



# An Interlanguage Pragmatics Analysis

## *A Study of Apology Speech Act by Beginner and Intermediate Japanese Learners*

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### ABSTRACT

Apologies play an important part in maintaining a human relationship. The realization of the apology speech act is often culturally specific and challenging for most foreign or second language learners to master. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the apology speech act strategy used by Japanese language learners in a public university in Northern Bandung. The data were collected by using Discourse Completion Test (DCT) which investigated four apology situations focusing on relations with the interlocutors. The participants of this study were 30 beginner Japanese learners (BJL) and 30 intermediate Japanese learners (IJL). The collected data were then classified into eight semantic formulas and were analyzed qualitatively by using the theories from Fraser (1981), Olshtain and Cohen (1983) which have been modified by Haristiani and Sopiyan (2019) in their research. The result showed that both beginner and intermediate Japanese learners use main similar strategies overall. They tend to express an apology directly (*meikakuna shazai hyoumei*), followed by responsibility (*sekinin shounin*). However, the frequency of using the offer of repair (*hoshou no moushide*) strategy by intermediate Japanese learners tends to increase when compared to beginner Japanese learners. The finding demonstrates that there is a development of pragmatic competence in line with the increasing level of learners.

**Keywords:** *Apology speech act, Beginner Japanese Learners (BJL), Interlanguage Pragmatic (ILP), Intermediate Japanese Learners (IJL).*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to language learning, communicative competence is the goal (Abe, 2017). However, as Hymes (1972) underlined, grammatical knowledge is insufficient for communicating correctly with diverse interlocutors in varied settings. The second language -or foreign-language learners must therefore not only acquire linguistic norms such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary, but also the social rules of utilizing the target language (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983).

With regard to social rules, studies on interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) indicate that second language learners' speech acts frequently differ from those of native speakers due to a lack of understanding of the socio-cultural rules of the target language (Eviliana, 2015). As a result, it can lead to communication breakdowns. This kind of communication problem is known as a pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983).

Besides social rules, speech acts are one of the most important aspects of pragmatics in communication. There are several forms of speech acts. However, this research focuses on the act of apologizing. An apology serves a function to restore and maintain harmony between the speaker and the interlocutor (Kitao & Kitao, 2013). The realization of the apologetic speech act is frequently culturally distinctive, making it difficult for the most foreign or second-language learners to acquire it (Jones & Adrefiza, 2017). Improper speech may lead to serious consequences, such as misunderstandings and negative perceptions among native speakers. Therefore, speech acts become important areas of ILP studies.

In fact, there have been many studies about the apology speech acts in Japanese and Indonesian. Several previous studies on the speech act of apologizing show that the apology strategies used by native Japanese speakers (JNS) and native Indonesian speakers (INS) are different. The characteristics of native Japanese speakers

in conveying apologies (Haristiani, 2014; Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990) are as follows: 1) using direct apologies, 2) not providing explanations or justifications, and 3) employing simple strategies. Meanwhile, according to Hashimoto (as cited in Haristiani, 2014), the characteristics of the speech act of apologizing for native Indonesian speakers are as follows: 1) using explicit expressions, 2) giving lots of explanations, and 3) using address terms (*yobikake*) such as Ma'am, Sir, etc.

Based on the characteristics of the apology speech act, which are different from Japanese native speakers and Indonesian native speakers, it raises the question on how Indonesian Japanese learners realize their apologizing speech acts in the target language. Seeing that there are still few previous studies regarding the speech act of apologizing to Indonesian Japanese language learners, this research is worth investigating.

The purpose of this study is to determine the apologizing speech act strategy used by Indonesian as Japanese learners at the beginner and intermediate levels. The results of this study are expected to be used as a guide for developing pragmatic competence in the learning environment for Japanese in Indonesia.

### 1.1. Interlanguage Pragmatics

Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) is a new field of study that combines pragmatics and interlanguage. According to Bardovi-Harlig (2010), pragmatics is the study of all aspects of linguistic behavior related to contextual meaning. Therefore, the definition of Interlanguage pragmatic should not be too far from understanding the use of language in context. Meanwhile, Kasper and Rose (2002) define interlanguage as the ability of non-native speakers to understand and perform actions in the target language, as well as its development. In other words, ILP refers to the study of second language learners. Despite its wide scope, researchers in the field are often interested in exploring the speech acts of learners in the target language, with the aim of improving learners' pragmatic competence.

