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Abstract

Public apology by public figures has to be apologetic and properly constructed in order for it to be publicly accepted. It also requires public figures or celebrities to use the right apology strategies so that the intention of the apologies is well-received by the targeted audiences, and for the apologies to eventually be accepted. This study aims to explore the strategies used by Malaysian public figures in making apology statements through social media. Content analysis method was employed to analyse the written or verbal apologies intended to other public figures, their followers, or the netizens. It was found that the most frequent strategy used in Malaysian public figures' apologies is Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID); in which request of forgiveness strategy is the most frequent sub-strategy while expression of regret is the least frequent sub-strategy. Other notable strategies in their apologies is the strategy of acknowledging responsibility, and non-apology strategies. Interestingly, this study has also found several new apology strategies used by Malaysian public figures which include flattery, diversion, mention of fault, acceptance of punishment or criticism, thanking, and expression of hope.

Keywords: Apology Strategies, Apology, Speech Act, Public Figures, Communicative Competence.

Introduction

Public apology may or may not work for the one apologising. Among effective apologies by public figures, Bill Clinton's second apology for his infamous extra-marital affair with Monica Lewinsky is reputable for its effectiveness as his image was restored (Benoit, William & Drew, 1997) and his public approval ratings increased in America (Cerulo & Ruane, 2014). In contrast, his first apology had displayed his denial of responsibility and led to Americans' divided opinion of whether his apology was sufficient or not but most importantly, they thought he should admit his perjury ("Poll: Americans divided", 1998)

To make an acceptable apology, public figures imitate other public figures' strategies in their apology. "Successful apologies demand a format that resonates with audience expectations—those surrounding the message patterns that routinely reside in media spaces" (Cerulo & Ruane, 2014). In research about apologies of influencers, it was found that different apologies from different influencers use a similar format. Their sincerity or regret is questionable, as the

apologies sound more cliché and similar to one another (Johnson, 2021; Makalintal, 2019). Besides, different culture has different preference of apology strategies (Wierzbicka, 1985). This may lead to varied levels of effectiveness of an apology and how it is perceived by other people including the offended party. Al-Sobh (2013) concluded that the lack of formal teaching on how to apologise leads to the unclear apology strategies employed by EFL undergraduate students at Irbid National University.

Before teaching proper apology strategies, it is also important to figure out the strategies that are used in social media by public figures whose apology is read and listened to by fans or the society in general. The objective of this research is:

- To discover the strategies used by Malaysian public figures when making apology statements through social media.

Literature Review

a. Communicative Competence

The burgeoning demand for good communication skills in English has contributed to a massive need for high quality language teaching skills, materials and resources. Due to this matter, current employers are looking for future employees with good communication skills. It is essential as a prerequisite for advancement and improvement in various fields of employment during our epoch. In addition, language development always employs the appropriate teaching and learning methodologies and strategies based on the needs and demands. The core concept of communicative language teaching is Communicative Competence as proposed by (Hymes, 1972). According to Hymes communicative competence is the 'implicit and explicit knowledge of the rules of grammar and knowledge of the rules of language use' (Hymes, 1972, as cited in Canale and Swain, 1980). As suggested by Sercu (2005), communicative competence refers to an aptitude of a person to act in a foreign language in a linguistically, socio-linguistically and pragmatically suitable way. To define the notion 'communicative competence' we can refer to the two words that constitute it, of which the word 'competence' is the main word. Communicative competence can be defined as 'competence to communicate', that is, having the capability that permits the person to communicate in real situations in order to achieve communicative purpose (Ahmed, 2018). Similarly, Tucker (2006) claims communicative competence as "received understanding as a unidirectional, primarily oral mode of functional meaning-making must give way to new appreciations of dialogical communicative performance as a relational and collaborative act of subjective negotiation". As proposed by Byram (1995), grammatical competence or linguistic competence primarily refers to the skill in using linguistic knowledge to communicate. The term sociolinguistic competence denotes the ability to use language to express oneself and respond appropriately. Undoubtedly, communicative competence is actually the definite aim of English Language Teaching in many countries in the world (Harper, 2020). According to Zhang (2016), upon the influence of communicative language teaching, communicative competence should be the fundamental goal of language education. Communicative language teaching is one of the most dominant and operative language teaching methodologies, which increases learners' communicative competence (Savignon, 2002).

