Apology Strategies Used by the Ninth Grade Students of MTs Almahfudz in the Academic Year of 2024/2025

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Article Info	Abstract
	This study describes the apology strategies employed by ninth-grade students at MTs Almahfudz in the academic year of 2024/2025. Apologies are a crucial component of pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), yet their use among junior high school students remains underexplored. Every student has their own unique way of apologizing and the way to express apology is unique to be analyzed. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were gathered through a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) by Harb 2015. The analysis followed the framework developed by Olshtain and Cohen's (1983), which classifies apology strategies into five categories: Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), acknowledgment of responsibility, explanation of account, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance. Results reveal that IFID was the most frequently employed strategy (34.6%), followed by acknowledgment of responsibility (24.3%), explanation of account (20.3%), offer of repair (11.7%), and promise of forbearance (9.1%). The study also found that students often combined multiple strategies to strengthen their apologies. Future research could explore how social variables such as gender and age impact the choice of apology strategies.

Artikel Info	Abstrak
	Penelitian ini mendeskripsikan strategi permintaan maaf yang digunakan oleh siswa kelas sembilan di MTs Almahfudz pada tahun ajaran 2024/2025. Permintaan maaf adalah komponen penting dari kompetensi pragmatis dalam Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL), namun penggunaannya di kalangan siswa sekolah menengah pertama masih belum banyak diteliti. Setiap siswa memiliki cara yang unik untuk meminta maaf dan cara mengungkapkan permintaan maaf yang unik untuk dianalisis. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui Tes Penyelesaian Wacana (DCT) oleh Harb 2015 dan dianalisis berdasarkan kerangka kerja Olshtain dan Cohen (1983), yang mengklasifikasikan strategi permintaan maaf ke dalam lima kategori: Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), pengakuan tanggung jawab, penjelasan, tawaran perbaikan, dan janji kesabaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa IFID adalah strategi yang paling sering digunakan (34,6%), diikuti oleh pengakuan tanggung jawab (24,3%), memberi penjelasan (20,3%), tawaran perbaikan (11,7%), dan janji untuk bersabar (9,1%). Studi ini juga menemukan bahwa siswa sering menggabungkan beberapa strategi untuk memperkuat permintaan maaf mereka. Penelitian selanjutnya dapat mengeksplorasi pengaruh faktor sosial seperti jenis kelamin dan usia terhadap pemilihan strategi permintaan maaf.

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, being able to communicate successfully in English has become essential. In order to communicate effectively, language learners need to develop communicative competence (Taghizadeh, 2017). Communicative competence is the ability to understand and use language effectively effectively for communication in real-life social and academic settings (Suratman et al., 2017). In other words, this competence enables individuals to interact meaningfully, adapt their language to different situations, and engage appropriately in conversations, thereby enhancing their overall communication skills in both personal and educational environments.

According to Bachman (1990), three components of communicative competence were language competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms. In developing of communicative competence, Bachman further categorized language competence into two main types: organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence is the ability to recognize speakers' intentions, interpret their emotions and attitudes, and distinguish between different speech acts, such as requesting, suggesting, and making threats (Ahmed, 2022).

Through pragmatics, individual allows to navigate social interactions more effectively by understanding context, tone, and underlying meanings in communication. Although pragmatic competence plays a crucial role in interpersonal communication, it is often overlooked in second or additional language instruction (Amaliah, 2024). In sum, although pragmatic competence is essential for effective communication and social interaction, it is frequently overlooked in the teaching of second or additional languages.

Pragmatic competence is associated with concepts such as speech acts. According to Yule (1996), the speech act theory suggests that when people produce utterances with grammatical structures and words, they are not only conveying information but also performing actions. In other words, a speech act is an expression a speaker uses in response to an action directed at the audience or other speakers. Within the framework of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, mastering social interactions is essential for effective communication, with one important aspect being the ability to apologize appropriately. Speech act of apology plays a crucial role in human communication (Pratiwi & Hamzah 2022). Therefore, understanding the nature and function of an apology in communication is important. An apology is an expressive speech act that helps maintain harmony between speakers and listeners (Amalia & Mujazin, 2023). We should really apologize for our mistakes in order to make amends and ask the listener for forgiveness.