### 1.2. Apology Speech Acts

Apologizing can occur everywhere, whether in public or private conversations (Grainger & Harris, 2007). The apologetic speech act is classed as an expressive speech act (Searle, 1976). Apologies are essential in the maintenance of human relationships (Kitao & Kitao, 2013). An apology shows that the individual who made a mistake confesses his or her error and accepts responsibility for it. As a result, the speech act of apologizing is designed to rebuild the relationship once a mistake occurred.

The apology speech acts in Japanese have been investigated from a variety of viewpoints, including

examining Japanese apology strategies based on semantic formulations (Yamamoto, 2004) and in cross-cultural situations such as Japanese and English (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Kumagai, 1990; Sugimoto, 1997), Japanese and Vietnamese (Abe & Van, 2021), Japanese and Malaysian (Nabil, 2007), Japanese and Indonesian (Takadono, 1999; Haristiani, 2010), Japanese, Indonesian and Sundanese (Haristiani & Danuwijaya, 2017), Japanese and Sundanese (Haristiani & Sopiyan, 2019). Similar to the apology speech acts in Japanese, research on the apology speech acts in Indonesian has also been carried out, including by Wouk (2005; 2006), Jones and Andrefiza (2017). Nonetheless, there are only few studies that have been conducted on the speech act of apologizing among Indonesian Japanese learners.

The author had been doing an investigation prior to research on the speech act of apologizing among Indonesian as Japanese learners and found two studies which are related to the subject. The two studies were conducted by Radhiya (2011), Savana and Meisa (2021). According to Radhiya (2011), a common strategy used by many Indonesian students is to apologize explicitly and provide an explanation or reason for their mistakes. Meanwhile, Savana and Meisa (2021) describe the way Japanese language learners employ different strategies depending on the situation and the interlocutors. In the first situation (apologies to the lecturer for being late to class), most Japanese learners who are Javanese and Sundanese used two strategies: speech act indication expression and explanation or reason; and polite language (*keigo*). In the second situation (apologies to senior because the borrowed book is dirty), three strategies are used: speech act indication of expression; recognition of responsibility; and offers of repair. In the third situation (apologies to a friend for not being able to attend the new student admissions meeting), two strategies are used: speech act indication expression and explanation or reason.

In contrast to the two previous studies, this study concentrates more on the apology speech act employed by Japanese language learners in the same situation, specifically forgetting to return the book to an interlocutor with varying social distance and closeness. In addition, this study gathers a wider sample of participants with varying levels of language skills, notably beginners and intermediates.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Participants

The participants in this study were students of the Japanese Language Education Program, Faculty of Language and Literature, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI). The participants consisted of 60 students which were divided into two groups. There were

30 beginner level learners (BJL) and 30 intermediate level learners (IJL) in this study.

## 2.2. Data Collection

This research utilized a questionnaire in the form of the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) to collect data. A situational of simulation is needed to include in the questionnaire. The situation in this study of DCT is one that students most likely might encounter in their daily language such as “failed to return a book borrowed from the other person.” Two specific social factors are added to this situation: social distance and social dominance. Social distance indicates whether the speaker and interlocutor are closely (-D) or barely acquainted (+D). This study identified only two forms of social dominance or power relations between interlocutors in DCT: equal status (students-students) and unequal status (students-lecturers). All interlocutors in DCT are arranged as follows: (1) Intimate Lecturer (IL), (2) Non-Intimate Lecturer (NL), (3) Intimate Friend (IF), and (4) Not Intimate Friend (NF).

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were then classified into 8 types of semantic formulae and analyzed qualitatively by using the theory of Fraser (1981), Olshtain and Cohen (1983), which has been modified by Haristiani and Sopiyantri (2019) in their research. The eight semantic formulas are:

1. *Meikakuna shazai hyumei*: an expression of apology (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device/IFID).  
e.g. *Sumimasen* (I'm sorry).
2. *Sekinin shounin*: an acknowledgment of responsibility (RESP).  
e.g. *Hon wo motte kitenain desu* (I didn't bring the book).
3. *Hoshou no moushide*: an offer of repair (REPR).  
e.g. *Ashita wa motte kimasu* (I'll bring it tomorrow).
4. *Yobikake*: an address term (ADRS).  
e.g. *Sensei, ~San* (Mr/Mrs).
5. *Riyuu/joukyou setsumei*: an account or explanation (EXPL).  
e.g. *Kesa, isogimashitakara* (I was in a hurry this morning).
6. *Kantou Shiteki no hyouushutsu*: a surprised expression towards the other person (EXPR).  
e.g. *E!?* (Eh!?)
7. *Maeoki*: preface or opening sentences before moving on to the topic to be discussed (OPNG).  
e.g. *Okari shiteita hon nandesuga* (It's about the book that I borrowed).