b. Speech Acts

There are many types of actions that can be carried out by using words, besides producing a statement which is the typical use of words. The usage of words can appear in many forms,

for example; making requests, asking questions, giving orders, making promises, giving thanks, offering apologies and so on. Commonly, speech acts in communication express an intended language function. In other words, to communicate is to express an attitude, and the type of speech act being made are parallels to the type of attitude being expressed (Bach, 1998). For instance, a request conveys desire, and an apology conveys regret. As an act of communication, a speech act is achieved if the audience recognises, in line with the speaker's intention, the attitude that is being expressed. The concept of speech acts was first established by Austin (1962) through the book *How To Do Things With Words* and it is further elaborated by Searle (1969) in his book entitled *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Speech acts can be divided into three types of acts; locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Locutionary act is the elementary act of utterance or making a meaningful linguistic expression, illocutionary act is executed through the communicative force of an utterance in which the speakers have an intended meaning to the audience and lastly, perlocutionary act is an utterance with a function that is intending it to have an effect (Hilda, Herland & Diana, 2021). Parallel to this study, the focused speech act category is illocutionary as this study examined the act of apologising among celebrities. Apology expression is an Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) which is used to convey regret, to offer an apology and to ask for forgiveness (Jacobsson, 2002).

(i) Speech Act of Apology

In the category of expressions in Speech Act Theory, apology is seen as one of the main foci in the field of pragmatics due to their importance in communication as an act of diplomacy and politeness. In the field of language studies, there are numerous literatures on apologies using a variety of frameworks and methodologies, ranging from Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) cross-cultural work on apologies based on discourse completion tasks, Trosborg's (1995) work based on role plays and role enactments, and Deutschmann's (2003) work circled around the spoken part of the British National Corpus. To the present, more researchers add up to the collection of work on apologies; Lutzky & Kehoe (2017a; b) and Haugh & Chang (2019), just to name a few. Jacobsson (2002), in his research claims that the act of apologising as one of the speech acts in human language which engrossed the scholars to do studies on social and cultural patterns in language. Classical speech act theory describes and categorises apologising rendering to conditions for an expression of regrets. Olshtain and Cohen (1981) describe apologising as a culture-sensitive speech act of semantic strategies. They further explain that apologies as a speech act happening between two parties in which one of the parties assumes or perceives oneself deserving an explanation because of an offense committed by the other. Aydin (2013) claims that "an act of apology can be considered a remedial act of speech, which means that the speaker is trying to save his or her face because of an action." This is proposed by Goffman's (1971) view of apology in which he regards apology as a remedial act, it is used when one party commits an offence, and the emphases is on the key function of apology as providing a remedy for an offence and re-establishing social harmony.

c. Apology Strategies

There are different variables that can influence the strategies in apologising, for example social differences and social status. Holmes (1995) stated that there were significant differences in expressing apology between genders, and that females are inclined to apologise more. Based on Cohen & Olshtain (1983), an expression of apology usually includes

unambiguous Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFID), which are utterances or rigid expressions that express the meaning of apology or regret. They also propose a framework of five apology strategies; the expression of apology, an explanation or account of the situation, an acknowledgement of responsibility, an offer of repair, and a promise of forbearance. Alfattah (2010) aimed to organise the strategies used for the purpose of apologising from the pragmatic point of view and the findings showed that the subjects used the expressions of regret the most. The other strategy as proposed by Wardoyo (2016) is giving an excuse or justification when someone commits the offence. The offender will eventually apologise when he or she is explaining about the offended situation which is considered as indirect speech act of apologising. This relates to the context of the offense as the statement is intended to “set things right”. Alquraishy (2011) stated that a strategy of apology is used to maintain the relationship in order to reduce the offense to the offended and everyone has their own way to express their apology to other people. The apology can be a direct apology by using the word that signals apology such as sorry or apologise, or indirectly such as the offender giving explanation to them or taking on responsibility of the offence committed (Trosborg, 1995).

