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Research Article

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Apology Strategies in Asian English: A Corpus-Based Study of Cultural Variation in L2 Apology Behavior

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Abstract

This study is based on the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE) and aims to explore whether the cultural backgrounds of different Asian countries influence the use of apology expressions and apology strategies in English. The research selects spoken language data from six Asian countries (China, Japan, South Korea, India, Malaysia, and the Philippines) and compares them with spoken language data from the United Kingdom. The goal is to provide new insights into understanding cultural differences among Asian countries and to offer references for English learners to improve their pragmatic competence. The results indicate that both the choice of apology expressions and apology strategies vary across different cultural backgrounds. In terms of apology expressions, "sorry" is the most frequently used, followed by "apology" and its variants, while "forgive," "pardon," and "excuse" are used relatively less. Cluster analysis shows that South Korea, the Philippines, the UK, and Malaysia are the most similar, followed by China, South Korea, the Philippines, the UK, and Malaysia, while Japan and India differ significantly from the other five countries. Regarding apology strategies, the most common strategy is the direct use of Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), followed by IFIDs combined with explanations of the situation or reasons for the apology, and then IFIDs combined with mitigating expressions. IFIDs combined with compensatory actions and repeated apologies are less frequent. Cluster analysis of apology strategies reveals that the Philippines and Malaysia, as well as the UK and South Korea, are the most similar, with India being relatively close to these four countries, while China and Japan differ significantly from the other five. Correspondence analysis of apology behaviors in Asian countries shows that Dimension 1 clearly distinguishes between Eastern and Western cultures, while Dimension 2 broadly differentiates countries based on power distance and collectivism tendencies. The differences in the use of apology expressions and strategies among Asian countries are related to culture and can be explained using Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. These findings have reference value for enhancing the teaching of second language pragmatic competence.

Keywords: *Apology strategies; Apology behavior; Asian countries; Corpus study; Cultural dimensions.*

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the differences in English apology behaviors among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in Asian countries, with these differences largely stemming from the influence of cultural transfer. Zeng (2013) [1] posits that people sharing the same cultural background tend to draw from a common national cultural heritage, acquiring similar experiences, beliefs, and values, thereby forming identical thought patterns and behavioral models. Consequently, communicators from different cultures adhere to distinct conventions. Apology behaviors across nations are influenced by their respective cultural and social contexts. For instance, Eastern cultures, shaped by Confucianism, emphasize humility, politeness, and harmony, leading to indirect and tactful apologies that spare both parties' face. In contrast, Western cultures, with their focus on equality, tend to favor direct and concise apologies. For second language (L2) learners, who's native and target languages may originate from different cultural types, this further intensifies the negative transfer effects of their native language on the L2. L2 pragmatic competence is built upon native language pragmatic foundations and is inevitably influenced by them (Shen, 2023) [2]. This influence manifests in two aspects: vocabulary and apology strategies. Barron (2019) [3] indicates that the choice of apology words in an L2 is influenced by those in the native language. For example, the frequent use of "sorry" in English is mirrored in German expressions, where the German equivalent of "sorry" is also commonly used, with less reliance on a variety of words. Regarding the selection of apology strategies, research by Degenhardt and Bernaisch (2022) [4] reveals differences between British and Indian apology strategies, with the extent of these differences related to the degree of English exposure.

In today's globalized world, cross-cultural interaction is inevitable, and high levels of pragmatic competence can prevent communication breakdowns and associated losses caused by pragmatic failures. Apologies and requests are prevalent speech acts across cultures and among the most frequently used in daily life (Blum et al., 1984) [5]. With globalization deepening, studying apology behaviors can further enhance English learners' L2 pragmatic competence and cross-cultural communication skills, preventing pragmatic failures.

In cross-cultural communication, apology behaviors are an indispensable part of interaction, reflecting not only individuals' cultural backgrounds but also societal norms and values. Given the rich cultural diversity in Asian countries, English apology behaviors should exhibit varied manifestations. However, research on English speech acts in cross-cultural contexts, particularly concerning Asian countries, remains relatively scarce. Therefore, this study aims to explore differences in

English apology behaviors across different Asian countries and analyze the underlying cultural motivations. Furthermore, with frequent interactions among Asian countries in the context of globalization and English serving as an international lingua franca, understanding the diversity in apology behaviors is crucial for cross-cultural communication. Apologies are not merely linguistic acts but also social behaviors involving complex factors such as face, politeness, and social harmony. By analyzing the use of apology language across nations, this study seeks to provide new perspectives for understanding cultural differences among Asian countries and offer practical guidance for cross-cultural communication.

The research questions addressed in this study are threefold: 1) Do English apology behaviors differ across cultural backgrounds? 2) What are the differences in apology strategies across cultural backgrounds? 3) Are the apology strategies of different countries related to their cultures?

