
A MODEL FOR ASSESSING STUDENTS' USE OF APOLOGY STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Working as teacher in a tourism higher "education" that is running diploma program in hospitality services is quite challenging. The diploma programs emphasize development of student professional competency that includes knowledge, skills, and attitude. In term of English language teaching the heavy is put on developing speaking competency, especially to those programs that require direct guest-contacts such as Food and Beverage program that produces among others waiters, or Rooms Division program that produces among others receptionist. Finding effective and efficient ways to evaluate students performance is not an easy task. Taking notes of students' performance during an oral role-play practice of handling complaint topic can be challenging. So is when the teacher evaluates students' written works on the same topic. Teacher will have to note many 'empirical examples' using easy to follow ways that later when it is used as feedback will be understandable for students so that students learning may improve. Empirical examples notes of students' performances may vary from word-choice to grammatical mistakes, but this study focus on the employment of Blum-Kulka's five apology strategies that is used in handling complaint situation. The five apology strategies are 1) Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), 2) Taking on Responsibility, 3) Explanation or Account, 4) Offer of Repair, and 5. Promise of Forbearance. A model of assessment is made by applying simple coding of the possible combinations use of the five strategies. The apology strategies are coded 1 to 5 while possible combination use the five strategies are coded a to z and more. So, for example a combination is coded "k" represents the use of apology strategies of 1+2+4 or IFID + Taking on Responsibility + Offer of Repair. The assessment model was applied to measure the use of apology strategies in handling complaint situations to students of four well-known tourism higher educations in Indonesia located in Medan, Bandung, Makassar, and Bali. There were eight complaint situations in the DCT or Discourse Completing Test questionnaire in which students have to complete a dialog in written form. These parts of student answer then identified and categorized into one type of combination in the model based on answers given. It is a worth trying alternative of students' performance evaluation that is helpful for teacher.

Keywords: apology strategies, handling complain, learning evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a continuation of previous study on the topic of apology strategies. In the previous study the writer found out that having this model to analyze students used of apology strategies was helpful. It helped to parse elements of students' apology through identifying the head of each clause or sentence produce by students. The results of this parsing process, the elements were identified and coded using alphabet letter, and numbers. The number represents apology strategies that is 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in which it is based on Blum-Kulka's five apology strategies. Then the alphabet letters is used to represent or to code students' choice of apology expression that were vary, starting from a single choice or one apology strategy to the double or multiple used of different apology strategies. The possible combination were coded 'a' to 'cc'. The coding scheme of the apology strategy assessment model had helped the writer to produce clearer discussion of the obtained data in the above study.

In this paper the writer would like to see whether or not the assessment model of the use of apology strategies can be also use in class teaching and learning activity, especially for class of hotel academy in dealing with the topic of managing guest complaint in hotel and restaurant. The writer wish to disseminate the idea at the conference as well as to seek for feedbacks and input from

audience so that the idea can be developed well and hope could be beneficial to other teachers in the future.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORY:

Model:

A simple definition of a model is “something such as a system that can be copied by other people” (OALD, 2016). The writer chooses the term model was motivated by the spirit that this can be applied by others, teachers and students of tourism and hotel academies, in the future. However, there may be other terms that can be used to refer to this assessment tool such as ‘rubric’. Rubric is “a title or set of instructions written in a book, an exam paper, etc.” (OALD, 2016). Though, the assessment model is a combination of both “a system” and “set of instructions” functions to help user to identify use of apology strategies as individual or in combination with other strategy.

Assessment:

To measure students learning and improvement as well as to check whether or not the targets stated in curriculum and syllabus of subject is already achieved teacher need to have and to do a measurement process. There are lots of ways to evaluate students’ progress such as quiz in oral or written form, or some other kind of progress tests. The objectives of the assessment are to have a reliable data of student progress and the execution of the curriculum. Assessment is “an opinion or a judgement about somebody/something that has been thought about very carefully” (OALD, 2016). In case of TLA or teaching and learning activity it refers to teacher’s judgement concerning students’ performance. Students’ performance can be either in *productive aspects* such as speaking or writing, or in *receptive aspects* such as listening and reading. In this article the assessment model was applied to record the use apology strategies in the case of managing complaint situations by tourism students. The aspect was productive in form of writing utilizing what called as WDCT or Written Discourse Completion Test.

