# Apology Strategies Used by Students in University of Balikpapan

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## Article Info

## Abstract

There are two objectives of the study namely to investigate kind of apology strategies are used by students in University of Balikpapan and to investigate how age and social status affect their choice of apology strategies. When saying sorry, it is needed to choose appropriate strategies that associate with politeness term and culture in Indonesia. Hence, this study is needed to be done. The design of this study is descriptive qualitative. Instrument to collect the data was DCT task devised by Hasan in 2014. The data were analyzed and categorized by using theory of Trosborg and Aijmer compiled by Firiani & Lestari in Fitriani (2012). Findings have shown that an overwhelming majority of the apologies were combinations rather than single type. The most often used combined strategies by students in University of Balikpapan were 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + offering redress'. Moreover, it can be inferred that age and social status affected participants' choice of apology strategies since the result of this study showed that they had different combined apology strategies based on older, younger, same age and higher, lower, equal social status.

## INTRODUCTION

When communicating, sometimes people perform either good or bad lexical. Thus, there is a probability for misunderstanding, ambiguity, miscommunication, and slip up tongue which may hurt other people. This situation will crack the relationship between the speaker and hearer. Here, the speaker must apologize to restore peace between them and expressing regret for the past bad deed. It is believed that apology becomes one of the most appropriate way to fix the mistakes which are done during communication in our daily life. In this case, we must realize apology strategies that can be applied later on in our

communication to pay off whatever damage that we have been done. Yule (1996) categorized apology into expressive type which means speech act that informs what the speaker feels. Apologize is like an unwritten ethics between human being that insert feelings. It does not only talk about ethical issue, but also of part of politeness strategies.

Brown and Levinson (1987) declare that apologies are manifestation of politeness strategies since it is the social act that aims at maintaining good relation between the hearer and speaker. Politeness can be related to education. When we talk about education, we usually focus on the teacher. Teacher is a role model in society. That is why teacher needs to be polite in many ways. One of them is doing politeness in apologizing to students and other people. The researcher is interested in employing this study in the field of education especially students in faculty of teacher training and education in University of Balikpapan because they will soon be teachers who will be the role model in society. They will have to devise polite behavior in daily life because they were taught the competences by their lecturers to become a great teacher in the future. The way they apologize is one of teacher's personal competences. They have to be brave to admit their mistakes and say sorry to people around, especially to students.

Many teachers are hardly ever apologizing to the students. For example, when the teacher comes late to the class, they forgot to say sorry to students. They just start the lesson soon after they sit in the class. Another example is when the teacher gives wrong answer or explanation to students and they protest the teacher. What the teacher usually does is denying that he or she is wrong by giving excuses or anything else. Furthermore, when the teachers give wrong mark, they tend to blame the students for their score before correcting it. Those examples are not so good in education practices, especially in Indonesia. We can say they are quite arrogant because of the age and social status between them and students.

In fact, human should avoid the matters talked above (especially if they are dealing with education field) by paying attention to people around and say sorry as soon as possible after we make the mistakes. When we say sorry, we also need to choose appropriate strategies that associate with politeness term and culture in Indonesia. Nevertheless, with different people, age, and social status we may have various ways of apology. When saying sorry, it is needed to choose appropriate strategies that associate with politeness term and culture in Indonesia. Hence, this

study is needed to be done.

There were some researches concerning with the phenomena of apology. The first one was done by Majeed and Janjua (2014) entitled "Apology Strategies and Gender: A Pragmatic Study of Apology Speech Acts in Urdu Language". The findings of the study reveal that girls tend to be more mindful about their face wants and they used less risky strategies even with their siblings and friends more than boys. Another study was done by Shahrokhi and Jan in 2012 entitled "the Realization of Apology Strategies among Persian Males". Their study reveals the universal apology strategies in Persian especially Persian men are situation-dependent in relation to contextual variables. The third one was done by Murad in 2012 entitled "Apology Strategies in the Target Language (English) of Israeli-Arab EFL College Students towards Their Lecturers of English Who are also Native Speakers of Arabic". The findings reveal that three sub apology strategies used by students are Expression of regret, offer of apology and request for forgiveness included in the main apology strategy that is "expression of apology". Based on the background and previous studies above, this study tries to fill the gap of study about apology strategies in university students and has two objectives namely to investigate kind of apology strategies are used by students in University of Balikpapan and to investigate how age and social status affect their choice of apology strategies.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

There are many kinds of everyday expression, including apology. Apology may be used very often to show a feeling and maintain good relationship between speaker and listener. In other word, apology is needed whether someone makes mistake or not because someone deals with others who might have been offended by our attitudes. It is assumed that we have two kinds of apology; apology for solving the problem and apology for politeness. An apology can be brief, such as (I am terribly sorry), or (I am so bad, please forgive me). But when the offence is serious between people, we should understand how an apology succeeds or fails by analyzing its major components. In most apologies, the insulted one wants an explanation for the behavior of the offending one.