Using appropriate strategies is important to making an apology more effective (Sabilla & Jusmaya, 2020). This means that in order to successfully apologize and get the speaker to forgive us, people should use particular strategies. For Indonesian EFL students, learning these strategies is crucial, as effective apologies help establish and sustain positive relationships in English-speaking cultures. Each student, particularly those in junior high school, has their own unique way of apologizing and the way to express apology is unique to be analyzed. Apologizing goes beyond simply saying "sorry", it requires understanding how to properly express regret, accept responsibility, and provide solutions when necessary.

The concept of apology has been the subject of numerous academic investigations. The first one was done by Eksa (2023) entitled "Apology Speech Act Strategies Used by Students in Faculty of Letters, Dr. Soetomo University". The study's findings indicate that the research subjects most frequently used multiple apology strategies rather than a single type. The majority of participants expressed apologies by offering a solution or employing a repair strategy. Additionally, most research subjects preferred using an indirect apology strategy. Another study was done by Retnowaty & Maulida (2019) entitled "Apology Strategies Used by Students in University of Balikpapan". The results found that majority participants used the combinations apology rather than single type. The most combination used was a combination of strategies "explicitly apologizing + acknowledging responsibility + offering redress." Furthermore, the study revealed that participants' selection of apology strategies was affected by their age and social status. On the other hand, there is also previous study that analyse apology strategies in a movie. Previous study conducted by Silvina & Hartati (2023) entitled "Apology Strategy in Disney and Pixar's Luca Movie: A Pragmatic Approach" highlighted the different apology strategies used by the characters. The finding found 9 distinct apology strategies employed by the characters in the story of Luca. Some of the recognized strategies involved expressing a sincere apology, showing remorse for one's actions or mistakes, and offering self-blame explanations.

It can be concluded from previous studies mentioned above that these studies highlight the diverse ways apologies are expressed across different settings. Motivated by the concept of apology strategies, the researchers decided to explore this topic further by conducting a study on apology strategies among junior high school students entitled "Apology Strategies Used by the Ninth Grade Students of MTs Almahfudz in the Academic Year of 2024/2025". Meanwhile, the objective of this research is to describe the apology strategies employed by the ninth grade students of MTs Almahfudz.

II. METHOD

The researcher used descriptive qualitative research design in this study. Creswell (2018) defines qualitative research as a methodology for exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to social or human phenomena. Since the goal was to describe the apology strategies employed by the students, the descriptive qualitative research design was well-suited to this study. This study was conducted in March 2025 at MTs Almahfudz, Central Java, Indonesia. This study engaged

twenty students of ninth grade, MTs Almahfudz in the academic year of 2024/2025 as the participants.

The instrument employed in this study was the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). DCT is a type of questionnaire that presents real-life situations where respondents are expected to respond by offering an apology. According to Kasper (2000), the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is considered a reliable instrument for data collection in studies aiming to investigate speakers' pragma-linguistic competence, particularly in relation to the strategic and linguistic forms utilized in communicative acts. Additionally, it helps assess their socio-pragmatic awareness of the contextual factors that govern the appropriateness of specific strategies and linguistic choices. The study uses the DCT from Harb (2015) to collect the data. They are given ten situations in "Bahasa Indonesia" which the students are likely to encounter in their daily language interactions in the school activities. Students are encouraged to connect with the situation and respond using their natural language reactions in similar circumstances. According to Ogeirman (2009), DCT can be translated into other languages because it is ideal for comparing speech acts in similar situations across different languages. The questionnaire was distributed offline by paper in the class.

The steps taken to analyze the data, from the beginning to the conclusion of the process, were as follows: the researcher investigated DCT about apology strategies with the help of analysis table to know students' individual choice, the researcher displayed the data using apology strategies table, the researcher interpreted the tables mentioned above and analyzed strategies based on Olshtain & Cohen's 1983 theory, last the researchers conclude the result of analysis to address the research questions.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION
A. Result

The primary data in this research are the students' responses to a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) from Harb's study in 2015. The collected data are analyzed using Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) framework, which classifies apology strategies into five semantic formulas such as explicit expressions of apology or IFID, acknowledgment of responsibility for offense, explanation of account, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance. This section showes the findings from the data analysis, with a focus on the classification of apology strategies. The table below illustrates the types of apology strategies employed by the ninth grade students at MTs Almahfudz.