Apology:

In tourism and hospitality academies students are taught, among others, how to manage guest complaint. The reason is because many of these academies run diploma program and their students are prepared to fill the positions of *frontliners*, staff of hotel, restaurant or other tourism business establishments whose duties requires them to make direct contact with guests or customers. Here, staff’s speaking ability is the main qualification in whatever the language is. In other words, higher communicative competence is basic obligation in addition to vocational skills. The reason is because the hospitality services of hotel or restaurant, among others, are delivered through language.

So are when one of the hospitality service goes wrong and guests deliver their complaints, it is done through language. To clarify the terms between complaint and complain here how each defined, “complaint is a reason for not being satisfied; a statement that somebody makes saying that they are not satisfied” while “complain is to say that you are annoyed, unhappy or not satisfied about somebody/something” (OALD, 2016). A complaint happens when there was offence that makes customer feels unhappy about something of someone. To manage complaint there are certain steps a hotel staff should take. One famous approach to handle complaint is HEAT i.e. an abbreviation of four steps namely hear, empathy, apology, and take. The first step is hear the customer problem thoroughly without interruption, second to show empathy, the third is to apologize to customer, and the last is to take ‘agreed’ action to solve the problem. This article is concern with the third step of the approach that is to apologize.

“Apology (to somebody) (for something) a word or statement saying sorry for something that has been done wrong or that causes a problem” (OALD, 2016). As this is taken from a dictionary the meaning is rather generic but still it accommodates the function to admit that something was in accordance with the standard and cause an offence to the part of customer.

A more pragmatic reference explains that, “By apologizing the speaker recognizes the fact that a violation of a social norm has been committed and admits to the fact that s/he is at least partially involved in its case.” (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, Vol. 5, No. 3). Some keywords or expressions from this definition are; first speaker recognition of social norm violation. In case of hotel service *social norms* may refer to standard operating procedure in handling guest check-in. Example of violation

could be misspelling guest name. Even though the receptionist has already borrowed guest ID, still he or she typed the guest name in a wrong way. This could drive the guest to complain and in this case unless the receptionist admit that he or she had committed that he or she is the one who did the error or the one who takes the blame for the mistake the apology will not fully accomplished because it is a personal mistake.

Apology, in linguistics study, belongs to speech act. Speech act refers to “a theory which analyses the role of utterances in relation to the behaviour of speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication” (Crystal, 2008). According to Crystal apology belongs to expressive category of speech act. Expressive articulates speaker’s feeling such as apologizing, welcoming, sympathizing, etc. In the above example, internal communication refers to conversation between hotel receptionist and guest about complaint. The utterance used by the receptionist part is the concern of the study where the writer wanted to identify and describe whether or not the apology strategy chose by students in representing receptionist fit to the context of situation.

Apology strategies:

Below is the five apology strategies (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989):

1. Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID)
2. Taking on responsibility
3. Explanation or account
4. Offer of repair
5. Promise of forbearance

According to Blum-Kulka et al apology can be performed by any one of the above strategies, or any combination or sequence. In this article the use of apology strategies will be seen as individual occurrence and as sequence or combination of strategies. The following example is taken from Blum-Kulka (1989:290) where all five strategies are used in sequence:

IFID	RESPONSIBILITY	EXPLANATION
I’m sorry. I missed the bus, and there was a terrible traffic jam.		
REPAIR	FORBEARANCE	
Let’s make another appointment. I’ll make sure that I’m here on time.		

