offended	0	0.00	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>1437</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Figure 1** Apology strategies used by Indonesian ELF first-year students and Thai ELF first year students

An overall analysis of Table 1 above reveals a convergence in apology strategies employed by students from both Indonesian and Thai contexts. Notably, all participants utilized the three most frequent strategies: **Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), Explanations of the action, and Offer of repair**. However, the data indicates an obvious difference in strategy preference between Indonesian and Thai students. Specifically, while both groups utilized **Explanations of account** as a core strategy, Indonesian students employed it more frequently (14.41%) compared to their Thai counterparts (11.71%). Conversely, Thai students exhibited a stronger preference for **Offer of repair** (12.24%) compared to Indonesians (10.93%). This trend is further reflected in the area of **Concern for the hearer**, where Thai students expressed this sentiment more often (7.89%) than Indonesian students (4.11%).

In addition, neither Indonesian nor Thai ELF students employed **Pretend to be offended**. Moreover, the apology strategies labelled **Justify the hearer, Expression of embarrassment, Self-dispraise, Denial of responsibility, and Blame the hearer** were rarely employed by the participants in both groups. In reality, Thai ELF subjects excluded apology strategies like **Expression of embarrassment, Justify the hearer, Blame the hearer, and Pretend to be offended**.

Consequently, the findings suggested potential cultural differences that influence how these Thai and Indonesian ELF students apologized in English.

#### **Findings regarding statistically significant differences between the apology strategies utilized by Indonesian ELF students and Thai ELF students**

In response to the second research question regarding significant differences between Indonesian and Thai ELF students in their use of apology strategies, a chi-square test was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2** Statistical results from a chi-square examination of a significant difference between Indonesian and Thai ELF students in their use of all apology strategies

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	117.600(a)	90	.027*
Likelihood Ratio	55.027	90	.999
Linear-by-Linear Association	12.776	1	.000
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	<b>14</b>		

The statistical results presented in Table 2 indicated a significant difference between Indonesian and Thai ELF students in their utilization of apology strategies

( $X^2 = 117.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This suggested an association between the apology strategies employed by Indonesian students and those used by Thai students.

## Discussion

With respect to the research agenda outlined previously, this study sought to address the two aforementioned research questions. Correspondingly, the subsequent discussion unfolds in two parts. The initial part explored the apology strategies employed by both Indonesian and Thai ELF undergraduate students. The other part then examined the divergences in apology strategies between these two subject groups.

### Apology Strategies: Indonesian vs. Thai ELF Students

This study investigated the apology strategies used by Indonesian and Thai ELF undergraduate students. Interestingly, the findings revealed a difference in the range of strategies employed. Indonesian students utilized a wider repertoire, adopting 13 strategies compared to the Thai students' 10. Remarkably, neither group employed **Pretend to be offended** in their apologies. Subsequently, this finding suggests the need for further investigation. Conducting interviews with participants can reveal the underlying cultural reasons for this trend. Nevertheless, only eight strategies were frequently used by both subject groups, namely **Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), Explanation of account, Offer of repair, Explicit self-blame, Expression of self-deficiency, Concern for the hearer, Promise of forbearance, and Lack of intent**. The remaining five strategies – **Expression of embarrassment, self-dispraise, Justify the hearer, Denial of responsibility, and Blame the hearer** – were used very infrequently. This low utilization likely reflects individual stylistic preferences, which aligns with Blum-Kulka, Olshtain's (1984) notion that individual factors influence apology styles.

While both Indonesian and Thai students utilized eight apology strategies frequently, three emerged as clear favorites: **Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), Explanation of account, and Offer of Repair**. Interestingly, the order of preference differed slightly between the groups. **IFIDs** topped the list for both Indonesians (48.42%) and Thais (47.04%). Following **IFIDs**, **Explanation of account** (14.41%) ranked second for Indonesians and third for Thais (11.71%). **Offer of repair** followed a similar pattern, ranking third for Indonesians (10.93%) and second for Thais (12.24%). The preference for these three strategies aligns with previous research. Studies by Alfattah (2010), Istifci (2009), Olshtain, & Cohen (1983), and Prachanant (2014) consistently identify **IFIDs, Explanation of account, and Offer of repair** as the most common apology strategies across various contexts.

