APOLOGY STRATEGIES: ARE WOMEN’S DIFFERENT FROM MEN’S?

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Most theories of Gender in Language explain that there is inequality between men and women in communication. This inequality, which is caused by social norms and cultural context, has lead people to an assumption than women are more polite than men. Some theories also say that social norms influence men and women in choosing communication strategy. This article aims at finding out whether men and women have different strategy in communication, especially in apologizing.

INTRODUCTION

In everyday life, people often assume that the utterances used by women are in contrast to the ones used by men, especially in terms of politeness. Women are often considered more polite than men because of the roles in their social life. In many communities, women are regarded as the ones who are responsible for transmitting politeness and cultural value.

Based on the above explanation, I am interested in knowing the true facts about the differences of utterances used by women and men. In this case, I focus on observing the way men and women use to apologize. The reason of focusing the utterances on the speech act of apology because it is often used in everyday life. In addition, this speech act is one of negative politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987) which can be used to maintain the harmony of social relations between speakers and hearers. In detail, this paper aims at:

(1) Describing apology strategies used by women;
(2) Describing apology strategies used by men;
(3) Finding out whether the apology strategies used by both groups correspond to the theory of politeness as well as to the theory of language and gender.

The survey was conducted in English for Professional Purposes class, Perbanas Institute Jakarta in March-April 2012. Instrument used is a questionnaire containing 12 situations that requires the respondents to make an apology. Theory used in this paper is the theory of apology speech act which is related to the theory of politeness and the theory of language and gender.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
The Speech Act of Apology as One of Politeness Strategies

There are some factors that must be considered by the speakers to make the communication process go smoothly. The factors are background, topics, participants, and the purpose of communication. Ignoring those factors may cause an offense or inconvenience among speakers. Brown and Levinson (1987) call that kind of speech as face-threatening act. Based on the ideas of Goffman who considered face as the most important part of human's body, the two experts have raised the concept of face as a person's self image. Then, they divided the notion of face into two, namely positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to one's desire to make him/herself respected by other people or anything associated with him rated well by others. Negative face refers to one's desire to not be disturbed by the actions of others.

To minimize the impact of face-threatening act to hearers, speakers need to choose appropriate strategies of communication. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested Politeness Strategies which consist of five strategies. The strategies are: (1) speak bald on record, without redressive action; (2) speak on record with redressive action, in the form of positive politeness; (3) speak on record with redressive action, in form of negative politeness; (4) speak off record; (5) don’t do the FTA (do not speak at all). In relation to those five strategies, speech acts of apologizing belong to the third strategy.

Leech (1983: 104-105) argues that apologizing is an act which has convivial function. Convivial function can be interpreted as a function of the language prioritizes comfort of social relations between speakers and hearers. In the comfort of social relations, speakers show their respects to hearers. They will apologize if they feel they had done an offense.

Apology Strategies

The theory of apology that will be discussed in this paper are the theory of Trosborg and Aijmer. Trosborg (1995) suggests that there are seven strategies to apologize, i.e. (1) minimizing the degree of offence, (2) acknowledgment of responsibility, (3) explanation or account, (4) expression of apology, (5) expressing concern for hearer, (6) promise of forbearance, and (7) offer of repair. In
addition, Trosborg also mentions another strategy in which the speaker refuses to take responsibility. He calls this 0 strategy or *opting out* because it does not meet the criteria of apology strategies.

Moreover, Aijmer (1996) outlines thirteen apology strategies, i.e. (1) explicitly apologizing, (2) offering an apology, (3) Acknowledging a debt of apology, (4) expressing regret, (5) demanding forgiveness, (6) explicitly requesting for the hearer’s forgiveness, (7) giving an explanation or account, (8) self-denigration or self-reproach, (9) minimizing responsibility, (10) expressing emotion, (11) acknowledging responsibility, (12) promising forbearance from a similar offending act, and (13) offering redress. To facilitate data processing, Firiani & Lestari (2011) compile the theories suggested by Trosborg and Aijmer into seven categories that will be used to analyze the strategies used by respondents. The seven categories are as follow.