2. Literature Review

Kecskes (2004, 2010) [6,7] posits that intercultural pragmatics focuses on how communicators with different native languages, often representing distinct cultural backgrounds, interact using a shared foreign language system in social contexts. It examines communicative behaviors across cultures, particularly the realization of speech acts (such as requests, apologies, and expressions of gratitude) in different cultural settings. For instance, researchers compare the linguistic forms and strategies employed by native and non-native English speakers when apologizing, as well as how these strategies are influenced by cultural values and communicative habits. Some studies concentrate on regional varieties of English, exploring the linguistic features of English variants in specific regions or countries, such as Indian English, Sri Lankan English, and Australian English, in terms of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and pragmatics. Among intercultural pragmatic studies, the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) project conducted by Blum-Kulka (1984, 1989) [8] stands out as one of the most renowned. This project confirmed the significant impact of cultural background on the realization of speech acts. For example, apologies may be expressed differently in cultures emphasizing individualism versus those emphasizing collectivism. Researchers investigate how these differences manifest in specific speech acts.

Apology, as a commonly used speech act, has been extensively studied by numerous scholars. It is defined as a remedial speech act for face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Kasanga & Lwanga-Lumu, 2007) [9]. Apologies are necessary when social norms are violated in communicative contexts (Trosborg, 1995) [10]. When speakers offend listeners in any way, they feel compelled to correct the mistake (Kitao & Kitao, 2013) [11]. From this perspective, apologies serve as a means to remedy communicative behavior. Their primary function is to salvage the situation following an offensive act by the speaker.

These studies often employ theoretical frameworks such as politeness theory (Leech, 1983, 2014) [12,13], face theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978) [14], and cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1984, 1991) [15,16] to analyze and explain phenomena in intercultural and regional English variants. In pragmatics, theories related to apologies include Brown and Levinson's face theory and Leech's politeness principle. For Brown and Levinson (1978) [14], apologies grant the listener negative face, i.e., the right to act without interference, thereby reducing the risk of losing negative face. For Leech, apologies are part of politeness, aligning with the tact and generosity maxims of the politeness principle, as they can increase or further enhance the embellishment of utterances to elevate linguistic politeness (Leech, 2014) [13]. However, apologies also affect the speaker's face, as expressing regret acknowledges wrongdoing, potentially damaging the speaker's positive face (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2008) [17].

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a well-known framework for describing and comparing cultural differences across nations globally. It comprises six primary dimensions: power distance index, which measures societal acceptance of power inequality; individualism versus collectivism, reflecting the emphasis on individual independence versus group interests; masculinity versus femininity, describing societal tendencies toward competition and achievement versus cooperation and care; uncertainty avoidance, assessing societal tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; long-term versus short-term orientation, focusing on societal emphasis on long-term goals versus traditional values; and indulgence versus restraint, describing societal pursuit of enjoyment and personal desires versus control. The first two dimensions significantly influence the use of speech acts.

The realization of apologies can be complex. They are expressed not only through words indicating apology intent, such as "sorry", but also through apology strategies like stating the reason for the apology or using interjections to strengthen the apology's intensity or informational content. These methods also mitigate offense to the listener's face, as in, "I'm sorry to inform you that you cannot enter here." Apologies may consist solely of apology intent words or combine these words with one or more apology strategies. For example, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) [5], in studying apology realization through discourse completion tasks, found that apology acts can take one or two basic forms or a combination thereof. Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) are the most common approach, often accompanied by other apology strategies such as explaining the offense's cause, accepting responsibility, offering compensation, or requesting forgiveness (Leech, 2014) [13]. Domestic scholar Li Jun (2007) [18] investigated Chinese apology strategies, finding that Chinese apology speech acts comprise both essential and auxiliary means. Essential means include specialized apology words, accepting blame, and remedial measures, while auxiliary means encompass address terms, statements of the facts requiring an apology, and reasons.

Kitao (2012) [11] proposed another category of apology strategies, including IFIDs, statements about the apology situation (i.e., the speaker's reason for apologizing and where social norms were violated, causing offense), accepting responsibility, offering compensation, promising non-recurrence, and suggestions to avoid future occurrences. Accepting responsibility and offering compensation can be further classified. Kitao (2012) [11] also suggested that apology strategies should include intensifiers and expressions of concern for the listener, adding "self-defense" and "request for understanding" to the list. Among various apology strategy classifications, this one comprehensively summarizes the realization forms of apology behaviors in communication.