In analyzing the frequency of key apology strategies employed by Indonesian and Thai EFL students, the findings reveal a distinction. Indonesian ELF students employed **Explanation of account** (14.41) and **Taking on responsibility** (19.76%) more frequently than Thai ELF students (11.71 and 17.76% respectively). These findings suggest a potential emphasis on speaker-oriented apologies among Indonesian EFL students. Surprisingly, these results are consistent with those found in earlier literature. For instance, Qorina (2012) and Ramlah, & Sartini (2023) discovered that **Explanation of account** was widespread in Indonesians' apologies in Bahasa Indonesia (Wouk, 2006). These findings indicated a tendency to reduce the degree of liability through such apology strategies as **Explanation of account** and **Lack of intent** – the latter being a weaker form of **Taking on responsibility**. Furthermore, the results in the present study also supported the findings demonstrated by Ardiati (2023) that Indonesian apologies were more direct and straightforward. The results in this current study also comply with the findings by Winda (2014) that Indonesians apologized by accepting fault (responsibility) and offering explanations for their actions and the findings by Abudin, & Sundari (2021) that Indonesians' most frequent used apology strategy was explanation (reasons behind a particular action), account (detailed report or narrative of the events), and excuse (rationale provided to alleviate the perceived severity of the offense). Furthermore, the results of the present study also conformed to the findings by Wouk (2006) that Indonesian apologies often included explanations. Yet, Wouk (2006) noted that Indonesians tended to refrain from explicitly accepting responsibility, suggesting that accepting responsibility alone may serve different purposes beyond a mere apology strategy.

Conversely, Thai students exhibited a stronger preference for employing **Offer of Repair** and expressing **Concern for the Hearer** compared to Indonesian students. The findings align with Intachakra's (2004) assertion. Specifically, in Thai culture, interpersonal relationships are the primary concern, leading individuals to avoid interpersonal sanctions, such as by apologizing frequently (Intachakra, 2004).

The above cultural finding offers a new perspective on perceiving apology strategies and insight into the native cultures of the two subject groups, particularly when examining the nature of these four strategies. **Explanation of account** serves as an apology tactic to clarify the reasons behind an offense (Olshtain, & Cohen, 1983; Intachakra, 2004). Employing this strategy involves defending that the offense originates from external factors, suggesting that the speaker bears minimal or no responsibility for it (Olshtain, & Cohen, 1983). In other words, by employing this strategy, the speaker seeks to mitigate the situation and lessen their responsibility (Wouk, 2006). Similarly, **Lack of intent** is also an apology strategy

aimed at ultimately reducing personal responsibility by expressing that the speaker did not intend to commit a malicious act resulting in offense (Intachakra, 2004; Wouk, 2006).

On the other hand, **Offer of repair** is a situation-specific strategy commonly used when the offense results in physical injury or other damage to the hearer that can be compensated (Olshtain, & Cohen, 1983). By employing this strategy, the speaker attempts to rectify the situation by offering verbal or material compensation to the hearer, thereby restoring social harmony (Intachakra, 2004). Meanwhile, **Concern for the hearer** is considered an apology intensification marker external to the **Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs)** (Olshtain, & Cohen, 1983). Like other intensification markers, **Concern for the hearer** is commonly used to create a stronger apology in the eyes of the hearer.

The description of the four apology strategies above highlights some shared aspects between **Explanation of account** and **Lack of intent**, and between **Offer of repair** and **Concern for the hearer**. The first pair releases the speaker from the offense and reduces personal responsibility while covertly claiming that the speaker is not at fault. In other words, these strategies place the speaker at the center of importance and are thus speaker-focused. Conversely, the second set of strategies appears to adopt a different perspective, emphasizing the harm to the hearer and the hearer's role as the individual affected by the offense, thus demonstrating a hearer-focused approach. The speaker using these strategies indirectly admits that an offense has taken place and feels the need to compensate for the damage or ease the hearer's circumstances to maintain social harmony.

#### **Significant Differences between the Indonesian ELF Undergraduate Students' and the Thai ELF Undergraduate Students' Apologies**

The chi-square statistical analysis unveiled a relationship between the apology strategies utilized by Indonesian ELF students and those employed by Thai ELF students, indicating a significant difference in their utilization of apology strategies. However, the statistical outcome concerning their utilization of six primary categories of apology strategies revealed no significant association, underscoring the importance of **Taking on responsibility** as essential to the difference between strategies (both main strategies and sub-strategies). The result goes in line with Intachakra's (2004) and Wouk's (2006) assertion regarding interpersonal relationships and prevention of interpersonal consequences.

#### **The Influence of First Language and Culture on the Use of ELF Apologies**

In addition to the statistical results, the words and expressions used for apologies by Indonesian and Thai students reveal cultural nuances unique to each group. Notably, while both groups of EFL students commonly used terms like **sorry**, **apologize**, **forgive**, and **excuse**, only the Indonesian respondents employed **sir** and **ma'am** in phrases such as **I'm sorry**, **Sir** and **I am sorry**, **Ma'am**. These terms are equivalent to the Indonesian

**Pak** and **Bu**, respectively, and are typically used among speakers with a social distance (Adrefiza, 2010), as well as by senior teachers addressing their junior counterparts in Indonesia. Thus, this clearly demonstrates the transfer of Indonesian language and culture.