Figure 1

Below is description of each apology strategies:

1. Illocutionary force indicating device (IFIDS)

In Blum-Kulka (1989:290) IFIDs is explained as a formulaic, routinized expressions in which the speaker’s apology is made explicit. While (Yule, 1996, p. 49) defines IFID as an expression where there is a slot for a verb that explicitly names the illocutionary act being performed. Such a verb can be called a *performative verb* (Vp). Below are examples from Blum-Kulka:

Sorry
Excuse me
I apologize for ...
Forgive me
Pardon me for ...
I regret that ...
I’m afraid ...

2. Taking on responsibility

In an attempt to placate the hearer, the speaker chooses to express responsibility for the offence which created the need to apologize. For example:

My mistake (explicit self-blame)
I didn’t mean to upset you (lack of intent)
You are right to be angry (justify the hearer)
I feel awful about it (expression of embarrassment)
I haven’t read it / I missed the bus (admission of fact but not of responsibility)
It wasn’t my fault (refusal of acknowledge guilt)
I’m the one to be offended (pretend to be offended)

3. Explanation or account

This category covers any external (+/- human) mitigating circumstances offered by the speaker. i.e. 'objective' reason for the violation at hand. For example:

The traffic was terrible

My tutor kept me late

4. Offer if repair

If the damage or inconvenience which affected by the hearer can be compensated for, the speaker may choose to offer repair; this offer must be directly related to the offence perpetrated: in other words, you can only repair a reparable. For example:

I'll pay for the damage

I'll go and enquire in the kitchen

5. Promise for forbearance

Whenever the speaker's sense of guilt is strong enough, he or she may feel the need to promise that the offensive act will never occur again. For example:

This won't happen again.

Teaching and assessing student learning:

This study concerns with evaluation of students' learning. Students' learning is important to be measured by the reason that there are lots of aspects have potential impacts to students learning. "Assessment and evaluation are essential components of teaching and learning..." (Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum, p. 263), adding that, "Without an effective evaluation program it is impossible to know whether the students have learned, whether the teaching has been effective, or how best to address students learning needs."

In assessing the use of apology strategies by tourism students in handling complaint situations the writer utilize a gathering data tool called discourse completion test (DCT). DCT was first used by Blum-Kulka (1982) in her famous research called Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns or CCSARP. The study was in the field of pragmatics and since then DCT is widely used for studying topics such as speech act.

Followers confirm that it can help teacher to assess students' performance on certain speech act such as apology (Aufa, 2013). The written responses given by student can easily be analyzed by teacher to help student improve.

The next step after identifying students' performance is to give them feedback. Feedback is an important part of the learning cycle, but both students and teachers frequently express disappointment and frustration in relation to the conduct of the feedback process (Spiller, 2009). Some of the causes are it is unclear or not helpful enough.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Defining units for analysis:

In this initial research of apology and request in hospitality service business the writer will only focus on identifying and hopefully able to describing types of apology strategies used by tourism students in Indonesia in handling complaint situations by noting it Head Act. The discussion will be about how these strategies appear as individual and as pattern of combination.

Meanwhile the use of detail analysis such as *intensifier*, *syntactic down grader*, *syntactic upgrader*, etc. will not be discussed deeply. The focus would be to identify pattern of combination of apology strategies as they appear in series or sequence of combination.

The coding scheme:

In order to ease the process of making description of discussion especially about the pattern of combination of apology strategies the writer has come up with a simple coding scheme as can be seen in Figure 1 below.

MODEL FOR ASSESSING STUDENT USE OF APOLOGY STRATEGIES

Apology Strategies	Scheme of Codes					
1. IFID	a 1	f 1+2	k 1+2+4	p 1+2+3+4	u 2+5	z 3+5
2. An explanation or account	b 2	g 1+3	l 1+2+5	q 1+2+3+5	v 2+3+4	aa 3+4+5
3. An expression of the doer responsibility	c 3	h 1+4	m 1+3+4	r 1+2+3+4+5	w 2+3+5	bb 4+5
4. An offer of repair	d 4	i 1+5	n 1+3+5	s 2+3	x 2+5	cc 5
5. A promise of forbearance	e 5	j 1+2+3	o 1+4+5	t 2+4	y 3+4	

Following the order of apology strategies in Blum-Kulka's research, the apology strategy types are code in number 1 – 5 where 1 represents *IFID*, 2 represents *an explanation of account of the cause of offence*, 3 represents *an expression of the doer responsibility for the offence*, 4 represents *an offer of repair*, and 5 represents *a promise of forbearance*.

