

THE LEVEL OF DIRECTNESS IN APOLOGISING IN *AKEELAH AND THE BEE* MOVIE DIALOGUE

Faiza Hawa

Rahmawati Sukmaningrum

Abstract

This paper discusses precisely the production of the speech acts of apology. The choice for apology is due to its popularity as a study of speech act and being an illocutionary force so common to take place in daily context. This paper aims to explicate the appropriate strategies of conveying apologies as part of Speech Acts in the social interaction done by the speaker and addressee in movie conversation. Apologies is one of these speech acts, discussed through the analysis of conversation in 'Akeelah and the Bee' movie concerned with the level of directness. The data for the analysis is taken from the dialogue transcripts of Akeelah and the bee movie. Remedial apology with assymetrical relationship are mostly found in the dialogue. The various way of conveying apology between the characters prefers in polite apology.

Keywords : Apology, politeness, the level of directness

INTRODUCTION

Politeness is one of the most important impressions of human. Human beings can not live and communicate each other if conventions of politeness are not observed in the society they live in. It is a universal, interdisciplinary phenomenon. Every culture has its own ways of displaying respect and deference, saving face, avoiding, or minimizing, impositioning and exercising good manners verbally and non-verbally. Numerous studies have shown that the conventions of politeness are different from one culture to another.

According to Brown and Levinson, positive and negative face exists universally in human [culture](#). In social interactions, face-threatening acts (FTAs) are at times inevitable based on the terms of the conversation. A face threatening act is an act that inherently damages the face of the [addressee](#) or the speaker by acting in opposition to the wants and desires of the other. Most of these acts are verbal, however, they can also be conveyed in the characteristics of speech (such as [tone](#), [inflection](#), etc) or in non-verbal forms of [communication](#). At minimum, there must be at least one of the face threatening

acts associated with an [utterance](#). It is also possible to have multiple acts working within a single utterance.

Apologies as one of both negative face, an act that shows that the speaker is succumbing to the power of the hearer, and positive face, An act that shows that the speaker is in some sense wrong, and unable to control himself, which in this act, speaker is damaging his own face by admitting that he regrets one of his previous acts.

This study discusses the analysis of conversation in ‘Akeelah and the Bee’ movie concerned with level of directness of apology. It aims to find out how the level of directness reflects the relationships between the characters.

Apology

Apologies are considered expressive speech acts. Leech (1983:103-105) defined apologies as convivial speech acts with social goal of maintaining harmony between speaker and hearer. Defining an apology is essential to determining its function in the community. An apology does not exist unless the person who is expressing regret is also taking responsibility for a wrong which they have committed. This definition appears to apply whether we are considering an apology from a moral theory point of view or from psychological point of view. This kind of apology is called a “full” apology. A mere expression of regret is called a “partial” apology.

Apology is an expression of sympathy or regret, a statement that one is sorry or any other words or actions indicating contrition or commiseration, whether or not the words or actions admit or imply an admission of fault in connection with the matter to which the words or actions relate.

Apologies are a means of maintaining the social order; they are called for when social norms are violated (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983), thus, being ‘face-supportive’ acts (Holmes, 1989, p.195). They are very good indicators of distance and dominance in relationships, hence reflecting cultural norms (Wolfson, Marmor and Jones, 1986).

In order for an apology to take place, expression of an apology by the offender, and a reply with silent gesture or words by the victim are called for. However, it is also possible that the offender may deny the responsibility, not perceiving himself/herself responsible for the act (Goffman, 1971). There are indeed factors which make the

offender deny the responsibility, such as the offender's own perception of the degree of severity of the offence, the recipient's point of view, age, familiarity and social status.

Olshtain and Cohen (1983) in their study compared and contrasted apologies in English, Russian and Hebrew and presented some semantic formulas. According to them, strategies used to apologize can generally be classified as a) an expression of an apology e.g. 'I apologize', 'I'm sorry', 'please forgive me', 'excuse me' or 'pardon me'; b) an explanation of the situation ; c) an acknowledgement of responsibility e.g. 'It's my fault', 'I was confused', or 'I didn't see you', 'You're right'; d) an offer of repair, e.g. 'I'll pay for the vase'; e) a promise of forbearance, e.g. 'It won't happen again'.