In intercultural research, many foreign pragmatic scholars aim to answer the question: To what extent can language use rules be identified in specific cultures and languages (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984)? [5]. Alternatively, can universal patterns of language use be found across different cultures and languages? Apology, a speech act present in most cultures, possesses qualities suitable for cross-cultural research. Some linguists compare apology behaviors across cultures to explore consistency in language use (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981 [19]; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989 [8]; Chang, 2010 [20]; Barron, 2019 [3]; Elasfar et al., 2023) [21]. These studies often employ discourse completion tasks to examine apology behaviors among English users from different cultures. Domestic research focuses on comparing apology behaviors between Chinese and American, Japanese, Russian, and African cultures (Huang Yonghong, 2001 [22]; Su Na, 2018 [23]; Cai Haina, 2019) [24]. These studies compare Chinese with other languages but do not report on the impact of different cultures on apology behaviors in the same language. In comparing Chinese and English apology behaviors, Pan (2010) [25] notes similarities but also gaps. Chinese apologies often employ strategies like expressing regret, accepting responsibility, showing concern, and offering compensation, while English apologies frequently use strategies like expressing regret, promising restraint, explaining, and offering compensation.

Among research methods in intercultural pragmatics, discourse completion tasks, role-plays, and questionnaires have been commonly used. In recent years, with the rise of corpus research, scholars have increasingly favored corpus methods to study English use in specific cultures or regions. Corpora provide vast amounts of natural language data, enabling researchers to identify patterns and trends in speech acts. Therefore, this study adopts a corpus-based approach to analyze English apology behaviors across cultures.

3. Corpus Approach

The corpus utilized in this study is the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE). By searching for terms such as “sorry,” “excuse,” “apology,” “apologies,” “apologize,” “apologizing,” “apologized,” “pardon,” and “forgive” within the corpus, we obtained 2,472 instances of language data. Following the methodology outlined by Kitao & Kita (2013) [11], we categorized apology behaviors into seven distinct strategies. Subsequently, we conducted chi-square tests and cluster analyses on both word usage and strategy employment, culminating in a correspondence analysis of apology strategies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 presents the chi-square tests, cluster analyses, and examinations of word usage in apologies. 4.2 introduces the chi-square tests, cluster analyses, and correspondence analysis pertaining to apology strategies.

4.1 the word usage in apologies

Table 1: Cross-National Usage Patterns of Apology Expressions.

Country	Sorry	Excuse	Apolog*	Pardon	Forgive	X-square	P value
CHN	926.76	75.57	178.99	15.91	0		
GBR	880.02	85.86	203.9	21.46	10.73		
IDN	971.26	193.01	149.43	80.94	18.68		
KOR	879.37	108.69	286.54	79.04	0	433. 84	<0.001
MYS	331.22	10.04	150.55	10.04	10.04		
JPN	1331.96	203.56	192.49	39.83	0		
PHI	550.08	76.4	198.64	30.56	0		

Table 1 presents the chi-square test results for the standardized frequencies of apology word usage across seven countries. Due to the occurrence of zero observed frequencies, this study employed Monte Carlo simulations to ensure the accuracy of the results. The findings indicate that the frequencies of apology word usage vary significantly among these countries, demonstrating statistical significance (with a p-value of 0.000999 from one thousand Monte Carlo simulations). The word “sorry” exhibits the highest usage frequency in every country, followed by “apology” and its various forms, and then “excuse”. The word “pardon” is used relatively infrequently, while “forgive” only appears in the United Kingdom, India, and Malaysia. Japan surpasses other countries in the usage of the first four apology words, followed by India and South Korea, then the United Kingdom and China, with the Philippines and Malaysia showing the least usage.

Table 2: The Usage Patterns of Five Apology Words Across Different Countries.

Country	Form	Sum	Frequency	Standard	X-square	P value
CHN		251413	233	926.76		
GBR		93180	82	880.02		
IDN		160616	156	971.26		
JPN	Sorry	451964	602	1331.96	127.071	<0.001
KOR		101209	89	879.37		
MYS		99632	33	331.22		
PHI		130891	72	550.08		
CHN		251413	19	75.57		
GBR		93180	8	85.86		

IDN		160616	31	193.01		
JPN	Excuse	451964	92	203.56	43.8425	<0.001
KOR		101209	11	108.69		
MYS		99632	1	10.04		
PHI		130891	10	76.4		
CHN		251413	45	178.99		
GBR		93180	19	203.9		
IDN		160616	24	149.43		
JPN	Apolog*	451964	87	192.49	7.49337	=0.277
KOR		101209	29	286.54		
MYS		99632	15	150.55		
PHI		130891	26	198.64		
CHN		251413	4	15.91		
GBR		93180	2	21.46		
IDN		160616	13	80.94		
JPN	Pardon	451964	18	39.83	18.0645	=0.02
KOR		101209	8	79.04		
MYS		99632	1	10.04		
PHI		130891	4	30.56		
CHN		251413	0	0		
GBR		93180	1	10.73		
IDN		160616	3	18.68		
JPN	Forgive	451964	0	0		
KOR		101209	0	0		
MYS		99632	1	10.04		
PHI		130891	0	0		

