ความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับวัจนกรรมการขอโทษเพื่อการเรียนรู้และการสอนภาษาต่างประเทศ

Understanding Apology Speech Act : Foreign Language Acquisition and Teaching Implications

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บทคัดย่อ

วัจนกรรม(speech act) การขอโทษเป็นหนึ่งในปัญหาที่พบในหมู่ผู้เรียนภาษา บทความนี้นำเสนอรายละเอียดเชิงทฤษฎีเกี่ยวกับวัจนกรรม(speech act) การขอโทษ งานวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการเรียนภาษาที่สองและอภิปรายแนวทางการสอนโดยมีจุดประสงค์เพื่อให้เกิดความตระหนักรู้และความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับการสอนการขอโทษให้แก่ผู้เรียนภาษาต่างประเทศ

คำสำคัญ : วัจนกรรมการขอโทษ การเรียนภาษาที่สอง การสอนภาษาต่างประเทศ

Abstract

Apology speech act is a problematic aspect for most of English as foreign language (EFL) learners. This article presents a brief theoretical review of apology speech act, studies concerning second language (L2) acquisition of apology and later a discussion of some teaching implications with intention to raise awareness and develop understanding about teaching apology speech act to foreign language learners.

Keywords : apology, speech Act, foreign language acquisition, foreign language teaching

Introduction

Generally, we apologize for something that has been done wrong or that causes a problem to someone else. People apologize for various reasons but it is mostly to make a repair for an offense and maintain a good relationship with the addressee. Tavuchis (1991:19) defines apology as "an acknowledgement and painful embracement of our deeds, coupled with a declaration of regret." Many scholars in the field of speech act have proposed different frameworks about apologies. Among such various theories, two distinct frameworks---one from Goffman (1971) and the other from Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) have been widely referred. This article therefore will give an overall background of these two frameworks, review related studies concerning second language acquisition of apology and then discuss pedagogical implications.

1. Theoretical Frameworks

1.1 Apologies as remedial interchanges

Similar to compliments, apologies are speech acts which pay attention to the face needs of the addressee. Primarily they aim at maintaining, or enhancing the addressee's face (Goffman, 1967). The term 'apology' has generally been used to describe what Goffman refers to as a 'remedy' (1971:140) which is one element in a 'remedial interchange'. This term nicely highlights the central function of apologies---to provide a remedy for an offence and restore social harmony. This idea goes hand in hand with Holmes's (1996:364). She points out that the issuing of an apology is a face-saving strategy where remedial exchange may incorporate an attempt to simultaneously redress the speaker's positive face needs as well as the victim's face needs. The remedial interchange consists of a dialogue in which the offender provides excuses and account for his offense and the offended shows some sign of the acceptance and sometimes appreciation for the offender's corrective behavior.

1.2 Apologies as post-event acts and hearer supportive acts

According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), apologies are generally post-event acts. Apologies signal the fact that a certain type of event has already occurred (or the speaker might know the fact of its upcoming occurrence). By apologizing, the speaker recognizes the fact that s/he is at least partially involved in its cause. Hence, by their very nature, apologies involve loss of face for the speaker and support for the hearer. They also concur that apologies are "hearer-supportive acts" which threaten the

speaker's face. Moreover, they differentiate between positively- and negatively- orientated apologies in regard to the content of the apology itself. A positively-oriented apology, according to Olshtain and Blum-Kulka as cited in Meier (1992), manifests itself in minimizing the level of the offense and placing responsibility on factors other than speaker (S) while negatively-oriented apology manifests itself in speaker's taking on greater blame, accepting responsibility and using more elaboration and intensifiers

According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), there are three preconditions which must hold true for the apology act to take place:

a. S did X or abstained from doing X (or is about to do it).

b. X is perceived by S only, by Hearer (H) only, by both S and H, or by a third party as a breach of a social norm.

c. X is perceived by at least one of the parties involved as offending, harming, or affecting H in some way.

In order forthe apology to materialize when these three preconditions exist, S must be aware of all the preconditions and infer the need for him/her to apologize. Similar to the above notion about social norms affecting apologies, by performing the apology S pays tribute to the social norm (recognizes precondition b) and attemptsto placate the hearer (recognizes precondition c).