A study by Banikalef and Marlyna (2013b) found that the most used apology strategies are IFID and the strategy of acknowledging responsibility. According to them, explicit apology expressions like IFID might differ across different languages. Jordanian and British respondents used the expression of regret subcategory but the use of substrategy “I am afraid + sentence” was only used by British speakers. Therefore, it was concluded that each language employs different expressions to be utilised as IFID (Banikalef & Marlyna, 2013b).

Banikalef, Maros, Aladdin & Al-Natour (2015) found that acknowledging responsibility is the most used apology strategy, followed by a combination of acknowledging responsibility and swearing by God’s name. Interestingly, non-apology strategies are also frequently used. On the other hand, IFIDs were not frequently used. It was believed to be so because Jordanians do not want to ‘lose face’ and prefer to use implicit apology strategies instead.

Another study involving Jordanian subjects found that IFID is used with higher preference for expression of regret than other IFID sub-strategies. Al-Adaileh (2007) found that British and Jordanian subjects use expression of regret more than offer of apology or request of forgiveness. In Jordanian language, the word ‘apologise’ is of higher level of formality. Thus, using it might cause less face loss than using the request of forgiveness strategy (Al-Adaileh, 2007).

Another interesting finding in Al-Adaileh’s study was the use of proverbs in the subjects’ apologies. Besides its ability to save the offended person’s face, it may also mean the offender does not want to accept the responsibility. Besides, idiomatic expressions are considered as healing factor as it also sums up the experience of the older generation in the society that values it greatly (Al-Adaileh, 2007). Using proverb as an apology strategy is something that has not been found in other cultures. Different cultures may have different expressions and different interpretations of apology. It can be concluded that apology strategies are language-specific (Banikalef & Marlyna, 2013b; Banikalef et.al., 2015; Al-Adaileh, 2007)

i. Apology Strategies among Public Figures

Every so often people witness famous public figures and celebrities make public apology due to the offence that they committed. They use social media such as Instagram and Facebook as a platform to convey their apology as a way of face-saving them from being criticised and to maintain their good image. These apologies typically follow the public discovering an

offense, past or recent, that the influencer has committed, which results in the influencer using their social media platforms to address the offense and the reaction it has caused (Johnson, 2021). Cunningham (1999) in his study mentions that the issue of sincerity is at the heart of public apology processes and the sincere apology is successful if it is accepted sincerely by the recipients.

According to Cerulo and Ruane (2014), public forgiveness is influenced by the sequential structure of an apology which means some sequences in an apology make it more effective than the others. In another study by Xu (2017), the apology strategies employed by public figures in English and Chinese open letters were analysed. It was found that all public figures used IFID to avoid the resentment and aggression of the public while saving the victim's face. In addition, another preferred apology strategy was the strategy of explanation or account, which Xu (2017) claimed to be what the offended party and the public wanted to hear, and what will gain the public figure understanding and sympathy. Two strategies were considered specific to public figures' apology in their open letters which are expression of gratitude and put forward to wish or demand. They were employed to thank the public for their understanding and to express wish that the offended party will forget the offenses which caused them pressure. This was believed to be effective in rebuilding the public figures' image (Xu, 2017)

A study by Uoti (2022) found that influencers' apologies do not use the strategy of offer of repair but use the strategy of promise of forbearance instead. The most significant strategy used by the influencers was acknowledgment of responsibility. The apologies analysed in the study were made because of offences related to Covid-19 and new apology strategies influenced by the pandemic were found; appealing to the common struggle of the pandemic and reminding the audience of ways to mitigate the pandemic (Uoti, 2022).