Table 2 displays the frequency of occurrence of five words in various countries. Except for “sorry”, all other data exhibit cases where the observed frequency is below five. This study has employed Monte Carlo simulations to correct the final results accordingly. To minimize the probability of committing a Type I error during multiple comparisons, we set the alpha value at 0.05/5, which is 0.01. It can be observed that the usage of “sorry”, “pardon”, and “excuse” varies significantly across different countries, whereas the usage of the remaining two words does not reach a statistically significant level.

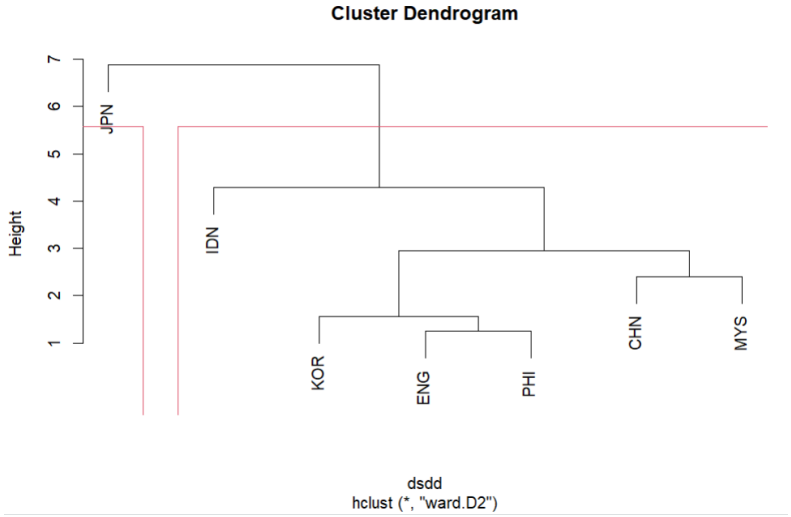


Figure 1: Cluster Analysis of Apology Words

Figure 1 presents a cluster analysis of the usage of apology words among Asian countries. From the diagram, it can be observed that the usage patterns in the United Kingdom and the Philippines are the most similar, followed by South Korea, which shows a close resemblance to the combined usage of the UK and the Philippines. Subsequently, China and Malaysia exhibit similar usage patterns, followed by India, which shows differences from the aforementioned five countries. The country with the most distinct usage pattern is Japan. The red line in the diagram indicates the optimal cluster division based on the silhouette coefficient, suggesting that the most reliable classification is to separate Japan into a distinct category, while grouping the other six countries together.

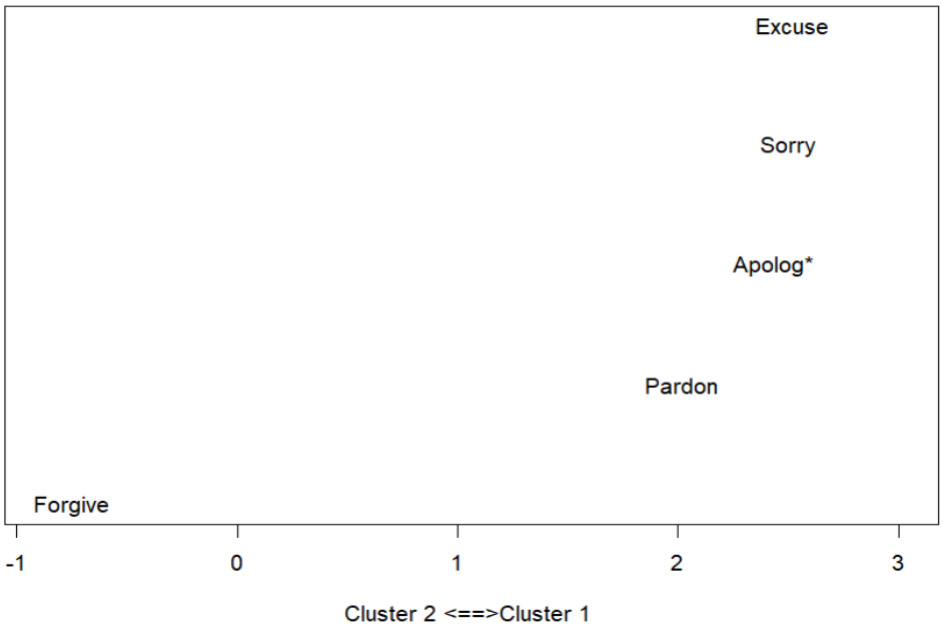


Figure 2: Visualization of Differences in Apology Word Usage Between Group 1 and Group 2.