Olshtain and Cohen (1983) illustrated some basic strategies and formulas comprising the speech act set for apologies as follows:

Strategies	**Examples**
1. An expression of an apology	
a. Expression of regret	I'm sorry.
b. An offer of apology	I apologize.
c. A request for forgiveness	Excuse me.
2. An explanation or account of the situation	The bus was late.
3. An acknowledgement of responsibility	
a. accepting the blame	It's my fault.
b. expressing self –deficiency	I wasn't thinking.
c. recognizing the other person as deserving apology	You are right.
d. expressing the lack of intent	I didn't mean to.
4. An offer of repair	I'll pay for the broken vase.
5. A promise for forbearance	It won't happen again.

Among these five strategies, two of which are general and depend less on contextual constraints, and three of which are situation-specific. The two general strategies are an expression of an apology and an acknowledgement of responsibility. The other three situation-specific strategies--an explanation, an offer of repair, and a promise for forbearance semantically reflect the content of the situation. In addition to the main strategies which make up the speech act set, there are ways in which the speaker can modify the apology either by intensifying it or by downgrading it. Most common intensifiers are very and really, while an expression such as 'I'm sorry, but…' and 'you really shouldn't get insulted by…' is used when a speaker intends to downgrade an apology.

2. Previous studies concerning second language acquisition

2.1 Issues of universality and disparity

Several studies have addressed and examined the speech act of apologies and it seems obvious that both universality and culture-specificity co-exist in the act of apologizing. As a result, issues concerning universality and disparity with regard to apologizing have received very much attention and been brought up to discussion in most of the studies.

Priori research works showed universality found among apologies in different languages. Olshtain (1989) investigated the strategies used to realize apologies by speakers of four different languages: Hebrew, Australian English, Canadian French, and German. He concluded that the strategies used to perform apologies are largely universal. Cordella (1991) revealed no significant differences in the frequency of apology strategies in English for Chileans and Australians but she also discovered that one social factor (gender) notably affects the use of apology in both groups. In the same line, Linnell et al. (1992) reported no differences between non-native and native speakers in six out of eight apology situations.

On the contrary, several of later research works provided distinctive evidence showing cultural disparities between the responses of L1 and L2 speakers of English and between the responses of L1 speakers where the target culture is not the same. For instance, Creese (1991) discovered disparities between American and British speakers of English when performing apologies. Montserrat (1992) did a study on the production of English apology strategies by Spanish speakers learning English. The results of his study confirmed his assumption as it revealed interesting dissimilarities of apology systems and the degree of

response intensifications between Peninsular Spanish and the American English. Similarly, Kim (2001) reported the findings of his study on Korean and EFL speakers' apology behavior in terms of social variables with particular attention to pragmatic transfer of first language norms. His findings showed that social factors have influence on Korean learners' transferring their native pragmatic norms into English. Turgut (2010) also conducted a comparative study between Korean ESL learners' apologies and apologies performedby native speakers of English. He indicated that time spent in the U.S. and English language learning significantly influence the use of apologies more in line with the native behavior while the use of intensifiers varies according to gender, cultural background and language proficiency. Moreover, Mardani and Eslami-Rasekh (2010) provided additional information reporting that Iranian people tend to apologize more frequently than native speakers with the frequent use of intensifiers given the same level of offence or mistake in the same social context. They also concluded that speech act is a language area in which performance is not absolute; therefore, learners cannot be expected to acquire native-like performance. Thijittang (2010) shared some dissimilar findings stating that the realization of selecting some apology strategies for both Thai and English apologies is a universal phenomenon while the differences between apology strategies used by Thai native speakers and English native speakers are demonstrated in the quantity of direct acts of apologizing, explicit expression of apology and the use of sub-strategies. Finally, Farashaiyan and Amirkhiz (2011) found both similarities and differences in opting for apology strategies among their Iranian and Malaysian participants. In terms of the similarities, both groups utilized the same typology of strategies in 11 situations (out of 17) which they based their choice of strategy on the hierarchical differences. Regarding the differences, Iranians used four more types of strategies which were not observed in Malaysians' performance.

It seems that the existing literature reveals varied findings regarding the universal uniformity or cultural specificity of the use of apologies in different languages. Nevertheless, it is quite apparent that more various attributes are likely to emerge as scholars expand their research horizons by investigating apologies in different contexts.