Apology strategies are, in fact, not used on their own, but a combination of several strategies is usually the case. The choice of apology strategy depends on the nature of offence, the severity of the offence, the situation of the interaction, the familiarity of the individuals involved and the sex of the individuals (Fraser, 1981).

Speech Act of Apology

Pragmatics is the study of communication – the study of how language is used. In other words, pragmatics occupies a realm intermediate between language autonomous, decontextualized approaches and more complex theories entailing the consideration of the linguistic context and extralinguistic circumstances in which utterances occur. Brinton (2001, p.140) states that pragmatics is frequently equated with speech act theory. According to Austin's 'speech act theory', language as action serves a range of different functions such as promising, asserting, describing, complaining, apologizing, etc.

In the light of the speech act theory, it can be said that to apologize is an illocutionary act, which is achieved through the uttering of the performative verb 'apologize'. Performative verbs carry an action in themselves. In other words, in performatives, the saying of the words constitutes the performing of an action. In such a case, for example, no one can prevent someone from apologizing except by refusing to listen.

Searle (1975, p.59) introduced a distinction between direct and indirect speech acts which depends on a recognition of the intended effect of an utterance on a particular occasion. Searle makes this distinction between two cases of meaning : 1) the case when

the speaker utters a sentence and means exactly and literally what he says. In this case, what the speaker intends is to produce an illocutionary effect in the hearer 2) the case when the speaker's utterance meaning and the sentence meaning diverge in hints such as insinuations, irony and metaphor. In such cases, the speaker utters a sentence, means what he says, but also means something more. Searle (1980, p.226) further states that "in indirect speech acts, the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer".

Pilkington (1996, p.158) explains the same fact as follows : the addresser in fashioning his or her utterance takes into account what he or she considers to be the concepts and assumptions that are most accessible to the addressee. The addressee follows a route of least effort in using the most accessible concepts and assumptions until a range of contextual effects that the addresser could rationally have intended is derived. Context is extended until such effects are achieved. These effects then constitute the interpretation. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish what is implied, suggested or meant by a sentence or group of sentences and what is actually said.

Gricean conversational maxims and implicatures can also contribute to the understanding of the implied meanings in utterances. Grice distinguishes between what is implied, suggested or meant by a sentence or group of sentences and what is actually said. Grice explains the cooperative principle in the following way : The participants should make their conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which they are exchanged. If the speaker's words convey other than their literal meanings, the situation characteristically gives rise to a conversational implicature (1975, p. 45).

In the light of the information given above, it is possible to make a distinction between direct and indirect apologies. Direct apologies are realized by the use of appropriate performatives whereas indirect apologies consist of linguistic forms which include verbs other than the performative ones. Thus, it is clear that the hearers can understand an indirect apology by relying upon their knowledge of speech acts, along

with the general principles of cooperative conversation, mutually shared factual information, and a general ability to draw inferences.

Apology Strategy

Apology is a frequently used speech act which serves different purposes ranging from maintaining polite rituals that could vary from one society to the another (social etiquette), to the acknowledgement of serious offences. Holmes(1990) acknowledging the importance of face, points out that what matters most in the act of apologising is the face of the hearer. Therefore, an apology is addressed to the hearer's face need and intends to remedy an offence for which the speaker takes responsibility, and thus to restore the equilibrium between speaker and hearer, where the speaker is the apologizer, and the hearer is the person offended (159). The goal is to restore the relationship through the acknowledgement of wrongdoing.

There are a number of linguistic strategies for expressing apologies and a number of reserachers have developed systems of classifying them, among others, Owen (1983): Cohen and Olshstain 1981; Blum-Kulka, et al, 1989; Trosborg 1987. Aijmer (1996) develops Olshstain and Cohen's (1983) apology strategy system, pointing out that an apology speech act can be made on its own or made up of different combinations of semantic formulas. Aijmer distinguishes a total of thirteen apology strategies (1996:83) acknowledging the role that personal preference has regarding the choice of strategies. Aijmer sub classifies these strategies as explicit (direct apologies or expression of regret), implicit strategies (giving accounts, minimizing responsibility, etc) and emotional (those which express the speaker's attitude towards the situation) or non-emotional strategies.