To facilitate data processing, Firiani & Lestari in Fitriani (2012) compile the theories suggested by Trosborg and Aijmer into seven categories that were used to

analyze apology strategies used by participants. The seven categories are as follow. 1) Explicitly apologizing means speakers express their apology explicitly or directly. There are some verbs that can be used to apologize directly, e.g. I apologize; I am sorry; 2) Acknowledging responsibility means speakers can implicitly or explicitly claim to be responsible for their action. In addition, speakers also usually blame themselves. This strategy is aimed to give support to the hearer. It can be divided into six sub-strategies as follows: a. implicitly acknowledging responsibility, e.g. I can see your point; perhaps I should have not done it. b. explicitly acknowledging responsibility, e.g. I'll admit I forgot to do it. c. Expressing regret, e.g. I did not mean to. d. expressing self-shortcomings, e.g. You know I am bad at .... e. demonstrating a sense of shame, e.g. I feel so bad about it. f. receiving error explicitly, e.g. It was entirely my fault; You're right to blame me; 3) Giving an explanation means speakers can reduce the impact of the offense by giving an explanation about the situation of violation. In this strategy the speakers argue that the offense is not something he wanted. It can be divided into implicit explanation, e.g. Such things are bound to happen, you know and explicit explanation, e.g. Sorry I'm late, but my car broke down; 4) Minimizing the degree of offence means this strategy is similar to the strategy of irresponsible offenders. However, in this strategy, the speaker does not deny his responsibility. There are three sub-categories of this strategy, i.e. claiming that the offense is not important, e.g. Oh, what's the matter, that's nothing; what about it, it's not the end of the world, questioning the previous conditions, e.g. Well, everybody does that; what is love then? (in response to complaint You do not love me), blaming someone else. This happens if the offence committed by offenders is part of the violations committed by third parties. 5) Expressing concern for hearer means to comfort the hearer, the speaker may demonstrate his attention, e.g. I know you do not feel comfortable with what I've done. 6) Promising forbearance means when apologizing, speakers can show responsibility by expressing remorse. In this case, an apology is not only related to the violations that have been done but also related to the behavior in the future. This speech act apology contains a commitment from the speaker not to repeat his action. The statement is usually characterized by performative verb "promise", e.g. it will not happen again, I promise; 7) Offering redress means a speaker who have committed an offense can offer a repair or compensation for the losses caused by his action. The

compensation offered can be either objects or money.

In addition to seven apology strategies mentioned above, Trosborg in Fitriani (2012) proposes another strategy that can be used to analyze the data, i.e. 0 strategy or opting out in which the speaker refuses to take responsibility. They are: 0.1 Explicit denial of responsibility means speakers openly deny being responsible for the violation occurred. They may be emphasizing the ignorance of the matter, for example by saying I know nothing about it; or you know I would never do a thing like that; 0.2 Implicit denial of responsibility means speakers generally avoid responsibility by ignoring complaints or talking about something else; 0.3 Justifying oneself means speakers provide arguments that could affect the hearer not to blame the speaker; 0.4 Blaming someone else means speakers avoid responsibility by blaming others. They blame a third party or the hearer as the cause of further violation; 0.5 Attacking the complainer means speakers attacked the hearer in a much ruder manner compared to 0.4.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of this study is descriptive qualitative. The data were the answers of DCT (Discourse Completion Task) done by 65 students in University of Balikpapan in the academic year of 2017/2018. Qualitative data frequently emphasize on less number of people than quantitative data (Cohen, et. al., 2007:461). Moreover, the answer of Discourse Completion Task done by students in University of Balikpapan in the academic year of 2017/2018 (even semester) will be data for this research. DCT Task was the instrument for this study and it adapted items by Hasan (2014). The students who were also participants in this study are from faculty of teacher training and education of University of Balikpapan.