Methodology

Most literature on apology strategies centred around second language learners in various countries in comparison with native English speakers. Discourse Completion test (DCT) was utilised which required the respondents to write their apology based on several scenarios provided by the researchers (Nemeth, M., 2015; Sari, 2016; Alsulayyi, 2017), and in some studies, DCT and interviews were used (Al-Adaileh, 2007; Banikalef & Marlyna, 2013b). Meanwhile, a few studies used authentic apologies in the form of social media postings or apology letters to analyse the apology strategies employed (Xu, 2017; Uoti, 2022) and another study used ethnographic observation and semi-structured interviews (Banikalef et. al., 2015). The current qualitative study employs content analysis method in order to explore the use of language among Malaysian public figures' apologies posted on social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube). Qualitative research suits this nature of study on this trend of apology as Forbus (2019) explains "the goal of research on qualitative reasoning is to formalise our intuitive knowledge of methods on how to reason about continuous phenomena and system"(p.4).

19 Malaysian celebrities were selected in this study. With the use of internet and social media, celebrities' public apologies were sought using key words such as "public apologies"/ "*permohonan maaf terbuka*", and "Malaysian celebrities"/ "*selebriti Malaysia*". From this internet search, Malaysian celebrities' public apologies were obtained. The receivers of the apologies included other public figures, their followers, or the netizens. These apology statements were made in Bahasa Melayu (formal and informal), English (formal and informal) and there was also code mixing between the two languages in both written and verbal shares.

These shares were then filtered and only posts from 2020 onwards were selected for this study.

For the data analysis, content analysis method is employed as this method is specifically concerned with the analysis of qualitative data that matches the nature of making replicable and valid inferences from texts and speeches (Anandarajan, Hill & Nolan, 2019). In this study, content analysis method involves transcription of written and verbal utterances of the selected celebrities. These transcriptions are then analysed by classification and labelling in the attempt to explore the apology strategies involved.

Table 1

Apology strategies and examples from previous study

| | Code | Strategy/Sub-strategy | Examples (previous study) |
|------------------------------|----------|---|--|
| (Cohen & Olshtain, 1983) | A | Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) | |
| | A1 | An offer of apology | excuse, apologize, forgive, regret, pardon |
| | A2 | An expression of regret | I'm sorry |
| | A3 | A request of forgiveness | Excuse me, forgive me |
| | B | Explanation or account | I made this video to entertain people because I am a content creator, and this is my job to entertain people |
| | C | Acknowledging responsibility | |
| | C1 | Explicit self-blame | I'm here taking full responsibility for all of that |
| | C2 | Lack of intent | I meant absolutely no harm to anyone |
| | C3 | Expression of self-deficiency | it was a dumb thing to do |
| | C4 | Expression of embarrassment | I do not know what I want to say, |
| | C5 | Self- dispraise | I'm such a dimwit brother!, |
| | C6 | Justifying the hearer | I know a lot of you are genuinely so hurt and so disappointed by this |
| | D | Concern for the hearer | The most important thing is your health |
| (Banikalef & Marlina, 2013b) | E | Promise of forbearance | I won't do it again |
| | F | Offer of repair | I'll pay for the damages |
| | G | Swearing | It is my fault but you know by God I was so busy. O' man by my honor I forget it. |
| (Banikalef et al., 2015) | H | Reassuring the hearer | I will give you my mobile number and insurer's details. |
| | I | Requiring the offended not to get angry | Please don't get so angry with me. |
| | J | Non-apology strategies | |

| | | | |
|--------------|----------|---|--|
| | J1 | Denial of responsibility | Why are you upset with me, I did not nothing bad to you) |
| | J2 | Blame the hearer | The fact that I am blaming you tremendously since I am the who has the right to be angry not you |
| | J3 | Pretend to be offended | You are the one who has to say sorry not me because you always put yourself in silly situations |
| | J4 | Arrogance and ignorance | Get out of my business, I am busy |
| | J5 | Trivialize the severity of the offence | Why are you angry? no need to be angry, nothing serious happened |
| | J6 | Determinism | May Allah Make it easy to you everything is fate and destiny |
| | J7 | Blame something else | Oh dear friend, damn Satan who made me forget the appointment, we manage it later ok? |
| (Uoti, 2022) | K | Covid-19-specific strategies | |
| | K1 | Appealing to the common struggle of the pandemic | The world is already so divided at this time, I would just like all of us to come together and learn through this experience |
| | K2 | Reminding the audience of ways to mitigate the pandemic | Stay safe, stay healthy, wash your hands, stay inside, |