Additionally, one notable indicator of the influence of Islamic beliefs on the use of apologies in English is the exclamation **Oh my Allah** (Oh my God). This finding is consistent with Qorina's (2012) observation that Indonesians, even when speaking English, often use the phrase **Astaghfirullohal adzim** (God, forgive me) when seeking forgiveness.

Interestingly, three Indonesian students used phrases such as **Thank you for reminding me** and **Thank you for waiting for me** in scenarios where the head of the department was apologizing to a junior at school and a manager was apologizing to a junior colleague at work. This may be due to the high regard for social distance and status in Indonesia (Adrefiza, 2010).

Apart from the Indonesian language and culture, the results also display the impact of Thai language and culture on the use of ELF apologies. Particularly, the use of **teacher** and **professor** in **I'm so sorry about it teacher. It will not happen again** and **Pardon professor, I'm in hurry and I didn't see you** to refer to the interlocutor with a teaching professional indicates Thai cultural influence in communication. The Thai words like **kru** and **ajahn** (teacher, lecturer, or professor) are conventionally used with respect by Thai students, colleagues, and even strangers who know their hearer's occupation.

Another interesting example of Thai cultural influence is the reduplication of **Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs)** at the beginning and end of an apology utterance which suggests the speaker's genuine remorse for the incident. In the Thai language, Thais frequently use reduplication and the term *really*, equivalent to the Thai word **jing jing**, to emphasize something (Cedar, 2012). Nonetheless, those unfamiliar with this cultural practice might misinterpret it as insincere or even irritating, as shown in the following examples without any modification:

**I'm really sorry** sir. I have an important appointment. **Sorry Sorry**.

**I'm so sorry** everyone. It's my fault. I went to the wrong hotel and **I apologize**.

**I'm really sorry** about your camera. I'll try to have it fixed or buy a new one for you.  
**I'm sorry**.

**Sorry** to give you waiting so long. I stuck in traffic. **I'm really sorry**.

Remarkably, the term **sir** (mistaken for Thai polite particles like **khrup** and **kha**, depending on the speaker's sex) was used to mark politeness (Prasithrathsint, 2001), as observed in IFIDs like **I'm really sorry sir**. "Without /kh/ particles, an utterance may sound brusque and thus impolite" (Prasithrathsint, 2001).

### Originality and body of Knowledge

As this study represents the first attempt to analyze the similarities and differences between Thai and Indonesian students' apology strategies in English, all the comparisons and contrasts identified are novel contributions to the field. These findings should be valuable to anyone interested in or involved with English communication with individuals from these two cultures, particularly concerning apologies. However, a limitation of this study pertains to the sample size. With 42 participants from Indonesia and 32 from Thailand, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. The student populations from these two universities cannot be assumed to represent the entire student body in Indonesia and Thailand. Future research efforts could address this limitation by incorporating a larger and more diverse participant pool, drawn from a wider range of educational institutions.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

Culture encompasses various aspects, some of which are shared among different cultures, while others are unique to specific cultures, including how speech acts are performed. This notion of culture is reflected in the findings of this study. Both the Indonesian and Thai ELF subjects primarily utilized eight apology strategies, with low frequencies or no use of the remaining six strategies. Moreover, the two groups shared a preference for three main apology strategies: **IFIDs, Explanation of account, and Offer of repair**. However, there were notable differences between the two groups regarding their preference for speaker-focused and hearer-focused apology strategies. This highlights the significance of recognizing cultural differences in the use of English among ELF students.

In conclusion, Indonesian apologies were previously observed to be more elaborated and less direct compared to Australian apologies (Adrefiza, 2010) but more direct than Japanese apologies (Ardiati, 2023). Additionally, the study suggested that Indonesian apologies tended to be more direct than Thai apologies. These findings highlight significant cross-cultural differences, particularly in apology practices, and offer valuable insights into intercultural communication involving Indonesians and Thais, as well as English language teaching in ELF contexts.

More importantly, to gain deeper insights into student decision-making and the cultural influences shaping their apology strategies, as well as other sociolinguistic factors, it is highly recommended to supplement the written responses with follow-up interviews. Engaging with participants directly would allow researchers to explore the rationale behind their choices and the cultural underpinnings of their apology styles. Briefly, understanding each other's linguistic and cultural backgrounds can help ELF interlocutors achieve successful

intercultural communication and prevent misunderstandings or offenses caused by language barriers, prejudice, and even religious conflicts.

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