Meanwhile, the coding scheme for patten are as shown above represented by letter *a* until *cc* with combination of apology strategies represented by numbers on its right column. To have a clear understanding letter “k” represents pattern of combination of apology strategy 1 + 2 + 4 or *IFID* followed by *explanation*, and then *an offer of repair*.

Below is excerpt from the writer previous study as exemplification of how the assessment model was used and in what ways it could help the researcher (TEFLIN, 2015). The result from this study is presented in order of the questions asked on the DCT. For each question, the most significant findings will be discussed. An overall discussion of the total apology strategies employed and the patterns of the used apology for each question is discussed at discussion part of the report.

Question 1:

You are a waiter in a restaurant. A guest wants to bring her Chi Hwa Hwa dog inside the restaurant. But, the restaurant rule says, “Pets are not allowed inside restaurant”.

Customer: “This is mad... You know, I never leave my dog alone, wherever I go - she goes with me.”

You:

Table 1a

APOLOGY STRATEGY	Bandung n = 40 (M:17, F:23)				Bali n = 39 (M:20, F:19)				Medan n = 40 (M:14, F:26)				Makassar n = 38 (M:19, F:19)				Total N = 157	
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		#	%
# actual used % of subject using strategy	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1. IFID	17	42.5	20	47.5	21	53.8	18	46.2	14	35	26	65	19	47.5	19	47.5	115	73.9
2. An explanation or account of the cause of offence	13	32.5	9	22.5	18	46.2	7	17.8	19	47.5	2	5	16	42.5	14	35	105	66.9
3. An expression of the doer responsibility for the offence	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.6
4. An offer of repair	13	32.5	20	47.5	14	35.9	5	12.8	7	17.5	0	0	1	2.5	9	22.5	64	40.8
5. A promise of forbearance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Total	4		6		5		3		6		4		4			
	4		2		2		2		7		6		7			

The design of question number 1 is that the cause of offence is “rule” of the establishment, in this case a restaurant, which says that “Pets are not allowed inside restaurant”. The case of situation requires students to give reaction to a customer complaint related to this rule where the customer do not feel satisfy with the rule as she never leave her Chi Hwa Hwa dog alone.

Table 1 shows recapitulation of apology strategies used by tourism students from Bandung, Bali, Medan and Makassar to the above case of question 1. Here are some significant findings based on table 1:

The most significant findings are as follow. Firstly, IFID: female of Medan 96% vs other 100%. Since the design of case is complaint situation, at first the writer assumed that the use of IFID or Illocutionary Force Indicating Device will 100%, but the data shows that female of Medan recorded 96%. This means there is one respondent who choose not to use the IFID in completing the given dialog. How did the respondent handle the complaint situation, here is the data: ...

An explanation or account the cause of offence: the highest – female of Makassar 100%, the lowest – male of Bandung 76%. The cause of offence in question 1 is establishment’s rule or regulation that forbid customer to bring her pet inside the restaurant. This challenges the respondent to provide certain explanation or description about the rule. To the writer surprise, the use of apology strategy code 2 i.e. explanation or account of the cause of the offence is vary. The highest percentage of use of this strategy is by female of Makassar at 100%. On the other hand the lowest percentage of use is by male of Bandung which is only 76%. What is that supposed to mean? It means that many of male student in STP Bandung prefer not to use the strategy, 13 out of 17 uses this strategy and 4 of them do not use it. Here is some example of how male of Bandung complete dialog to handle the given complaint situation: ...

An expression of the doer responsibility for the offence: male of Bandung 1 or 6% is the only one who used it. Another surprising data is there is one male respondent of Bandung who uses the strategy code 3 that is an expression of doer responsibility of the offence. Here how the respondent used the strategy: ...