Those thirteen strategies are described as follows:

Explicit Emotional	Explicitly apologising	e.g. I apologise (for)
	Expressing regret	e.g. I'm sorry, I'm afraid that
Explicit Non-emotional	Offering one's apology	e.g. I present my apologies
	Acknowledging a debt of apology	e.g. I owe you an apology
	Demanding forgiveness	e.g. pardon, excuse me
Implicit Emotional	Explicitly requesting the hearer's forgiveness	e.g. I beg your pardon
	Giving an explanation or account	e.g. (I'm so sorry) It's so unusual
	Expressing emotion	e.g. oh (I'm sorry)
Implicit Non-emotional	Self-denigration or self-reproach	e.g. how stupid of me, how awful
	Minimizing responsibility	e.g. I didn't mean to
	Acknowledging responsibility for the offending act	e.g. that's was my fault (Fraser, 1981:263)
	Promising forbearance from a similar offending act	e.g. I promise you that that will never happen again
	Offering redress	e.g. please let me pay for the damage I've done

Data Collection

This paper analyses data drawn from movie entitled *Akeelah and the Bee*, which has been transcribed to be used for qualitative analysis. The dialogues that form part of the data have been created by teams of scriptwriters and enacted by professional actors. The limitations regarding the study of speech acts in general, and in particular the study of the speech act apologising, refer principally to the method of gathering significant data. In this paper a database of all speech acts are compiled based on manually reading the entire transcript. These categorisations are then checked by independent researcher. For this study, scenes that contain the speech act of apologising are isolated and then analysed according to Aijmer's framework of apology strategies (1996), which is based on Olshtain and Cohen framework (1983). This framework allows a detailed cross-cultural comparison of apologies. A total of 19 apologies are found in the data.

Analysis

Aijmer (1996) suggests the classification of apologies conveyed in discourse into two major groups: anticipatory apologies which function is disarming and retrospective apologies which function is remedial.

Disarming apologies are those apologies that anticipate an offence and they are often issued in both sets of data before formulating a question, asking for repetition of what have been said or before making a statement that is contrary to one already formulated by the speaker. Disarming apologies are often easier to convey than remedial apologies because the latter involves a higher cost of face for the speaker. Disarming apologies found in data refer to: 1) asking: 4, 2) repetition/ clarification: 1, 3) asking for turn: 1, 4) impoliteness: 0, 5) interrupting: 3. some apologies used are as follows:

Sorry Chuckie, you need to listen.

I'm sorry Sir, this girl is only 11 ...

Excuse me, spell PRESTIDIGITATION.

Excuse me. I'm sorry the mother of this girl need to talk.

Remedial apologies are those apologies that are uttered after an offence has been committed. They are retrospective, supportive the hearer and self-demeaning (Aijmer, 1996:99). The apologiser's main concern is the reestablishment of harmony with the hearer. There are 10 findings regarding types of offences with the lists as follows:

- Skipping the class,
- Doing wrong spelling,
- Refusing to join spelling bee competition,
- Sneaking up to go out of town without mother's permit,
- Being impolite to Mr. Larabee,
- Telling a lie,
- Making Mrs. Anderson worried,
- Cancelling the meeting,
- Ignoring (Akeelah's)/her best friend,
- Rejecting the invitation,

Results

Explicit Emotional	Explicitly apologizing	e.g. I apologise (for)	1
	Expressing regret	e.g. I'm sorry, I'm afraid that	2
	Offering one's apology	e.g. I present my apologies	0
	Acknowledging a debt of apology	e.g. I owe you an apology	0
Explicit Non-emotional	Demanding forgiveness	e.g. pardon, excuse me	3
	Explicitly requesting the hearer's forgiveness	e.g. I beg your pardon	1
Implicit Emotional	Giving an explanation or account	e.g. (I'm so sorry) It's so unusual	1

Implicit emotional	Non-	Expressing emotion	e.g. oh (I'm sorry)	5
		Self-denigration or self-reproach	e.g. how stupid of me, how awful	2
		Minimizing responsibility	e.g. I didn't mean to	1
		Acknowledging responsibility for the offending act	e.g. that's was my fault (Fraser, 1981:263)	1
		Promising forbearance from a similar offending act	e.g. I promise you that that will never happen again	2
		Offering redress	e.g. please let me pay for the damage I've done	0