In this study, the researchers did some steps or procedures to collect data, namely 1) Reading apology strategies books and journals many times prudently; 2) Reading variation apology strategy tasks; 3) Adjusting DCT task about apology strategies based on Hassan in 2014; 4) Choosing the participants and asking them to do DCT (Discourse Completion Task)I; 5) Analyzing the result.

Several steps to analyze the data from the beginning to the end of the process were as follow based on Miles and Huberman (1994).

1) Data reduction

In this stage, the chief researcher investigated DCT about apology strategies

with the help of analysis table to know students' individual choice.

2) Data display

The chief researcher displayed the data using apology strategies table.

3) Data interpretation

In this part, the chief researcher interpreted the tables mentioned above and analyzed strategies based on participants' age and social status referring to expert: Trosborg and Aijmer compiled by Firiani & Lestari in Fitriani (2012).

4) Drawing conclusion

Finally, the researchers conclude the result of analysis to answer the research questions.


**DISCUSSION**

**Kind of Apology Strategies used by Students in University of Balikpapan**

Based on Trosborg and Aijmer in Fitriani (2012), there are two types of apology, they are apology strategies in which the speaker agree to take responsibility that have seven strategies and apology 0 strategy or opting out that have five strategies in which the speaker refuses to take responsibility. Nevertheless the researchers found other types of apology that are not classified by Trosborg and Aijmer in Fitriani (2012), they were combined strategies that have twenty two strategy combinations and one misunderstanding of the context. The pie chart below shows types of apology used by students in University of Balikpapan.
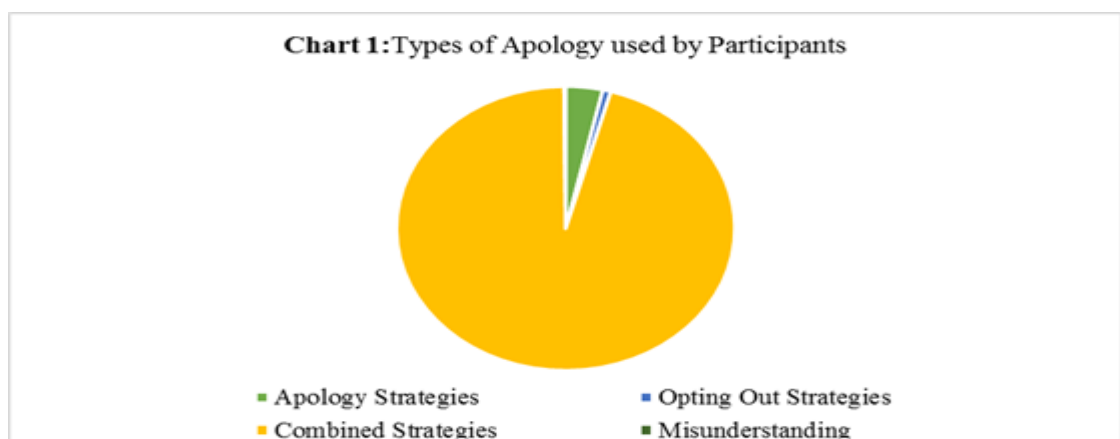


Based on pie chart 1 above, we can say that most students in University of Balikpapan would apologize if they were wrong or made mistakes based on the

situations given in DCT task. The results also showed that almost all of their apologies applied 95.54% combined strategies (621 responses). It means that they preferred to use more than one apology strategy to apologize to other people. They used two up to five strategies combined in one sentence of apology. They did not just say "sorry" but they add other strategies to persuade the listeners to forgive them. It is also shown that 3.54% of them (23 responses) chose apology strategy which was only single strategy. We also see that there were 0.77% and 0.15% of participants (5 responses and 1 response) chose opting out strategies to refuse taking responsibility and misunderstanding of the context. Each strategy above was elaborated below.

The table 1 below shows apology strategies used by students in University of Balikpapan.

**Table 1**: Apology Strategies used by Participants

| Types | Strategies | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Apology Strategies | Explicitly Apologizing | 12 | 52.17% |
| | Acknowledging Responsibility | 2 | 8.70% |
| | Minimizing the Degree of Offence | 1 | 4.35% |
| | Offering Redress | 8 | 34.78% |
| Total | | 23 | 100% |

As shown in table above, not many participants used single strategy (only 23 responses). They likely used more than one strategy to apologize because many people in Indonesia deliver their apology indirectly and long-winded to others as the culture.