An offer of repair: the highest female of Bandung 87%, the lowest – female of Makassar 47%. To overcome the situation many of respondent are really creative in using the strategy code 4 that is an offer of repair. The situation created in question 1 in some degree requires the respondent to be able to neutralize situation so that a mutual communication can be built after explaining the cause of offence. What is interesting is the way the respondent to handle the situation are really creative, here are some examples of them ... A promise of forbearance: all 0%

The next table (Table 1a) shows how apology strategies come up in combination as answer to each question in the questionnaire. Blum-Kulka et al says that apologies “may be performed” by any one of the five major strategies or “any combination or sequence” of them (1989:289) and in the obtained result of the DCT questionnaire shows that they come in combination or sequence. To ease the process of data interpretation here are the coding system that it used to represent possible strategy combination. On the left column is the five major apology strategy while on the right column is the codes of possible combination of apology strategy as the writer has identified. The number 1 – 5 represent each of the five apology strategy and the alphabetical letter a – cc represent possible combination of apology strategy. For example, “a” means respondent only choose to use the IFID (1) while “k” means that the respondent choose to use “1 + 2 + 4” combination i.e. ‘IFID’ plus ‘an explanation or account of the cause of offence’ followed by ‘an offer of repair.’

The next table (Table 1c) showing the recapitulation of the use of apology strategies as shown in the obtained questionnaire for each item of question. Table 1c show the recapitulation of combination or sequence of apology strategy for question 1.

Table 1b

Q1		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z	a	b	c	
BANDUNG	M	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	4	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	F	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	4	0	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BALI	M	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	F	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
MEDAN	M	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	3	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	F	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	4	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
MAKASSAR	M	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	3	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	F	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL		0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Result of questionnaire as recapitulated in Table 1a (Question 1 – pattern of used strategies)

Although the writer has anticipated and identified 29 different possible combinations of apology strategies, but the data in table above shows that only five combinations were chosen in answering question 1. Here are some of the most interesting figures in the above table.

(1) Q1/k/Female/Bandung:

“I’m sorry sir¹, this is rule from our restaurant². But don’t worry, I suggest you to entrust your dog to our employee while you can eating in our restaurant⁴. Don’t worry we can handle and protect your dog.”

(2) Q1/f/Female/Makassar:

“I am so sorry ma’am¹, we have rules here². Please understand.”

(3) Q1/h/Male/Bandung:

“I’m so sorry mam¹ but we have an outside table if you want⁴.”

The most significant findings of combination is that the highest appearance of total combination is “k” by 86 time of use followed by “f” = 47, “h” = 22, and the lowest is “j” and “t” = 1. When seeing the use of apology strategy based on respondent place of origin, female of Bandung is the highest frequency use of “k” combination = 16 while the lowest frequency used of “k” combination is male of Medan with only 4. Another interesting data shows from the use of “f” combination in which the highest frequency is female of Makassar = 10 while the lowest is both male and female of Bandung with 3. I

4. CONCLUSION

What the model can do:

1. The assessment model can help user to identify different types of apology strategies used by students
2. The assessment model can identify the use of apology strategy as individual and as combination by writing number codes for types of apology strategy and alphabet codes for multiple or combination of different types of apology strategy
3. The data gathered by the assessment model can be used to help display number and percentage of each
4. The data gathered by the assessment model can be used to help display number and percentage of each apology strategy user and can be very helpful for researcher in drawing conclusion

The future use and development of the assessment model:

1. The model should be developed and expanded so that it can also accommodate other aspects of understanding complaint and how proper responses can be made such as identify cause of offence, severity of offence, and doer of offence. That way it will be very helpful for student user to help decide the most suitable apology strategy to the context and situation of the complaint.
2. The model should be made into different version based on its function. For example for researcher who is dealing with apology strategy topic, for teacher who is shaping students’ performance in using apology strategies properly, for individual student who is self-studying or group students who are peer-studying, etc.

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