2.2 Implications for L2 acquisition and teaching pedagogy of apologies

2.2.1 L2 acquisition of apology

Various findings of the studies on apology have led to assorted conclusions on second language acquisition and

teaching pedagogy. Supporting Olshtain's study (1989) and the others, Kasper and Rose (2001) believed that there is a lot of pragmatic information that adult learners possess because some pragmatic knowledge is universal. The speech act set for apologies has been found to be used in many distant speech communities. It seems that universality of some pragmatic knowledge or first language (L1) based pragmatic knowledge is good news for L2 learners to acquire apology. On the contrary, Ellis (2003) indicated that strategies used to perform apologies are not easy for L2 learners to acquire despite the universal knowledge of learners. Learners can have difficulty in apologizing in L2. He (2003) stated four factors which influence L2 learners' performance of apologies as follows:

1. The learners' level of linguistic proficiency

Ellis (2003) believed that L1 transfer is possible but does not actually occur due to a lack of the necessary L2 proficiency. Instead of performing the same apologies in their L1, learners are less likely to offer repair or acknowledge responsibility.

2. Their first language (L1)

L1 negative transfer is evident in many cases especially it has an effect on the intensity with which apologies are performed. As seen in Cohen and Olshtain's (1993) study, Hebrew speakers of English were less likely to accept responsibility for an offence or make a repair than native English speakers.

3. Their perception of the universality or language specificity of how to apologize

People have different attitudes about how apologies should be performed cross-linguistically as proved by various studies mentioned above.

4. The nature of the specific apology situation

This factor refers to the extent to which learners acquire the socio-cultural rules of the L2 is situation-dependent.

Apart from the four factors, there is a significant influence of learning context on L2 acquisition of apologies. Kasper and Rose (2001) proposed that learning context plays a key role in the socio-pragmatics of apology development. They referred to Kondo's work (1997) observing Japanese EFL learners' apology performance before and after one year home stay in the U.S. in comparison with L1 speakers of Japanese and American English. The result showed that students' apologies became more target-like, whereas in others they did not. Kasper and Rose (2001) concluded that learners can acquire formulaic apology strategies through extended interaction in the target community. A similar conclusion was also made in the work of Turgut's (2010).

2.2.2 Teaching apology to L2 learners

Despite the fact that adult learners possess a lot of pragmatic information, Kasper and Rose (2001) argued that learners do not always use what they know. Moreover, EFL learners do not have a benefit of target language learning context. L2 learners; therefore, need some formal explicit instructions in order to acquire the uses of apology. Similar ideas are mentioned by many scholars (Schmidt, 1993; Olshtain and Cohen, 1991; Cohen, 1996; Meier, 1997; Martinez-Flor, 2005; Mardani, 2010; Tateyama, 2001; Baleghizadeh, 2007; Pinner, 2008; Turgut, 2010; Thijittang, 2010). For example, Pinner (2008) agreed with Schmidt (1993) and Cohen (1996) that overtly teaching illocutionary force and meaning behind speech acts can greatly be of use to language learners as this will contribute to their confidence enabling them to further improve as speakers of English. Thijittang (2010) shared the same opinion stating that explicit apology teaching as well as a contrastive study of apologies in L1 and L2 will assist learners to understand clearly in choosing apology strategies appropriately for different situations. This is in agreement with Turgut (2010) adding that the cultural difference topics in apologies should be included in teaching, teacher education, course materials and curriculum.

To design pedagogical syllabuses to develop learners' pragmatic competence, two types of learning activities : i) awareness-raising activities and ii) opportunities for communicative practice have been mentioned and supported by many scholars.

I) Awareness-raising activities

Referring to Kasper (1997), Meier (1997:26) proposed that an awareness-raising approach require a readjustment of focus and practice in L2 and foreign language classroom, "openly viewing it as a venue for culture teaching". She suggested 3 types of activities as follows: *1. A discussion of judgments of appropriateness in context both for the learners' cultures and for the target culture*

To conduct awareness-raising activities, teacher can start a lesson by presenting the students with authentic input in which the speech act of apology in the target culture is employed in real and natural setting. The use of video clips, films and TV can be an appropriate material that provides authentic audiovisual input. Then, a series of awareness-raising activities focusing on the socio-pragmatic aspects implied in such a conversation can be introduced such as posing questions for a discussion, then providing students with the written video script for the video taped situation together with asking questions that direct

the students to various linguistic forms used to make apologies.