The table 2 below shows apology 0 or opting out strategies used by students in University of Balikpapan.

**Table 2**: Opting out used by Participants

| Apology Types | Strategies | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Opting Out Strategies | Explicit Denial of Responsibility | 1 | 20.00% |
| | Implicit Denial of Responsibility | 2 | 40.00% |
| | Justifying Oneself | 1 | 20.00% |
| | Blaming Someone Else | 1 | 20.00% |
| Total | | 5 | 100.00% |

As can be seen in table above, not many participants chose opting out strategies. It is interesting that they used opting out strategies (refuse to take responsibility) in situation number 9 about the participant who had lunch with his/her university friend. The participant belched repeatedly and noisily (cannot be

controlled). We can assume that the university friend has equal status with the participants and they tend to choose to refuse taking responsibility even blaming someone else as the strategy.

Combined strategies have twenty two strategy combinations and can be seen in the table 3 below with the frequency and percentage analyzed from the students' responses in University of Balikpapan.

**Table 3**: Combined Strategies used by Participants

| Combinations | Strategies | Freq | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Combinations of 2 Strategies | Explicitly Apologizing + Acknowledging Responsibility | 146 | 23.5% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Giving an Explanation | 27 | 4.3% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Minimizing the Degree of Offence | 7 | 1.1% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Expressing Concern for Hearer | 5 | 0.8% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Offering Redress | 38 | 6.1% |
| | Acknowledging Responsibility + Offering Redress | 6 | 1.0% |
| | Giving an Explanation + Offering Redress | 6 | 1.0% |
| | Minimizing the Degree of Offence + Offering Redress | 1 | 0.2% |
| | Expressing Concern for Hearer + Offering Redress | 4 | 0.6% |
| Combinations of 3 Strategies | Explicitly Apologizing + Acknowledging Responsibility + Giving an Explanation | 90 | 14.5% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Acknowledging Responsibility + Expressing Concern for Hearer | 22 | 3.5% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Acknowledging Responsibility + Promising Forbearance | 6 | 1.0% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Acknowledging Responsibility + Offering Redress | 173 | 27.9% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Giving an Explanation + Offering Redress | 26 | 4.2% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Promising Forbearance + Offering Redress | 1 | 0.2% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Expressing Concern for Hearer + Offering Redress | 6 | 1.0% |
| | Acknowledging Responsibility + Giving an Explanation + Offering Redress | 1 | 0.2% |
| Combinations of 4 Strategies | Explicitly Apologizing + Acknowledging Responsibility + Giving an Explanation + Expressing Concern for Hearer | 6 | 1.0% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Acknowledging Responsibility + Giving an Explanation + Offering Redress | 37 | 6.0% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Acknowledging Responsibility + Expressing Concern for Hearer+ Offering Redress | 10 | 1.6% |
| | Explicitly Apologizing + Giving an Explanation + Expressing Concern for Hearer + Promising Forbearance | 1 | 0.2% |

| Combinations of 5 Strategies | Explicitly Apologizing + Acknowledging Responsibility + Giving an Explanation + Expressing Concern for Hearer + Offering Redress | 2 | 0.3% |
|---|---|---|---|
| **TOTAL** | | **621** | **100.0%** |

As shown in table above, we can say that in combined strategies type, students in University of Balikpapan tend to use combinations of three strategies to apologize with the total 325 responses or 52.3%. Combinations of three strategies seemed to have been favored by the participants. It can be inferred that they tried to express their apology with three apology strategies combined in one utterance.

While the researchers were categorizing the responses from the participants, they found only 1 response of students of University of Balikpapan who might be not understanding the context of the situation 9 about the participant had lunch with his/her university friend. The participant belched repeatedly and noisily (cannot be controlled). The task is to answer the question of how the participant would say to his/her friend. The participant then answered: "*bro, sakitkah sendawanya dikondisikan yah*" which translated into English "Bro, are you sick? Please control your belch yah" (*P/43/9*). The sentence / response is not correlated with the context of situation or apology because the participant thought that the one who belch is his/her friend.