8. *Sono ta*: another classification of semantic formulas that are not included in the previous category (OTHR).

e.g. *Aa, souieba* (by the way).

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research can be seen in the frequency distribution of apology strategies used by beginner and intermediate Japanese learners. Meanwhile, the usage of apology strategies by beginner and intermediate Japanese learners will depend on the interlocutors. Detailed explanations for each finding are provided in the following sections.

### 3.1. Frequency Distribution of Apology Strategies Used by Beginner and Intermediate Japanese Learners

Table 1 below is an apology strategy used by BJL and IJL when apologizing to the interlocutors because they forgot to return the book they had borrowed.

Table 1 indicates that the number of apologizing strategies utilized by intermediate-level Japanese learners is greater than that of beginner-level Japanese learners (BJL: 386, IJL: 459). Furthermore, when examined as a percentage, BJL employs four main strategies: expression of apology (IFID), acknowledgment of responsibility (RESP), address term (ADRS), and an offer of repair (REPR). IJL's main strategies are nearly similar but with different percentages and sequences, namely, expressions of apology (IFID), acknowledgment of responsibility (RESP), an offer of repair (REPR), and address term (ADRS).

**Table 1** Frequency distribution of apology strategies used by BJL and IJL (%).

	BJL		IJL	
	Frequency (%)		Frequency (%)	
<b>IFID</b>	136	37.88%	130	33.68%
<b>RESP</b>	113	31.48%	112	31.48%
<b>REPR</b>	35	9.75%	72	18.65%
<b>ADRS</b>	43	11.98%	49	12.69%
<b>EXPL</b>	4	1.11%	2	0.52%
<b>EXPR</b>	11	3.06%	8	2.07%
<b>OPNG</b>	0	0%	5	1.30%
<b>OTHR</b>	17	4.74%	8	2.07%
<b>TOTAL</b>	359	100%	386	100%

Based on the description above, it can be summarized that both beginner and intermediate level learners prioritize the strategy of apologizing (*meikakuna shazai hyoumei*/IFID) and acknowledgement of responsibility (*sekinin shounin*/RESP). In addition, address terms (*yobikake*/ADRS) and offering repair (*hoshou no moushide*/REPR) are also strategies that are quite important for learners in realizing the speech act of apologizing.

Several previous researchers have noted that when apologizing, native Indonesian speakers use strategies to provide justifications or explanations (Takadono, 1999; Wouk, 2005). However, this tendency is not transmitted by the learners into their L2 speech strategy. According to Al-Zumor (2011), an explanation (*riyuul/joukyou setsumei*/EXPL) is a situation-specific strategy. Perhaps a situation where “forgetting the book” is sufficient to explain, with an admission of guilt, “I forgot”. There is no need for further explanation, and more significant than the confession of responsibility (*sekinin shounin*/RESP).

### 3.2. The Usage of Apology Strategies by Beginner and Intermediate Japanese Learners Based on the Interlocutors

As previously discussed, there are several factors that influence a speaker’s words when expressing an apology. One of the factors is the interlocutor’s difference. In addition, the intimacy between the speaker and the interlocutor is also another determining factor.

#### 3.2.1. Apology Strategies Used by BJJ and IJJ to the Intimate Lecturer

Figure 1 indicates that, to the interlocutor of an intimate lecturer, BJJ and IJJ learners apply similar main strategies but in various percentages. Moreover, it is noticeable that BJJ employs three main strategies: IFID (100%), RESP (96.67%), and ADRS (73.33). IJJ employs four main strategies: IFID (96.67%), RESP (96.67%), ADRS (80.00%), and REPR (63.33%). The results of this DCT indicate that IJJ and BJJ use the offer of repair (REPR) strategy fairly different. REPR was

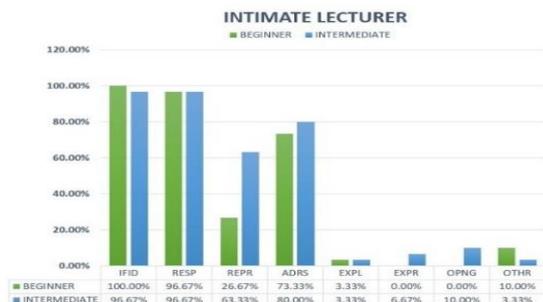


Figure 1 Percentage of apology strategies used by BJJ and IJJ to intimate lecturer.

used by 63.33% of intermediate-level learners merely only 26.67% of beginner-level learners.