2. Using learners' observations, guided discussion, comparisons of successful and unsuccessful dialogues and critical incidents to increase learners' understanding of linguistic behaviors

This idea goes along with Pinner (2008:12) stating that students should be asked to make their own observations and choices based on their observations concerning appropriateness. He believes that by providing the learners with the information they need to make their observations, the limitations of appropriateness in cross-sociocultural contexts can be escaped and it is a way to allow learners to figure out for themselves how to perform a speech act in any given situation.

3. Modifying textbook dialogues and enacting role plays to raise learners' awareness of socio-cultural factors as they inform linguistic decisions

Many scholars emphasize the importance of making use of universal pragmatic knowledge by making the learners aware of what they know already and encourage them to use their universal or transferable L1 pragmatic knowledge in L2 contexts. This idea is consistent with an idea of Olshtain and Cohen's (1991). They believe that it is very important to take learner beyond simplistic coverage of the speech act set. The focus of teaching lessons should include all apology strategies with underlying principles for when to use what and analyze the speech act set into its semantic formulas. For example, teacher should teach their learners to know which strategy to use in a given apology situation as well as to know which language forms are appropriate for realizing that strategy and how to modify these strategies in the given situation. Moreover, teachers need to develop an awareness of socio-cultural and socio-linguistic differences that exist between one's first language and the target language. For example, learners should be exposed to the patterns used most commonly by English native speakers to avoid some L1 negative transfer. According to Mardani (2010), such awareness is essential since it will often help explain to both teachers and learners why unintended pragmatic failure and breakdown in communication sometimes occur.

II) Opportunities for communicative practice

Due to the fact that pragmatic ability in a second or foreign language is part of a nonnative speakers' communicative competence, traditional language classroom or teacher-fronted teaching might not facilitate student's learning. Communicative student-centered approach is recommended since student-centered activities do more than just

extend students' speaking time. They also give them opportunities to practice conversational management, perform a larger range of communicative acts, and interact with other participants in completing a task (Kasper 1997). Several activities can be used to practice pragmatic abilities, namely those role-plays, simulations and dramas. Therefore, a series of these communicative activities could be used to develop learners' pragmatic performance when making apologies. Last but not least, feedback should also be given to learners from both the teacher and their peers regarding their performance in terms of pragmatic appropriateness. For example, a discussion allowing each student to give comments on each of their peers' role-plays can be done either in an oral or in a written format or both.

To illustrate a sample of teaching practices of apologies for better under standing, teaching steps suggested by Olshtain and Cohen (1991) are discussed as follows. Olshtain and Cohen (1991) pointed out the specification of situational and social factors matched with the most common realizations of the speech act are needed. For example, students need to realize that it is important to express an intensified apology to show a sincere apology when interacting with friends or interlocutors who are in a higher status than the speaker. Teacher should give their students chances to compare apologies in a variety of contexts and carefully consider the differences and similarities. They suggested five different ways to do so.

1. The diagnostic assessment

It can be carried out in writing or in oral interaction with teacher to establish the student's level of awareness of speech act in general. Students will be given a situation with different choices of responses and they need to choose one. Later, teacher can use the result to assess how they realize the apology patterns.

2. The model dialog

Teacher presents students with examples of the speech act in use. Short and natural dialogues are more appropriate. Students will be asked to identify the apology, the relationship of the speakers. Then a group discussion can be assigned to help the students become more sensitive to social and pragmatic factors affecting speech acts.

3. The evaluation of a situation

Teacher can help reinforce the students' awareness of the factors affecting the choice of strategies. A set of apology situations is given to be decided in pairs or in small groups. Teacher can ask the students to decide how apology is needed for each violation.

4. Role-play activities

Teacher can use role-play to help students practice the use of apologies. Information about each interlocutors interacting in the conversation and about the situation is needed. Students then need to think of potential violation and act out in a role-play.

5. Feedback and discussion

Students are asked to talk about their perceptions, expectations and awareness of similarities and differences between speech act behavior in the target language and in their first culture. This could be done after the role-plays. It will help them recognize areas of inference where pragmatic failure may occur.

All in all, speech acts can be a challenging area for language teachers to teach their students due to their complex features and variations. At the same time, without a mastery of speech acts learners can face difficulties or even have breakdowns in communication. Acquiring the apology speech act is complex in the sense cultural variables can be a great hindrance to second language learners but very important because the act of apologizing requires an action or an utterance in order to save faces and maintain harmony between people. This paper attempts to raise awareness and understanding of this speech act in the hope that it will help teachers to be able to provide effective instructions to their learners.

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