1. **Explicitly apologizing**
   Speakers express their apology explicitly or directly. There are some verbs that can be used to apologize directly, e.g. *I apologize; I am sorry*.

2. **Acknowledging responsibility**
   Speakers can implicitly or explicitly claim to be responsible for their action. In addition, speakers also usually blame themselves. This strategy is aimed to give support to the hearer. It can be divided into six sub-strategies as follows.
   a. Implicitly acknowledging responsibility, e.g. *I can see your point; Perhaps I should have not done it*.
   b. Explicitly acknowledging responsibility, e.g. *I'll admit I forgot to do it*.
   c. Expressing regret, e.g. *I did not mean to*.
   d. Expressing self shortcomings, e.g. *You know I am bad at ....*
   e. Demonstrating a sense of shame, e.g. *I feel so bad about it*.
   f. Receiving error explicitly, e.g. *It was entirely my fault; You're right to blame me*.

3. **Giving an explanation**
   Speakers can reduce the impact of the offense by giving an explanation about the situation of violation. In this strategy the speakers argue that the offense is not something he wanted. It can be divided into:
   a. Implicit explanation, e.g. *Such things are bound to happen, you know*.
   b. Explicit explanation, e.g. *Sorry I'm late, but my car broke down*.
4. **Minimizing the degree of offence**

   This strategy is similar to the strategy of irresponsible offenders. However, in this strategy, the speaker does not deny his responsibility. There are three sub-categories of this strategy, i.e.

   a. Claiming that the offense is not important, e.g. *Oh, what’s the matter, that’s nothing; what about it, it’s not the end of the world.*
   
   b. Questioning the previous conditions, e.g. *Well, everybody does that; What is love then?* (in response to complaint *You do not love me*).
   
   c. Blaming someone else. This happens if the offence committed by offenders is part of the violations committed by third parties.

5. **Expressing concern for hearer**

   To comfort the hearer, the speaker may demonstrate his attention, e.g. *I know you do not feel comfortable with what I’ve done.*

6. **Promising forbearance**

   When apologizing, speakers can show responsibility by expressing remorse. In this case, an apology is not only related to the violations that have been done but also related to the behavior in the future. This speech act apology contains a commitment from the speaker not to repeat his action. The statement is usually characterized by performative verb "promise", e.g. *It will not happen again, I promise.*

7. **Offering redress**

   A speaker who have committed an offense can offer a repair or compensation for the losses caused by his action. The compensation offered can be either objects or money.

In addition to seven apology strategies mentioned above, Trosborg proposes another strategy that can be used to analyze the data, i.e. 0 strategy or *opting out* in which the speaker refuses to take responsibility. This strategy is shown below.

0.1 **Explicit denial of responsibility**

   Speakers openly deny being responsible for the violation occurred. They may be emphasizing the ignorance of the matter, for example by saying *I know nothing about it; or you know I would never do a thing like that.*

0.2 **Implicit denial of responsibility**

   Speakers generally avoid responsibility by ignoring complaints or talking about something else.
0.3 **Justifying oneself**
Speakers provide arguments that could affect the hearer not to blame the speaker

0.4 **Blaming someone else**
Speakers avoid responsibility by blaming others. They blame a third party or the hearer as the cause of further violation.

0.5 **Attacking the complainer**
Speakers attacked the hearer in a much ruder manner compared to 0.4.

**Language and Gender**

In the sociolinguistic study, sex and gender are two different terms. Paulston and Tucker (2003:201) give a clear limit to these two terms. Sex is associated with biological criteria, which is the human reproductive organs, while gender is associated with social constructs that are influenced by socio-cultural conditions. In other words, gender is a concept that is more complex and varied due to the socio-cultural conditions, which are different from one community to others.

Gender is a social construct. Through the concept of gender, people are labeled men and women. The label is then indicates differences of men and women roles in a community. Norms in the society also determine what can and what cannot be done by men and women, such as the type of job, roles in the family and environment, how to dress, and how to speak.

