

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN
PUBLIC APOLOGIES: THE
MALAYSIAN CONTEXT**

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This topic has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

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ABSTRACT

The importance of politeness and the limited Malaysian studies on politeness in apologies prompted this research to examine the use of politeness in Malaysian public apology texts. This study examined 50 Malaysian online naturally-occurring public apology texts from 2000 to 2012 for politeness in terms of apology strategies, positive politeness strategies and negative politeness strategies. The content analyses of apology strategies and politeness strategies were based on researchers' apology taxonomies and Brown and Levinson's (1987) Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies respectively. The content analyses provided four (4) important findings. First, the 50 individual Malaysian public apology texts reflected the use of a range of three (3) to 10 apology strategies out of the total 17 apology strategies. Second, the 50 Malaysian public apology texts focused dominantly on eight (8) apology strategies that reflected features of: a) AS 11 (Offer Repair to Rectify the Wrongdoing), b) AS 10 (Downgrade the Harm), c) AS 4 (Justify the Wrongdoing / Action), d) AS 9 (Acknowledge the Harm Resulting from the Wrongdoing), e) AS 5 (Explain the Wrongdoing/ Action), f) AS 6 (Admit One's Responsibility for the Wrongdoing/ Action), g) AS 2 (Show the Intention to Apologize) and h) AS 3 (Intensify the Intention to Apologize). Third, both positive and negative politeness strategies were found across the Malaysian public apology texts. The 16 apology strategies found across the 50 public apology texts reflected the use of 11 positive politeness strategies and six (6) negative politeness strategies. Fourth, across the 16 apology strategies, the two (2) most dominant positive politeness strategies present were: a) PPS 1 (Notice, attend to Receiver (his interests, wants, needs, goods) and b) PPS 10 (Offer, promise), and the two (2) most dominant negative politeness strategies used were: a) NPS 6 (Apologize) and b) NPS 4 (Minimize the Imposition). There were three (3) conclusions. First, the content of the Malaysian public apology texts did reflect the use of politeness in terms of the use of some apology strategies and positive and negative politeness strategies. Second, the Malaysian public apology texts included dominant apology strategies relevant to apologies. Third, the Malaysian public apology texts reflected the use of both positive and negative politeness strategies suggesting that focus was given to maintaining positive public self-image and relationships and giving respect to the apologizees. Four (4) recommendations were proposed. First, there should be formal instruction on public apologies focusing on internationally acceptable standards and criteria of politeness in terms of use of apology strategies and pragmatic politeness strategies at secondary, tertiary and professional levels of education. Second, the designers of education syllabus and book writers should incorporate apology strategies and pragmatic politeness strategies in their respective syllabus and academic books for effective writing of public apologies. Third, teachers, academicians, educators and journalists should optimize the data of this study for further understanding and improvement of current practices of public apologies in the Malaysian context. Fourth, this study should be used as guidelines for further research on public apologies in important contexts of business, medicine, legislation, politics, and religion.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The special importance of apologies lies in the inherent value of their ethical reasons which are highly instrumental for mediation and restoration of relationships. An apology has been defined as “an acknowledgement of regret for an offence or failure” (Oxford Dictionary, 2010, p.60). According to Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary (2009), an apology is “a word or a statement that a person says or writes to show or tell that one is sorry for doing something wrong or hurting them or causing a problem” (p.61). Merriam-Webster (1999) defines an apology as “an expression of regret for a wrong action” or “a formal justification of defence” (p.58). A prominent psychologist and researcher, Lazare (2004) defines an apology as “an acknowledgement of an offence and an expression of remorse” (p.13). The Free Dictionary.com (n.d) gives two (2) definitions of apology: a) “a written or spoken expression of one’s regret, remorse or sorrow for having insulted, failed, injured or wronged another” and b) “a defence, excuse or justification in speech or writing as for a cause or doctrine”. The above given definitions identify that an apology is a way of remediating offences and wrongdoings.

Apologies which initially are expressed in the form of private apologies have become more significant in their extended roles as public apologies. According to Harris, Grainger and Mullany (2006), public apologies or official apologies have the same reasons, features and characteristics as private apologies. In their view, the former involves large audience and requires application of various mediums of communication or mediated communication which evidently make public apologies become public knowledge. In contrast, according to Tavuchis (1991), private apologies involve apologies given from one individual to another individual or from many individuals to one individual, showing that private apologies involve small and limited numbers of interactants in terms of apologizers and the apologizees.