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the differences in apology word usage between Group 1 and Group 2. It can be observed that Japan exhibits a higher frequency of using "excuse", "sorry", "apology*", and "pardon" compared to the other six countries, while showing a lower frequency of using "forgive".

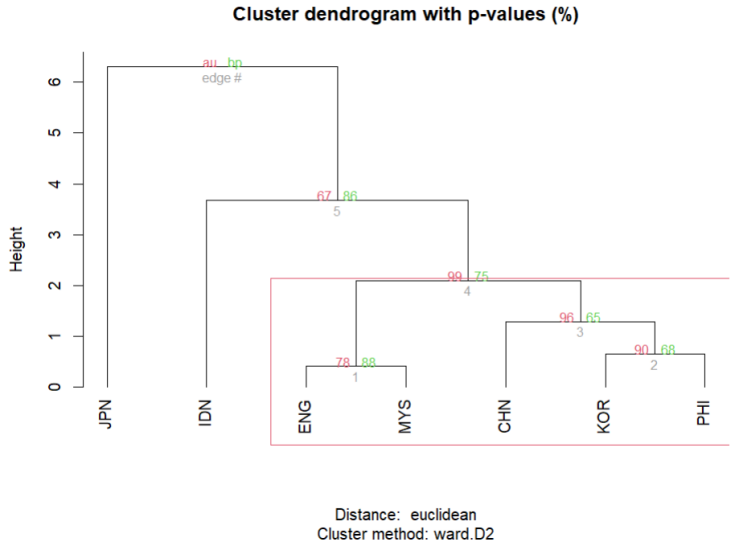


Figure 3: Bootstrap Validation of Clustering Results for Apology Words.

Finally, this study conducted a bootstrap test on the results of the cluster analysis, as shown in Figure 3. The clusters within the red circles represent those with an alpha value exceeding 0.95, indicating that the clustering patterns among countries such as the United Kingdom, Malaysia, China, South Korea, and the Philippines are relatively robust.

In the field of cross-cultural pragmatics, the similarities and differences in English apology behaviors across different countries are influenced by a variety of interacting factors. Japan and India exhibit distinct apology word usage patterns that are significantly different from those of the other five countries, which may be attributed to several reasons. Both Japan and India are deeply influenced by their unique traditional cultures. For instance, Japanese Confucian culture emphasizes etiquette and humility, which is reflected in Japan's high frequency of apologies. India, as a religiously diverse nation, has many religious doctrines that stress the importance of forgiveness and apology. These religious and moral beliefs influence people's behaviors, making apologies a common social practice after making mistakes. In Indian culture, maintaining social harmony and respecting others' face are highly valued. Apology is seen as a means to restore harmony and respect others' face, so people tend to resolve conflicts or misunderstandings through apologies. Finally, according to Hofstede's (2008) [15] cultural dimension theory, India is a typical collectivist society. In collectivist cultures, an individual's behavior is viewed as affecting the entire group, so personal errors or mistakes may impact the harmony of the whole group. To maintain this harmony, individuals need to apologize to repair their relationships with the group, leading to a higher frequency of apologies.

For the other five countries, Malaysia is a highly Westernized nation that was once a colony of an English-speaking country, as was the Philippines. English, as a lingua franca or official language, is widely spoken in Malaysia and the Philippines, naturally leading to similarities in apology behaviors with the United Kingdom. South Korea was also one of the earliest Asian countries to accept Western influence and learn from Western cultures. Although China retains a long-standing traditional culture, it has actively learned from Western cultures since the reform and opening-up period, gradually aligning its apology language with that of English-speaking countries.

4.2 Apology Strategies

Table 3: Standard Frequencies of Apology Strategies in Asian Countries.

Country	IFID	IFID_sta	IFID_st_in	IFID_int	IFID_rep	IFID_min	Repet	X-square	P value
CHN	779.59	15.91	254.56	131.26	0.00	3.98	11.93		
GBR	858.55	128.78	42.93	21.46	10.73	85.86	32.20		
IDN	958.81	136.97	56.03	118.29	31.13	93.39	0.00		
JPN	1035.48	42.04	531.02	161.52	0.00	11.06	46.46	290	P<0.001
KOR	800.32	187.73	266.77	59.28	19.76	19.76	29.64		
MYS	421.55	30.11	10.04	30.11	30.11	0.00	30.11		
PHI	557.72	99.32	76.40	38.20	22.92	45.84	0.00		

Table 3 reveals the differences in the use of apology strategies among Asian countries and the United Kingdom. Given the occurrence of zero observed frequencies, Monte Carlo simulations were also conducted in this study. The results indicate that the apology strategies employed vary across countries. The Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) is the most prevalent form of apology implementation; this is followed by the combination of IFID with statements about the reasons and circumstances of the apology; then by IFID accompanied by interjections and declarative statements. The frequency of IFID combined with interjections closely follows, whereas the combinations of IFID with compensatory measures and repeated apologies exhibit zero observed frequencies, suggesting a relatively low occurrence rate.