The power of relationship between two people is considered symmetrical in this paper if both, hearer and speaker seem to have the same social power in the given context of the scene. The relationship is considered asymmetrical if there is an imbalance of power. They are divided between remedial and disarming apologies. Most of them are asymmetrical, and only two apologies are symmetrical which presented to friends and family (brother – sister). On the other hand, the asymmetrical relationship described as follows:

Teacher – Student: 2, Professor - Teacher: 1, Professor – Student: 1, Student – Principal: 1, Judge – Guest: 1, Daughter – Mother: 2, Student – Professor: 2, Principal – Mother: 2, Principal – Judge: 1, Professor – Mother: 2, Principal – Students: 1, (Young-Old People) Akeelah – Dylan's Father: 1.

Thus, based on the finding, there is imbalance power between the characters in Akeelah and the Bee movie with 89% asymmetrical relationship of characters from the way of their apologising. The level of directness represented through both disarming and remedial apologies which the remedial apologie used more often than disarming apologie.

Conclusion

The main finding of this paper is the level of directness of the apology, mostly remedial apology with asymmetrical relationship. So, from the power of relation between characters in *Akeelah* and the *Bee* movie we can find in various relationship with different level, particularly one is higher than the other or with different class between speaker and hearer. Thereby, the apologies often express in polite ways.

References

- Aijmer, K. 1996. *Conversational Routines in English*. London: Longman.
- Brinton, J. L. 2001. *Historical discourse analysis*. In Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D. and Hamilton, H. (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp.138-160). Oxford : Blackwell Publishers.
- Brown, P., Levinson, S. R. 1987. *Politeness* . Cambridge : C.U.P.
- Fraser, B. 1981. *On apologizing*. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *Conversational Routine* (pp. 259-272). The Hague : Mouton.
- Goffman, E. 1971. *Relations in public*. Harmondsworth : Penguin.
- Grice, H.P. 1975. *Logic and conversation*. In P. Cole and J.L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics*, vol. 3 : *Speech acts*. (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.
- Holmes, J. 1989. *Sex differences and apologies: One aspect of communicative competence*. *Applied Linguistics*, 10,2 , 194-213.
- Holmes, J. 1993. *New Zealand women are good to talk to: an analysis of politeness strategies in interaction*. *Journal of pragmatics*, 20, 91-116.
- Hudson, R.A. 1980. *Sociolinguistics* . Cambridge : C.U.P.
- Lakoff, R. T. 2001. *Nine ways of looking at apologies: The necessity for interdisciplinary theory and method in discourse analysis*. In Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D. and Hamilton,

- H. (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 199-215). Oxford : Blackwell Publishers.
- Olshtain, E., Cohen, A.D. 1983. *Apology : A speech act set*. In Wolfson, N. and E. Judd Rowley (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition* (pp. 18-35). Mass : Newbury House.
- Olshtain, E. 1989. *Apologies across languages*. In Blum-Kulka, S., House, J. and Kasper, G. (Eds.), *Cross cultural pragmatics: request and apologies* (pp. 155-173). New Jersey : Ablex,.
- Pilkington, A. 1996. *Introduction to relevance theory and literary style*. *Language and Literature*, 5,3, 157- 162.
- Searle, J.R. 1975. *Indirect speech acts*. In Cole, P. and J.L.Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics vol 3 : Speech acts*. (pp. 59-77). New York: Academic Press.
- Searle, J.R., Kiefer, F., Bierwisch, M. 1980. *Speech act theory and pragmatics*. Dordrecht : D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Tannen, D. 1994. *Talking from 9 to 5*. New York : William Morrow.
- The Concise Oxford Dictionary of current English. 1980. London: Book Club Associates.
- Wolfson, N., D'Amico-Reisner, L. and Huber, L. 1983. *How to arrange for social commitments in American English*. In Wolfson, N. and E. Judd Rowley (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition* (pp. 116-128). MA : Newbury House.
- Wolfson, N., Marmor, T. and Jones, S.1986. *Problems with the comparison of speech acts across cultures*. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House and G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and Apologies* (pp. 174-197). Norwood NJ : Ablex.
- Wolfson, N. 1989. *Perspectives. Sociolinguistics and TESOL*. Cambridge: Newbury House Publishers.