The following is an example of the variety of apology strategies used by BJJ and IJJ toward an intimate lecturer. Data 1 is an example of a BJJ utterance, whereas Data 2 is an example of an IJJ utterance.

#### Data 1

*Sensei. sumimasen deshita. Hon wasuremashita.*  
Sensei, sorry. I forgot the book.

From data 1, it can be seen that BJJ expresses its apology using three strategies. BJJ express their apologies immediately with the expression “*Sumimasen*”. Then, the learners say, “*Hon wasuremashita,*” which means, “I forgot to bring back the book I borrowed” as a way of taking responsibility. In addition, before expressing regret, BJJ typically address their interlocutor (*yobikake*) with “*Sensei.*”

#### Data 2

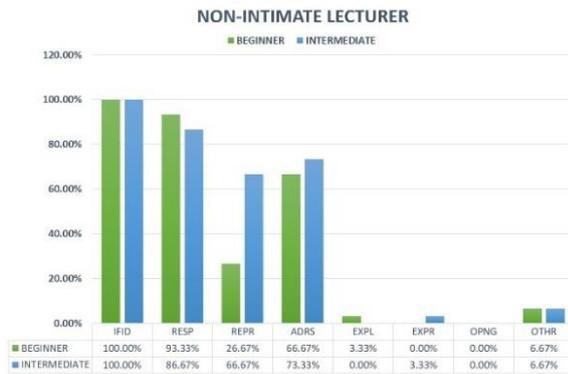
*Sensei. sumimasen. Hon wo motte kuru no wo wasurete shimaimashita. Ashita wa ikaga desuka.*  
Sensei, sorry. I forgot to bring the book. How about tomorrow?

According to data 2, IJJ employs four apology strategies. IJJ apologized by stating “*Sumimasen*” followed by “*Hon wo motte kuru no wo wasurete shimaimashita*” after they realized they forgot to bring the book. Similar to BJJ, before apologizing, IJJ addresses the interlocutor as “*Sensei*” out of respect for the interlocutor’s superior status. In addition to the three strategies described above, IJJ offers indirect repairs by asking “*Ashita wa ikaga desuka*” (How about tomorrow?).

According to the description above, both BJJ and IJJ use the same three main strategies when dealing with intimate lecturers: the apology expression (IFID), the acknowledgment of responsibility (RESP), and the address term (ADRS). However, there is one notable distinction, which demonstrating by the use of the “offering repair” (REPR) strategy, which is mostly carried out by IJJ rather than BJJ. This indicates that there are differences in the pragmatic competence of L2 learners at the beginner and intermediate levels when it comes to apologizing.

#### 3.2.2. Apology Strategies Used by BJJ and IJJ to the Non-intimate Lecturer

Figure 2 depicts the usage of BJJ and IJJ strategies when apologizing to non-intimate lecturers. Compared to the intimate lecturer as interlocutor, the main strategy employed have no difference. BJJ employs a total of three types, including IFID (100%) and RESP (93.33%), as well as ADRS (66.67%). IJJ employs four main



**Figure 2** Percentage of apology strategies used by BJJ and IJJ to non-intimate lecturer.

strategies: IFID (100%), RESP (86.67%), ADRS (73.33%), and REPR (66.66%). However, when comparing the percentages in Figure 1 to Figure 2, the use of RESP and ADRS strategies decreased slightly for both BJJ and IJJ when apologizing to non-intimate lecturer.

The following is an example of the variety of apology strategies used by BJJ and IJJ toward a non-intimate lecturer. Data 3 is an example of BJJ utterance, whereas Data 4 is an example of IJJ utterance.

#### Data 3

*Sensei, moushiwake arimasen deshita. Hon wo wasurete shimaimashita.*

Sensei, I'm sorry. I forgot the book.