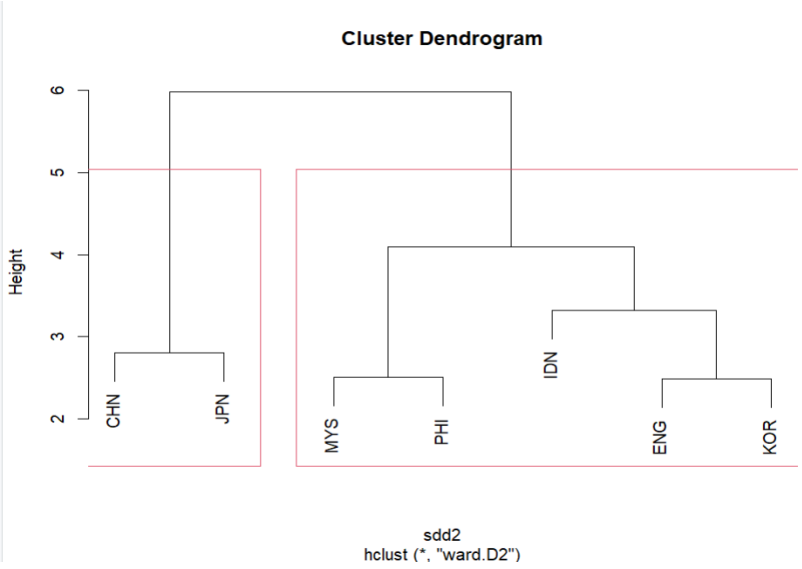


Figure 4: Clustering Results of Apology Strategies.

Figure 4 presents the clustering analysis results of apology strategies, with the red box indicating the optimal clustering scheme selected based on the silhouette coefficient. As depicted in the figure, the apology strategies of the United Kingdom and South Korea are the first to merge, followed by those of Malaysia and the Philippines. The apology strategies of China and Japan are relatively similar and merge next, and finally, India's strategies merge with those of the UK and South Korea. In terms of the optimal grouping, it is best to combine China and Japan into one group and the remaining five countries into another.

From a cultural perspective, the United Kingdom, as the birthplace of the English language, possesses a profound linguistic and cultural heritage. There is a historical connection between the UK and Malaysia, as Malaysia was once a British colony, and British culture has exerted a profound influence on Malaysia. In terms of language, English is widely used in Malaysia and is officially emphasized, with English education playing a significant role in the educational system. This has led Malaysians to be more exposed to and absorb British linguistic habits and cultural connotations, including apology strategies, during the process of learning and using English. For example, in formal settings such as business and education, Malaysians follow the norms of British English to express apologies, using direct and formal expressions like "I apologize" and "I'm very

sorry," and paying attention to the accuracy and logic of language.

The Philippines has been influenced by Western culture for a long time, and South Korea has actively absorbed elements of Western culture. Language education and international exchanges have driven their English apology patterns to align with British norms. For instance, in terms of apology strategy selection, language form preferences, and contextual adaptability, they are similar, often adopting direct and explicit expressions like "I'm sorry" and appropriately explaining the reasons, following the logic of maintaining others' negative face in Western politeness principles.

India was also once a British colony, and currently, English is one of India's official languages. Indians frequently come into contact with English in their social lives. Therefore, there is relatively little difference between India's and the UK's apology strategies.

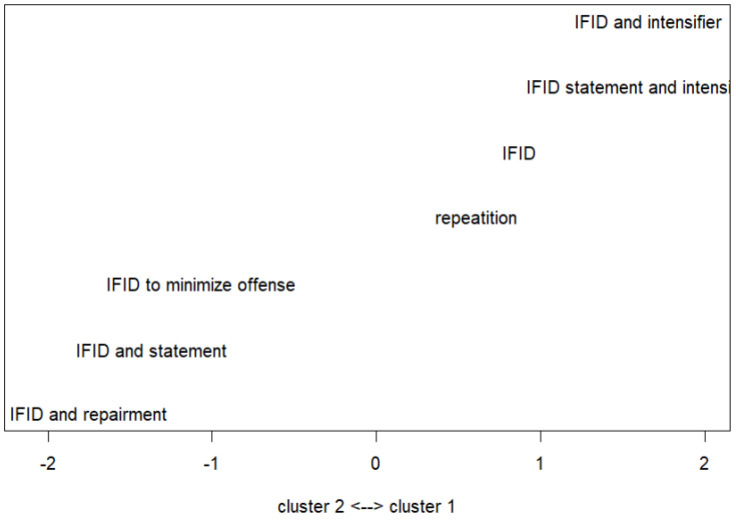


Figure 5: Visualization of Differences between Group 1 and Group 2.