Source: Cohen & Olshtain, 1983; Banikalef & Marlina, 2013b; Banikalef et al., 2015; Uoti, 2022

Table 1 shows the codes which were used to label the strategies. The codes were based on previous research on apology strategies (Cohen & Olshtain, 1983; Banikalef & Marlina, 2013b; Banikalef et al., 2015; Uoti, 2022). Examples from previous studies were also compiled for better understanding of each strategy.

Findings and Discussion

The frequency of apology strategies being used in 19 public figures' apologies is 124. This includes the repetitive usage of any strategy in the apologies. The number of strategies employed by each public figure ranges from three to 11 strategies. The current study found several new apology strategies used by Malaysian public figures which include flattery, diversion, mention of fault, acceptance of punishment or criticism, thanking, and expression of hope.

Table 2

Malaysian public figures' apology strategies and percentage

| STRATEGIES | PERCENTAGE |
|---|------------------------|
| A ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE INDICATING DEVICE (IFID) | (TOTAL: 30.63%) |
| A1 An offer of apology | 13.70% |
| A2 An expression of regret | 1.61% |
| A3 A request for forgiveness | 15.32% |
| B Explanation or account | 5.65% |
| C ACKNOWLEDGING RESPONSIBILITY | (TOTAL: 21.78%) |
| C1 Explicit self-blame | 6.45% |
| C2 Lack of intent | 7.26% |
| C3 Expression of self-deficiency | 4.03% |
| C4 Expression of embarrassment | 0.81% |
| C5 Self- dispraise | 2.42% |
| C6 Justifying the hearer | 0.81% |
| D Concern for the hearer | 0% |
| E Promise of forbearance | 3.23% |
| F Offer of repair | 0.81% |
| G Swearing | 0.81% |
| H Reassuring the hearer | 0% |
| I Requiring the offended not to get angry | 0% |
| J NON-APOLOGY STRATEGIES | (TOTAL: 12.51%) |
| J.1 Denial of responsibility | 1.61% |
| J.2 Blame the hearer | 0% |
| J.3 Pretend to be offended | 1.61% |
| J.4 Arrogance and ignorance | 1.61% |
| J.5 Trivialize the severity of the offence | 5.65% |
| J.6 Determinism | 1.61% |
| J.7 Blame something else | 2.42% |
| K COVID-19-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES | (TOTAL: 0%) |
| K.1 Appealing to the common struggle of the pandemic | 0% |
| K.2 Reminding the audience of ways to mitigate the pandemic | 0% |
| NEW STRATEGIES | |
| Flattery [NEW] | 1.61% |
| Diversion [NEW] | 2.42% |
| Mention of fault [NEW] | 5.65% |
| Accept punishment/criticism [NEW] | 4.03% |
| Thanking [NEW] | 4.89% |
| Expressing hope [NEW] | 4.03% |

Source: Data Analysis

Table 2 shows the percentage of apology strategies used by Malaysian public figures and the examples. The most frequent strategy used in their apologies is IFID (30.63%). This is similar to findings in studies conducted by Banikalef and Marlyna (2013b). Out of 19 public figures,

only one did not use any IFID. Instead, he used one of the non-apology strategies, which is the strategy of trivializing the severity of the offense:

"Jadi aku sebagai orang yang lebih matang dalam benda ini, aku seek apology daripada dia." (So as someone who is more matured, I seek apology from him).

This public figure apologised because he deemed himself as more mature than the person he offended, not because he acknowledged he was wrong.

Meanwhile, the most frequent IFID sub-strategy is request of forgiveness strategy. This strategy was used by 11 of 19 public figures, for the total of 19 times, which makes up 15.32% of all strategies. For example;

"Saya memohon maaf kepada semua yang terkesan dari tindakan memuat naik video berkenaan"

(I ask for forgiveness from everyone who were affected by the act of uploading the video).