But actually what said in the context is the one who belch repeatedly and noisily must be the participant. That is why, he/she should respond to this situation based on apology strategies available. The researchers then decided that it could not be categorized into the strategies available but insert into misunderstanding category which means the participant misunderstood the context when doing DCT task that happened in only one situation.

**Apology Strategies based on Older Age and Higher Social Status**

Older age and higher social status mean the person in each situation has higher social status and older than the participants. We can say that students in University of Balikpapan tend to use combination strategies as their way in doing apology based on older age and higher social status. They used 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility strategies' with total 64 responses or 32.8%. It can be inferred that most participants expressed their apology explicitly and claimed to be responsible for their action.

The second rank was occupied by 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + offering redress' strategies with total 39 responses or 20% and the third rank was occupied by 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + giving an explanation' strategies with total 35 responses or 18%. Only one participant in each situation used apology strategies type, namely explicitly apologizing (1 response) and offering redress (1 response). Moreover, no participant chose opting out strategies and misunderstanding type as his/her way to apologize to other people in situation 1, 6, and 8.

Here are two typical examples of this combination by the participants in "lateness returning professor's book" situation:

> *P/24/1*: "*Maaf pak…*" – "Sorry Sir…"                    **[Explicitly Apologizing]**
> "*…Saya telat mengembalikan buku*" – "…I am late returning the book"                                            **[Acknowledging Responsibility]**

> *P/10/1*: "*Maaf Pak Prof…*" – "Sorry Prof…"               **[Explicitly Apologizing]**
> "*…bukunya baru bisa dibalikin sekarang*" – "…I finally can return the book now"                               **[Acknowledging Responsibility]**

## Apology Strategies based on Younger Age and Lower Social Status

Younger age and lower social status mean the person in each situation has lower social status and younger than the participants. We can say that students in University of Balikpapan tend to use combination strategies as their way in doing apology based on younger age and lower social status. They used 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + offering redress' with total 85 responses or 43.6%. It can be inferred that most participants expressed their apology directly, claimed to be responsible for their action plus offered a repair or compensation for the losses.

The second place was occupied by 'explicitly apologizing + offering redress' strategies with total 21 responses or 10.8% and the third place was occupied by 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + giving an explanation' strategies with total 17 responses or 8.7%. Furthermore, no participant chose misunderstanding type as his/her way to apologize to other people in situation 2, 7, and 10.

Here are two typical examples of this combination by the participants in "unfinished students' task correction" situation:

> *P/39/2*: "*Maaf ya…*" – "Sorry ya…"                       **[Explicitly Apologizing]**
> "*…Ibu belum selesai mengoreksi tugasmu…*" – "…I haven't finished

correcting your task…" **[Acknowledging Responsibility]**
"…*nanti kalau sudah selesai akan ibu kembalikan*" – "…I will return it when finished" **[Offering Redress]**

P/34/2: "*Maaf ya nak…*" – "Sorry kids…" **[Explicitly Apologizing]**
"…*Ibu belum selesai menilai tugasnya…*" – "…I haven't finished marking the task…" **[Acknowledging Responsibility]**
"…*Ibu akan selesaikan dulu, setelah itu baru ibu akan kembalikan*" – "…I will finish it first, after that I will return it" **[Offering Redress]**

## Apology Strategies based on Same Age and Equal Social Status

Same age and equal social status mean the person in each situation has the same age and equal social status with the participants. We can say that students in University of Balikpapan tend to use combination strategies as their way in doing apology based on same age and equal social status. They used 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + offering redress' with total 47 responses or 24.1%. It can be inferred that most participants expressed their apology explicitly or directly, claimed to be responsible for their action plus offered a repair or compensation for the losses by their action.

The second place was occupied by 'explicitly apologizing + offering redress' strategies with total 38 responses or 19.5% and the third place was occupied by 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + giving an explanation' strategies with total 34 responses or 17.4% as his/her way to apologize to other people in situation 3, 4, and 9. Here are two typical examples of this combination by the participants in "making best friend's car dented" situation:

P/31/4: "*Maaf …*" – "Sorry…" **[Explicitly Apologizing]**
"…*saya merusak mobilmu tanpa sengaja…*" – "…I broke your car unintentionally …" **[Acknowledging Responsibility]**
"…*saya akan berusaha memperbaikinya*" – "…I will try to fix it" **[Offering Redress]**