Fasold (1990:89) stated that since the mid-1970s, researchs on language and gender focus on the role of language in society and weak position of women. Previously, language and gender research can be divided into two. First, researchs that are focuses on the level of phonology, morphology, prosody (intonation, speed, and volume), grammatical forms and vocabulary selection. Second, sociolinguistic researchs that use gender as independent variable associated with social status, language diversity, age, and ethnicity.

Coates (1989:63-73) and Bonvillain (2003:181) highlight two approaches that underlie research on language and gender. That approach is the approach of dominance (dominance approach) and the approach to cultural differences (difference approach / subculture approach).
Dominance approach puts men as the ones who control and dominate a conversation. Women then become the ones who are dominated (subordinate). In the dominance approach, "subordinate" juxtaposed with "weak", in the sense of the language spoken by women is weaker than that of men. In a discussion at Georgetown University in 1972, Hymes, as quoted by Holmes (1995:364) argues that in communication, women are considered as second-class society. This label is related to the existed function of women in society. Henley and Karamae as quoted by Bonvillain (2003: 198-199), suggests that the hierarchy in the community will determine who is considered as the winner in a debate, what kind of speaking style that is considered normal, who must learn how to communicate, who should interpret the meaning in a conversation, and who have become followers of a style of communicating. In this case, Henley and Karamae show that hierarchy has put men in more powerful position than that of women.

The assumption that man has control in the conversation is always related to social norms and context. Hierarchy system and inequality between men and women have created different communication strategies. However, different communication strategies of men and women has also play a role in preserving the system of hierarchy and inequality between men and women. Hence, we can see that the system in the community and the communication strategies of men and women affect each other.

The example of important research on language and gender from the perspective of men domination of women is a study by West and Zimmerman (1975). Both experts examined the interruption in the conversation. West and Zimmerman examined daily conversations in public places like coffee shops, stores, and university buildings. The result of their research explains the inequality between men and women in conversation. Men use the mechanisms of power and control while they are having interaction with women. Men also use the tactics of interruption to limit the women in expressing themselves in a conversation.

Difference approach is based on the theory of cultural differences proposed by Maltz and Borker (1982) and Tannen (1990). This approach says that men and women come from two different subcultures. The differences of these two subcultures lead to the differences of communicative competence of men and women. This approach does not focus on the imbalance of power distribution of men and women, but more focused on differences in internal norms of men and
women at the time of interaction. The difference approach explains that the difference of women and men’s communicative competence can be examined in their conversational style. Conversational style of men is based on competition (competitiveness), while the conversational style of women is based on cooperation (cooperativeness).

Maltz and Borker argue that a conversation that involves men and women sometimes becomes a problem. This is due to cultural background differences of men and women in the concept of conversation, their roles in the conversation, and how they interpret the meaning. Both experts explain that women tend to ask, ask for responses from another participant, give positive responses, and accept interruptions when she is speaking. Men tend to interrupt, confront, ignore other participants, control the conversation’s topics, and intrude their opinions.

Differences in conversational style of men and women are influenced by the their childhood culture. Girls and boys have their own community. Girls learn to create and maintain intimacy in the community, to criticize others in a subtle way, and interpret the speech of others accurately. Instead, boys learn to assert their dominant position, attack and set other participants, and get involved when someone else is talking. This phenomenon then reinforced by how their community and social norms put women and man in two different places. Thus, miscommunications often happen when women and men become participants in a conversation that actually treats them in equal position.