China and Japan exhibit a higher frequency of using combinations such as IFID with interjections, IFID with statements and interjections, and IFID with repeated apologies compared to the other five countries. Conversely, they demonstrate lower usage of IFID as an offense buffer, IFID with statements, and IFID with compensatory behaviors than the remaining five nations. The results of this study slightly deviate from those of Pan (2010) [25], possibly due to imbalances in corpus collection that did not comprehensively capture the full range of Chinese apology strategy implementations.

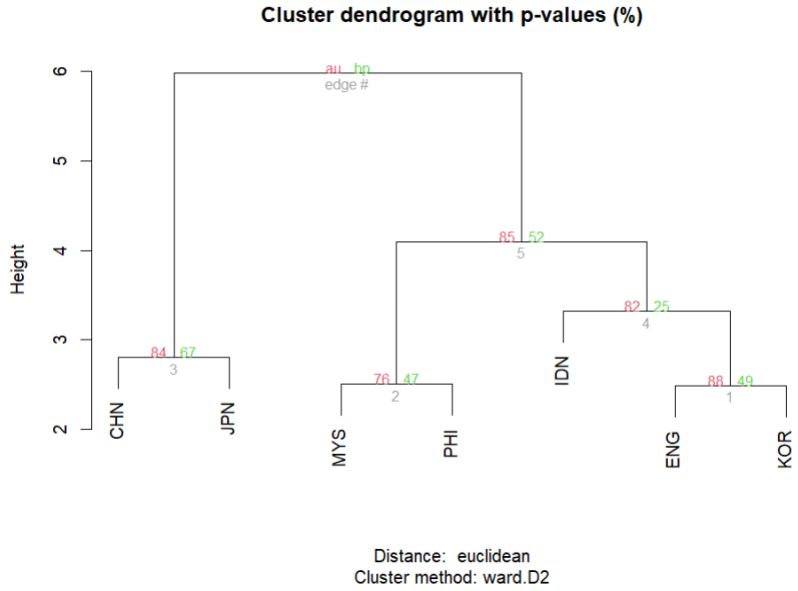


Figure 6: Bootstrap Validation of Clustering Results for Apology Strategies.

Figure 6 illustrates the bootstrap validation of the clustering analysis for apology strategies. It can be observed that none of the clusters achieve an alpha value of 0.95, indicating that the clustering results are not particularly robust. Given this, this study further incorporated correspondence analysis into the examination of apology strategies, with the results presented in Figure 7.

Correspondence analysis reveals a clear distinction along the first dimension between countries with Eastern and Western cultural backgrounds. China, Japan, and South Korea are quintessential Eastern cultural nations, whereas the United Kingdom, India, the Philippines, and Malaysia are either Western countries or have undergone Western colonial rule, thus being considered as nations deeply influenced by Western culture. The results indicate that China, Japan, and South Korea tend to employ apology strategies involving IFID combined with interjections or IFID with interjections and statements, suggesting a preference for intensifying the tone, and thus the degree, of their apologies. This inclination aligns with the Confucian cultural values prevalent in these three countries, which emphasize harmony, humility, and respect for others. In their apology strategies, speakers from these nations prioritize maintaining social hierarchy and interpersonal relationships, often going so far as to compromise their own positive face to demonstrate their willingness to bear the consequences of the offense and repair the relationship.

In contrast, Western cultures emphasize equality, and speakers from the United Kingdom, Malaysia, the Philippines, and India do not significantly compromise their own face when apologizing. The second dimension roughly differentiates countries or cultures based on power distance and collectivism. According to data provided by Zhang (2013) [1], as the numerical value increases in the positive direction of the second dimension, the power distance across different cultures also increases. This implies that Malaysia places greater emphasis on social hierarchy and power differences compared to China, India, the United Kingdom, and Japan. In cultures with high power distance, social hierarchies are more pronounced, and individuals from lower strata tend to use more humble language when apologizing to those in higher positions, such as through repeated apologies or the inclusion of interjections. Conversely, in the negative direction of the second dimension, collectivism tends to increase with the numerical value. Collectivist tendencies lead speakers to focus more on repairing relationships, often incorporating additional information into their apologies to seek forgiveness for the offense and restore the relationship.