In addition, 13.7% of IFID strategies used is an offer of apology. These sub-strategies are an explicit and simple way of apologising. The intention to make peace will be made clear by using these strategies. For example

"Saya minta maaf kepada media yang terguris hati dengan apa yang berlaku sebelum ini."

(I apologise to the media who were hurt because of what had happened recently).

In contrast, the least frequently used IFID is expression of regret (1.61%), which contradicts the findings in a study by Alfattah (2010). In the study, the subjects used the expression of regret the most. However, in Malay language, it is uncommon to say we 'regret' something in our apologies. Instead, we 'ask' for forgiveness by saying 'maafkan saya' (forgive me), or 'saya minta maaf' (I ask for forgiveness), which happen to be the two most frequently used strategies in the public figures' apologies. This is similar to what Al-Adaileh (2007) claimed; some strategies are language-specific strategies and are heavily influenced by social parameters.

Besides IFID, the strategy of acknowledging responsibility is also frequently used in the apologies (21.78%). This includes its three most popular sub-strategies; lack of intent (7.26%), explicit self-blame (6.45%), and expression of self-deficiency (4.03%). This is similar to findings by Banikalef et al. (2015) and Uoti (2022) who found that acknowledging responsibility strategy is one of the most preferred apology strategies. Some examples of these strategies are;

Lack of Intent

"Trust me, it was never my intention to offend you"

Explicit self-blame:

"Saya mengambil apa yang berlaku berhubung kenyataan saya tempoh hari sebagai kesilapan sendiri"

(I consider whatever happened regarding my statement recently as my own fault)

Expression of self-deficiency:

“Saya juga manusia biasa yang tidak lari dari melakukan kesilapan”

(I am just a normal human being who cannot escape from making mistakes).

These strategies seem to be able to elicit some sympathy from the public as the public figures make themselves relatable.

In addition to IFID and acknowledging responsibility strategies, the strategy of explanation or account only makes up to 5.65% of the strategies in public figures' apology. 12 out of 19 public figures did not use the strategy of explaining or giving excuses but apologised using IFID. It is probably because public figures are prone to be subjected to harsh criticism. Thus, explanations or excuses can be seen as an attempt to get away from the blame which will call for more criticism. This finding contradicts those by Xu (2017) who claimed that explanation or excuses are what the offended party and the public want to hear and is the preferred strategies by English and Chinese public figures in their open letters. This strategy would also give the public figure understanding and sympathy from the others (Xu, 2017).

Furthermore, it was found that unlike Banikalef and Marlyna's (2013b); Al-Adaileh's (2007) findings, there is lack of swearing in Malaysian public figures' apology (0.81%), even though they are mostly Muslims. This could probably be due to the different culture and language. To Muslims in Malaysia, swearing by God's name is the most powerful oath they can make and is something that should not be taken lightly. It is also not something that is said casually in light conversations. When swearing is included, the apology will sound more serious and reliable, but if the public figures swear by God's name in public and later break the oath, the backlash could be worse.

Meanwhile, the usage of non-apology strategies is not as high as the strategies discussed earlier. A total of 14.51% of the 124 strategies consists of non-apology strategies. The most frequent non-apology strategy is the strategy of trivializing the severity of the offence (5.65%). For example

“Program tu dah ditayangkan lama sebenarnya dan baru kini dihebohkan balik saya tak tahu apa tujuannya”

(The programme was actually aired some time ago and only now it is brought up again, I don't know why)

Other non-apology strategies used by the public figures are; blame something else (2.42%), denial of responsibility (1.61%), pretend to be offended (1.61%), arrogance and ignorance (1.61%), and determinism (1.61%). These strategies were not preferred by most of them probably because they wanted to avoid further damage to their image as public figures.

New strategies used by public figures in their apologies were found in this study. One of them is the strategy of mention of fault (5.65%). Only 7 out of 19 public figures explicitly or directly mentioned their fault which they were apologising for. This strategy can be considered as acknowledging responsibility strategy. For example

“Kita rasa macam kita mulakan tahun 2021 ini dengan negatif, tahu tak. Gaduh dengan netizen...”