RESULT

1. Apology Strategy used by Female Respondents
(4.1) I’m sorry
(4.2) I’m sorry for being late
(4.3) Sorry for not being here on time
(4.4) You can blame me for this lateness.
(4.5) I can’t come on time. It was my fault.
(4.6) I can’t join the trip with you because I have something to do.
(4.7) I’m sorry. I know I’m false.
(4.8) Oh, sorry, Friend. I’m not on purpose to make you waiting for along time.
(4.9) I’m terribly sorry. There was an accident on my way here.
(4.10) I am so sorry. I don’t think I can go with you. I have an urgent thing to do.
(4.11)  Sorry, I’m late. I feel bad about it. I promise I’ll always come on time.
(4.12)  I’m sorry to come late. I woke up late this morning. How if I treat you lunch at the cafeteria?
(4.13)  Oh friend, please forgive me. There’s something unpredictable I should do.
(4.14)  I’m really sorry, Sir. I’ve tried my best to come as early as possible, but there was an accident on my journey here. I promise it won’t happen again.
(4.15)  I have a very urgent matter that must be taken care of. I’m really sorry.
(4.16)  Dev, I’m so sorry. I have an urgent business. I will pay you back for the ticket.
(4.17)  I’m sorry. Are you ok?
(4.18)  Sorry. Are you all right?
(4.19)  I didn’t do that on purpose, but I have lost your page. Is it ok if I buy you a new one?
(4.20)  Oh my God. I didn’t mean it. What should I do?

**Apology Strategy Used by Male Respondents**

(4.21)  I’m sorry
(4.22)  I’m so sorry for being late, Mam.
(4.23)  Apologize me for coming late.
(4.24)  You can blame me for this lateness.
(4.25)  I can’t come on time. So sorry for that.
(4.26)  Sorry. I made you wait for one hour. That’s very bad.
(4.27)  Sorry for coming late. I got a bit trouble with the car.
(4.28)  I’m sorry. The traffic is so crowded this morning.
(4.29)  I’m sorry for coming late. I hope you’re not mad at me.
(4.30)  Sorry. Hopefully I’m not too late.
(4.31)  Sorry. I make you waiting.
(4.32)  Ron, sorry for my coming late. I promise you not repeat again.
(4.33)  I’m sorry for being late, Friend. Next time, I will be on time.
(4.34)  Forgive me, Please. I’m not able to manage my time. Next time I’ll do better.
(4.35)  Hey Budy…. No body woke me up. Sorry.
(4.36)  Sorry, that’s too long. Do you want a cup of coffee?
(4.37)  Sorry…. Wait a minute. I will find the program to recover your file.
(4.38)  I’ll buy you a new one?
(4.39)  I will give you my file at home.
I’m sorry. It’s been missing before I borrowed it.

Opting Out Strategy Used by Female Respondents

It is only soft drink, right?
Hey, You’re shocking me
Oh, my God. Because of you I spilled it.
Hey Mba, you make me shocked. Never do that again!!!
You!!!!!… Clean up this room!!
Oh, shit!! What did you do to me? Now, get out of here!!!
Hey, see what u did to me?

Opting Out Strategy Used by Male Respondents

Hey… I don’t know you are there!!!
Shit…. Don’t you know I’m in hurry?
Damn… I’ll fire you

2. The Frequency of Apology Strategies Used by Female and Male Respondents

The frequency of apology strategies used by female and male students can be seen in table 1.