P/16/4: "*Maaf banget…*" – "I am so sorry…" **[Explicitly Apologizing]**
"…*saya lalai dalam meminjam mobil kamu. Saya tidak sengaja menabrak mobil lain…*" – "…I borrowed your car carelessly. I unintentionally hit other car …" **[Acknowledging Responsibility]**
"…*Biaya perbaikannya akan saya tanggung kok. Maaf ya*" – "…I will pay for repairing cost. Sorry ya" **[Offering Redress]**

## Apology Strategies based on Younger Age and Higher Social Status

Younger age and higher social status mean the person in each situation has the younger age and higher social status than the participants. We can say that

students in University of Balikpapan tend to use combination strategies as their way in doing apology based on younger age and higher social status, especially in situation 5 only, because this indicator only found in situation 5. They used 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility' with total 28 responses or 43.1%. It can be inferred that most participants expressed their apology explicitly or directly and claimed to be responsible for their action.

The second place was occupied by 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + expressing concern for hearer' strategies with total 17 responses or 26.2%. The third place was occupied by and 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility' along with 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + giving an explanation' in the same percentage with total 4 responses or 6.2%. Furthermore, no participant chose opting out and misunderstanding type as his/her way to apologize to other people in situation 5.

Here are two typical examples of this combination by the participants in "unintentionally hit young lady's foot" situation:

*P/30/5*: "*Maaf maaf mbak.*" – "Sorry sorry Miss…"       **[Explicitly Apologizing]**
"…*Saya tidak sengaja menjatuhkannya*" – "…I dropped it unintentionally"              **[Acknowledging Responsibility]**

*P/28/5*: "*Saya minta maaf*" – "I am sorry…"       **[Explicitly Apologizing]**
"…*Saya tidak sengaja melakukannya*" – "…I did it unintentionally"
**[Acknowledging Responsibility]**

The findings have shown that the most often used category, either as a standalone one or in combination with other categories, was explicitly apologizing. This is consistent with Fitriani's (2012) findings on apology strategies based on gender. Other previous researcher used the term "illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID)" which has the same meaning with "explicitly apologizing".  If   the high frequency of the IFID is also considered, the conclusion is that Yemeni EFL University Students intend to use IFIDs mainly 'expressions of regret which are found in every response in the data studied by Alfattah (2010).

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

Based on findings of this study, we can say that the participants as teachers-to-be were well aware of how to use acceptable apology strategies to meet based on specific situations and relationships. They were brave enough to admit their mistakes and say sorry to people around (hopefully to their students) later on

in the future.

The findings have shown that the most often used type, either as a single or combining with other types, was the 'explicitly apologizing'. In so far, as the combination of basic types was concerned, the findings showed that an overwhelming majority of the apologies were combinations rather than single type. Almost all of participants' apologies applied 95.54% combined strategies. They used two up to five strategies combined in one sentence of apology. They did not just say "sorry" but they added other strategies to persuade the listeners to forgive them. They likely used combined strategies to apologize because many people in Indonesia deliver their apology indirectly and long-winded to others as the culture to become polite. Furthermore, the most often used combinations were by far was 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + offering redress' especially in situation 4 about making best friend's car dented.

The last research question is to investigate how age and social status affect students in University of Balikpapan choice of apology strategies. This question can be answered by finding out the most preferred choice of the apology strategies chosen by participants based on age and social status, which were combined strategies. Two most favored combined strategies were 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility strategies' and 'explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility strategies + offering redress'. Moreover, we can say that age and social status affected participants' choice of apology strategies since the result of this study showed that they had different combined apology strategies. To conclude, when we say sorry, we need to choose appropriate strategies that associate with politeness term and culture in Indonesia. Nevertheless, with different ages, social status, educational background and culture, we may have various ways of apology.

Based on the findings of this study, it is not possible to generalize this as absolute truth of each situation of Indonesian or other languages. Consequently, further study is needed before any generalization can be made. The steps would be increasing number of participants, broadening of age range of the participants, and their social status or background, which would lead to a better understanding of how those indicators affect the choice of apology strategies.

Moreover, comparative studies with other languages or cultures, especially English (which is the most commonly studied foreign language in Indonesia), using

the same situations and methodology would be advantageous. Furthermore, using other instruments such as role plays, interviews, and observations in doing data collection can help future study to be more reliable.

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