Table 1. Apology Strategies Used by Participants

NO	Type of Apology Strategy	Frequency	%
1.	IFID	240	34,6 %
2.	Acknowledgement of Responsibility for Offense	169	24,3 %
3.	Explanation of Account	141	20,3 %
4.	Offer of Repair	81	11,7 %
5.	Promise of Forbearance	63	9,1 %
	Total	**694**	**100%**

According to the data collected from ten different situations given to 20 participants, a total of 200 utterances were produced, containing 694 apology strategies. These 694 strategies were categorized into ten main types by Olshtain and Cohen's (1983). The findings indicate that the most commonly used apology strategy among students was the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), accounting for 34.6% of the total responses. This strategy is applied when a person feels regret for their actions. Sometimes, IFID is used twice within a single utterance. This can occur when the speaker feels deeply sorry for offending the listener. IFID become the most dominant strategy used by the students with the frequency was 240. This suggests that students primarily use direct expressions of apology. The following are examples of IFID utterances used by the participants:

Aduh Bu, maafin saya ya Bu.
(Ouch Miss, I'm so sorry Miss.)
Maafin kakak ya dek.
(Please forgive me brother.)
Maaf ya aku lupa mengembalikan kameramu, aku benar benar minta maaf.
(I'm sorry I forgot to return your camera, I'm really sorry.)

The Acknowledgement of Responsibility for Offense strategy was the second most common used by the students with the frequency were 169 sentences (24.3%), indicating that many students admitted fault in their apologies. The following are examples of utterances in which participants accepted responsibility:

Maaf ini salahku karena aku teledor.
(I'm sorry it's my fault for being negligent.)
Ini murni kesalahan saya Pak.
(This is purely my fault sir.)
Maaf saya tidak sengaja Bu.
(Sorry I didn't mean to, Miss.)

The Explanation of Account strategy (20.3%) showed that students often provided reasons for their mistakes. In this data, 141 utterances provided an explanation or account of the situation. The following utterances are examples of how participants responded when providing an explanation or account of a situation:

Maaf ya soalnya tadi banyak pekerjaan dan sibuk.
(I'm sorry that I was so busy with work.)
Maaf aku tidak bisa hadir sekarang karena ibuku menyuruhku mengantarkannya ke suatu tempat.
(I'm sorry I can't come now because my mom told me to drop her off somewhere.)
Maaf saya lupa membawa buku yang sudah saya pinjam karena sibuk dengan pekerjaan rumah.
(Sorry I forgot to bring the book I borrowed because I was busy with homework.)

The Offer of Repair strategy (11.7%) showed that students attempted to make amends. In this data, there were 81 utterances showed offer of repair strategy used by the students. The following utterances are examples of how participants responded to offer of repair:

Maaf ini bukumu di rumahku dibuat mainan oleh adikku, ini jadinya bukumu aku ganti saja.
(I'm sorry your book at my house was made into a toy by my sister, so I'll just replace your book.)
Maaf ya bu saya buru buru dan tidak sengaja menabrak Ibu, sini saya saja yang bawa bukunya Bu.
(Sorry ma'am, I was in a hurry and accidentally bumped into you, let me bring the book ma'am.)
Maaf teman aku lupa, lama banget nih aku mengembalikannya, yaudah aku tebus deh. Aku traktir kamu makan ya.
(Sorry, friend, I forgot, it took me so long to return it, I'll redeem it. I'll treat you to a meal.)

Less frequently used were Promise of Forbearance (9.1%) with the frequency was 63, in which they committed to avoiding similar mistakes in the future. The following utterances are Promise of Forbearance utterances used by the participants:

Maaf ya aku telat, aku janji nggak akan telat lagi.
(I'm sorry I'm late, I promise I won't be late again.)
Maaf, saya janji akan lebih berhati hati ketika berjalan.
(Sorry, I promise to be more careful when walking.)
Besok deh kakak belikan jajan, kakak janji nggak akan lupa lagi.
(Tomorrow I'll buy you some snacks, I promise I won't forget again.)

B. Discussion

This study highlights the importance of pragmatic competence, especially in developing apology strategies, as an essential aspect of effective communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Using Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) apology strategy framework, the findings show that ninth-grade students at MTs Almahfudz utilized various apology strategies including direct expressions of apology or Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), acknowledgement of responsibility for offense, explanation of account, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance. These strategies demonstrate the students' ability to navigate social interactions and maintain interpersonal harmony.