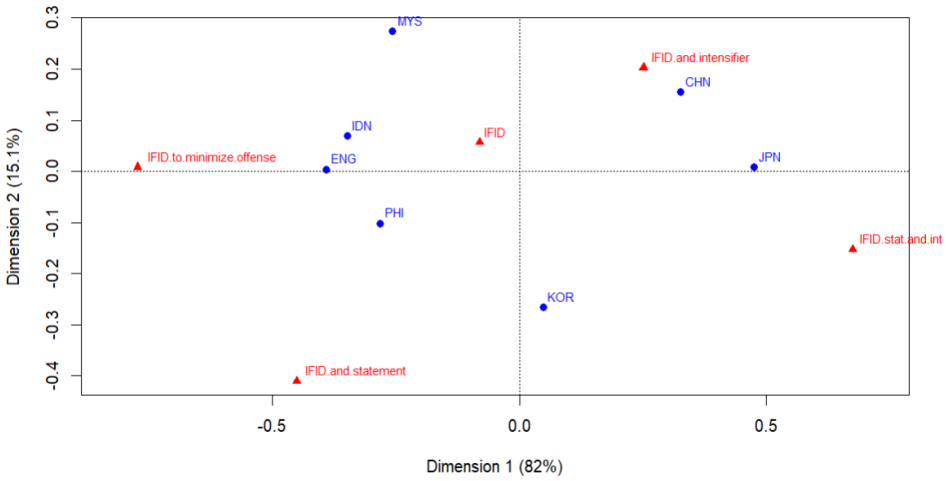


Figure 7: Correspondence Analysis of Countries and Apology Strategies.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of different cultural backgrounds on second-language apology behaviors by examining spoken English apology corpora from Asian countries included in the ICNAEL. The results reveal that the distribution of apology words is influenced by native language and varies across countries. “Sorry” is the most commonly used term, followed by “apology*”, “excuse”, “pardon”, and “forgive”. South Korea, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia exhibit the closest similarities, with China showing relative proximity to these four countries. In contrast, Japan and India demonstrate significant differences from the other five nations.

Regarding apology strategies, cultural influences are also evident. The direct use of IFID is the most prevalent approach, followed by IFID combined with statements explaining the reasons or circumstances of the apology and interjections, and then by IFID with interjections and IFID with statements. Apology strategies involving IFID with compensatory behaviors and repeated apologies are only observed in specific countries and are not widespread. The United Kingdom shows minimal differences from South Korea, while the Philippines and Malaysia are also closely aligned. India is relatively similar to these four countries, whereas China and Japan exhibit notable differences from the other five nations.

The silhouette coefficients from cluster analysis indicate that, in terms of apology word clustering, Japan forms a distinct group, while the remaining six countries cluster together. Japan has higher frequencies of “sorry,” “apology*”, “excuse”, and “pardon” compared to other countries, with “forgive” being less frequent. The clustering effect is excellent for the United Kingdom, Malaysia, the Philippines, China, and South Korea, while it is relatively weaker for Japan and India. For apology strategy clustering, the silhouette coefficients suggest that China and Japan should be grouped together, with the other five countries forming another group; however, the validation effect is not ideal.

Given the frequency requirements of correspondence analysis, this study combined IFID with compensatory behaviors and IFID as a buffer for offensive behaviors into one category, as well as merged repeated apologies with IFID and interjections, resulting in five distinct apology strategy categories. The results of correspondence analysis clearly delineate Eastern and Western cultures along the first dimension, with China, Japan, and South Korea representing typical Eastern cultures, and the

United Kingdom, Malaysia, the Philippines, and India exhibiting varying degrees of Western cultural influence or affiliation. The second dimension generally differentiates countries based on power distance and collectivist tendencies. According to cultural power distance rankings, the positive direction of the second dimension should include Malaysia, China, India, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Cultures with high power distance enforce stricter hierarchical distinctions, leading to the use of humble language, such as interjections, during apologies. In terms of collectivist tendencies, the negative direction of the second dimension ranks South Korea, the Philippines, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Countries with strong collectivist inclinations prioritize relationship repair and face-saving for the offended party, often supplementing apologies with information about the reasons for the apology to enhance sincerity.

This study contributes to revealing differences in English speech acts among Asian countries and to cross-cultural pragmatics research, offering valuable insights for cultivating second-language pragmatic competence among English learners. However, the study has several limitations. First, the corpus used has a relatively small capacity, making the results susceptible to randomness. Second, factors such as gender, learner proficiency, and text source were not considered. Third, the study interpreted the results solely from a cultural perspective, which may limit the richness of the analysis and its explanatory power. Fourth, the classification of apology strategies remains somewhat ambiguous. Finally, the criteria for selecting and excluding apology words should further distinguish between expressions of sympathy and expressions of apology.

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