<p>| No. | Strategy                                      | Female | | Male | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------|--------|----|----|----|
|     |                                               | F      | %  | F  | %  |
| 1   | Explicitly apologizing                         | 43     | 7.17% | 137 | 22.83% |
| 2   | Acknowledging responsibility                    | 6      | 1.00% | 1   | 0.17%  |
| 3   | Giving an explanation                          | 3      | 0.50% | 4   | 0.67%  |
| 4   | Minimizing the degree of offence               | 3      | 0.50% | 1   | 0.17%  |
| 5   | Expressing concern for hearer                  | 1      | 0.17% | 0   | 0.00%  |
| 6   | Offering redress                               | 4      | 0.67% | 4   | 0.67%  |
| 7   | Explicitly apologizing + Acknowledging responsibility | 146     | 24.33% | 131 | 21.83% |</p>
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<th>Statement Description</th>
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<th>Total Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Giving an explanation</td>
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<td>19.00%</td>
<td>143</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Minimizing the degree of offence</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Expressing concern for hearer</td>
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<td>4.50%</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Promising forbearance</td>
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<td>3.33%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Offering redress</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Acknowledging responsibility + Giving an explanation</td>
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<td>0.17%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Acknowledging responsibility + Promising forbearance</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Acknowledging responsibility + Offering redress</td>
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<td>0.33%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
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<td>0.17%</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Expressing concern for hearer + Offering redress</td>
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<td>0.17%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Acknowledging responsibility + Giving an explanation</td>
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<td>1.33%</td>
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<td>0.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Acknowledging responsibility + Expressing concern for hearer</td>
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<td>0.33%</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Giving an explanation + Promising forbearance</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Strategy Description</td>
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<td>Percentage</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Giving an explanation + Offering redress</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Minimizing the degree of offence + Expressing concern for hearer</td>
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<td>0.17%</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Minimizing the degree of offence + Offering redress</td>
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<td>0.33%</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Expressing concern for hearer + Offering redress</td>
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<td>0.67%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Promising forbearance + Offering redress</td>
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<td>0.17%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Explicitly apologizing + Acknowledging responsibility + Giving an explanation + Promising forbearance</td>
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<td>0.17%</td>
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<td>0.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Implicit denial of responsibility</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Blaming someone else</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.83%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Attacking the complainer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.17%</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
<td><strong>600</strong></td>
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Based on Table 1, both groups of respondents choose combined strategies more than single strategies. The followings are the most used strategies chosen by female respondents: (1) Explicitly apologizing + Acknowledging responsibility (24.33%); (2) Explicitly apologizing + Giving an explanation (19.00%); (3) Explicitly apologizing + Acknowledging responsibility + Offering redress (14.83%); and (4) Explicitly apologizing (7.17%). Similarly, male respondents used almost the same strategy with female respondents. The followings are the strategies used by male respondents: (1) Explicitly apologizing + Giving an explanation (23.83%); (2) Explicitly apologizing (22.83%); (3) Explicitly apologizing + Acknowledging responsibility (21.83%); and (4) Explicitly apologizing + Acknowledging responsibility + Offering redress (21.00%). Besides, the above apology strategies, some respondent also refuse to take responsibility by choosing strategy 0 or opting out strategy. Female respondents use implicit denial of responsibility (0.50%), Blaming someone else (0.83%), and Attacking the complainer (1.17%). Male respondents used implicit denial of responsibility (0.33%) and Attacking the complainer (0.50%).
The interesting thing about the result of this survey is of the four strategies that are mostly used by two groups of respondents, three strategies are combined strategies and only one single strategy used by the respondents, which is explicitly apologizing. The group of male respondents chose explicitly apologizing as the second most frequently used strategy. On the other hand, the group of female respondents chose the single strategy explicitly apologizing as the fourth most frequently used strategy. It shows that men tend to speak more to the point than women do.

The number of combined strategies used by both groups of respondents also shows that socio-cultural factors greatly influence the utterances spoken by respondents. In some ethnic groups in Indonesia a polite speech is not a speech that is spoken to the point. Even sometimes, people assume that the longer utterances they have, the more polite it will be. Therefore, people tend to choose long utterances than the simple ones.

Another important finding of this survey is that there are more female respondents choose opting out strategies than male respondents. It means that more female refuse to take responsibilities than male. It is a contradictory fact to the previous theory of language and gender, which stated that women are more polite than men because of their social responsibility in their community. The fact that there are more female respondents choose opting out strategies shows that the traditional theories of gender need to be re-observed.

CONCLUSION

The result of the survey shows that there are similarities and differences in apology strategy used by female and male respondents. The similarities are (1) both groups of respondents choose more combined strategies than single strategy; (2) In the most combined strategies, they choose explicitly apologizing to be combined with others strategies; (3) The only single strategy chosen by both groups of respondents is explicitly apologizing; (4) Both groups of respondents also choose opting out strategy. On the other hand, the two groups of respondents also have some differences in choosing apology strategies. The differences are: (1) Female respondents put explicitly apologizing as the fourth mostly used strategy, whereas male respondents put explicitly apology as the second mostly used strategy; (2) More female respondents refuse to apology than male respondents. It leads us to the thought that in some conditions the social label that say “women are more polite than men” should be reconsidered and re-observed.
REFERENCES