The results of this study show that Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) is the most frequently employed apology strategy among ninth-grade students at MTs Almahfudz. This suggests that students primarily rely on direct expressions of regret, such as saying "sorry" or "forgive me." The dominance of IFID is consistent with the findings of Eksa (2023), who also reported that university students preferred direct apology strategies. This similarity suggests that students frequently use simple apologies because they are comfortable and easy to understand, regardless of their educational background. However, the frequent use of IFID among junior high school students might

also be attributed to their limited pragmatic competence in utilizing more complex apology strategies. The findings also shown that the students most frequently used more than one strategy to apologies, they tended to use multiple or combination strategy rather than single strategy. The previous studies carried out by Eksa (2023) and Retnowaty & Maulida (2019) were in line with this research found that the strategy of multiple apologies became the most frequently used strategy.

The acknowledgement of responsibility strategy was the second most common, appearing in 24.3% of the responses. This indicates that many students recognize the importance of admitting fault when apologizing. The explanation of account strategy is the third most frequently used strategy in this research (20.3%), in contrast with Silvina & Hartati's (2023) research on movie dialog found that explanation is rarely used. It was found that there were only 2 utterances that used the explanation of account strategy. This disparity can be attributed to the scripted nature of movie dialogues, apologies by movie characters tend to be more concise and direct, whereas students in real life are given more opportunities to clarify their actions. In addition, Silvina & Hartati's (2023) analysis focused on fictional characters in Luca, meanwhile this study provides real-world data on apology strategies among young learners in an educational setting. This fills a gap in existing research by examining how junior high school students approach apologies.

Less frequently employed strategies include offer of repair (11.7%) and promise of forbearance (9.1%). These findings imply that although students understand the importance of apologizing, they are less inclined to provide promises of better behavior or take corrective action. In contrast, Retnowaty & Maulida (2019) found that university students were more inclined to offer repairs, possibly due to their greater understanding of social expectations and responsibility. The lower occurrence of these strategies among younger students may indicate that they have not yet fully grasped the importance of making amends as part of an apology.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Olshtain & Cohen's (1983) framework, which categorizes apology strategies based on different levels of social awareness. The predominance of IFID and Acknowledgement of Responsibility among students suggests a reliance on direct and basic apology strategies, reflecting their developing pragmatic competence. Practically, these results highlight the need for EFL instruction to emphasize a wider range of apology strategies, particularly those involving problem-solving and behavioral commitments.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
A. Conclusion

This study aimed to describe the apology strategies used by ninth-grade students of MTs Almahfudz during the academic year of 2024/2025. The results revealed that students utilized a variety of apology strategies based on Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) framework, including Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) (34,6 %), acknowledgment of responsibility (24,3 %), explanation of account (20,3 %), offer of repair (11,7 %), and promise of forbearance (9,1 %). Among these, IFID was the most frequently employed strategy, reflecting the students' preference for direct expressions of regret. Additionally, many students combined multiple strategies to enhance the effectiveness of their apologies, such as pairing explicit apologies or IFID with acknowledgment of responsibility or offers of repair.

Furthermore, the study highlights differences in apology strategies across various contexts, with younger learners using fewer repair offers and promises for better future behavior compared to university students. This suggests that as learners mature, they develop a deeper understanding of social expectations in communication. The study contributes to existing research by providing real-world insights into apology strategies among junior high school students, an area that has received limited attention in prior studies. These findings emphasize the need for enhanced EFL instruction focused on pragmatic competence, helping students develop more effective and contextually appropriate apology strategies for diverse social interactions.

B. Suggestion

Future research in the same topic may use this findings as base information. The researcher makes several recommendations

that might be useful for further study. First, this study examines junior high school student strategies for apologizing. While this study analyzed overall apology patterns, future research could examine how factors such as gender, social status, or the severity of the offense influence students' choice of apology strategies. Second, the future researchers might look at the variations in the students' apology strategies and responses. Future researchers might consider conducting longitudinal studies to track how students' use of apology strategies evolves over time, from junior high through high school or even university. Lastly, another additional theory can be used by future researchers to categorize apology strategies.

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