(I feel like I have started 2021 negatively, you know. Arguing with the netizens..)

This strategy is not a preference probably because reinstating people’s memory about their mistakes or offense can only add fuel to fire, and the people who had no knowledge about it will know about it too.

Moreover, another strategy that has been found in the current study is the strategy of thanking (4.89%). Some public figures thanked the offended person, their fans, or the netizens. This strategy is seen as a way to show humility, and to show that there is a learning growth as a result of the mistake that happened and the lesson they learnt afterward. For example;

“Alhamdulillah, syukur pada Allah atas apa yang terjadi. Jutaan terima kasih juga pada kalian semua yang selalu mendoakan saya selama ini”

(Praise to Allah, thank you Allah for everything that has happened. Thanks to you too who keep praying for me all this time)

Similarly, Xu (2017) found the same strategy being employed in English and Chinese open letters of apology to express their gratitude for the public’s understanding.

Furthermore, Malaysian public figures also used the strategy of expressing hope in their apology (4.03%). This strategy was used to show the public figures’ hopes and prayers related to them moving forward or related to the current situation. For example;

“Moga ia menjadi pengajaran buat saya serta anak seni yang lain”.

(Hopefully this becomes a lesson for me and other celebrities).

“Marilah kita sama-sama doakan semoga negara kita dan dunia bebas daripada Covid-19”

(Let’s pray that our country and the whole world will be free of Covid-19)

In contrast, English and Chinese public figures in their open letters used the strategy of expressing their wish that the offended party would soon forget the offenses and not be hurt by it anymore (Xu, 2017).

In addition, accepting punishment or criticism strategy was also a part of Malaysian public figures’ apology (4.03%) that has not been found in the literature. The definition of punishment in this study is the criticism, backlash, or removal of support from fans or the public in general. Using this strategy make the public figures look polite, and mindful of people’s perception of them. One of the ways the public figures used this strategy is;

“Kalau mereka tidak mahu berkawan dengan saya selepas ini pun, tidak mengapa”

(If they do not want to be my friends after this, it’s okay)

“Apapun yang korang cakap saya terima dengan hati yang terbuka”

(I will accept whatever you said with an open heart)

This strategy is close to promise of forbearance strategy but instead of making a promise, they just express their hopes which can reduce the pressure and attention on them in the future.

Lastly, there are two other new strategies which are diversion (2.42%) and flattery (1.61%) which were not frequently used in the apologies. These strategies may be considered as non-apology strategies. However, it is note-worthy that these public figures used these strategies to talk about something that does not relate to the apology or the mistake they did. For example, this public figure inserted this compliment in the apology out of nowhere. The use of this strategy made the apology sound incoherent.

Flattery:

“Handsome boy”

Diversion

“I couldn't have asked for a better band of brothers to share this experience. Thank you for the late-night talks, the love, and your guidance”

The example of diversion strategy above was not coded as the strategy of thanking because the public figure was thanking people unrelated to his offense. He did not talk about nor acknowledge his mistake. Instead, he apologised to the public without acknowledging any responsibility. This diversion strategy may be intentional to make it look like an apology when it is not.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the most frequently used apology strategy by Malaysian public figures is IFID especially the strategy of request of forgiveness, and an offer of apology. The strategies of acknowledging responsibilities like showing lack of intent, explicit self-blame, and expressing self-deficiency are also one of the most preferred apology strategies. An interesting finding would be the lack of explanation or account strategy in the apologies, unlike in similar studies in other countries. Lack of swearing in the apologies is not shocking as swearing is considered as an oath which, if broken, will elicit more anger from the public. The most interesting finding in this study is the discovery of new strategies specifically used by Malaysian public figures which are flattery, diversion, mention of fault, accept punishment or criticism, and thanking. These strategies differentiate the apologies of public figures and those of ESL learners or native speakers which can be found in many other studies. The limitation of this study is the small sample of the study and the limited literature on public figures' apology. It is hoped that this study contributes to the literature of this research area.

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