The data 3 is shown that BJJ expresses their apology through three strategies. The most important strategy is to ask for their apology immediately, using the expression "Moushiwake arimasen deshita". "Moushiwake arimasen deshita" which, considering as more polite, apologetic expression than "sumimasen" (Beuckmann & Mori, 2018). Furthermore, as an acknowledgment of responsibility for the mistakes that occur, the learners admit that they mistakenly forgot to bring the borrowed book with the statement "Hon wo wasurete shimaishita". Similar to the way of apologizing to an intimate lecturer, these BJJ learners call their interlocutor using the term "Sensei" before expressing an apology.

#### Data 4

*Sensei, moushiwake arimasen. Ima wa sensei ga kashite kureta hon ga, motte kimasen. Ashita wa kanarazu motte kimasu. Hontouni moushi wake arimasen deshita.*

Sensei, I'm sorry. I didn't bring your book now. I will bring it tomorrow. I'm so sorry.

From data 4, IJJ utilizes four strategies. IJJ utterances also look more complicated and prolonged compared to BJJ's utterances. IJJ apologized by

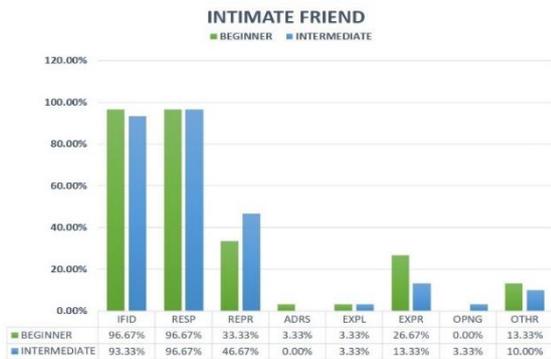
repeating "Moushiwake arimasen" and upgrading their apology expression with the phrase "Hontouni", which means "really." Then, as an expression of remorse or acceptance of responsibility regarding their mistakes, IJJ admits that they did not bring the borrowed book, saying "Ima wa sensei ga kashite kureta hon ga motte kimasen" Furthermore, similar to BJJ, IJJ addressed their interlocutors using the word "Sensei" as a show of respect before apologizing. In addition to three strategies above, intermediate learners also directly offer repair by saying, "Ashita wa kanarazu hon wo motte kimasu" (I will bring it tomorrow).

According to the explanation above, BJJ and IJJ both use the strategy of apologizing (IFID), acknowledging responsibility (RESP), and addressing the term (ADRS) while apologizing to a non-intimate lecturer. IJJ employs the offer of repair (REPR) strategy more frequently than BJJ. The strategies employed by BJJ and IJJ when apologizing to non-equal interlocutors, including intimate and non-intimate lecturers, are nearly identical, but there is a minor percentage difference. However, the difference is not significant.

Furthermore, the DCT analysis shows that the address term (*Yobikake*) is an L1 cultural influence that is carried by learners into the realization of the speech act of apologizing in L2. According to Haristiani's (2010) research, "address term" is commonly employed in the Indonesian language to express respect, attention, etc. This "address term" is also essential when apologizing to the interlocutor. This is consistent with the findings of this study. According to the data which Indonesian as Japanese language learners perceive *yobikake* to play a significant role in conveying apologies based on their mother tongue of culture. Other speech act studies have also talked about the use of the address term. For example, Hayati's (2013) research shows that Japanese speakers rarely use the semantic formula *yobikake* in refusal (*kotowari*) strategies.

### 3.2.3. Apology Strategies Used by BJJ and IJJ to the Intimate Friend

Figure 3 depicts BJJ and IJJ's strategy for apologizing to their intimate friends. The strategy which was employed when apologizing to an unequal interlocutor differs significantly to an equal interlocutor. Both BJJ and IJJ use two primary tactics when apologizing to close friends (equal interlocutor): IFID (96.67%, IJJ: 93.33%) and RESP (96.67%, BJJ: 96.67%, IJJ: 96.67%). In contrast to the findings of the previous two cases, ADRS is typically not utilized when apologizing to equal interlocutors. BJJ and IJJ employ the REPR strategy, even though the number is lower than 50.00% (BJJ:33.33%, IJJ:46.67%).



**Figure 3** Percentage of apology strategies used by BJJ and IJJ to intimate friend.

The following data is an example of the variety of apology strategies used by BJJ and IJJ toward an intimate friend. Data 5 is an example of BJJ utterance, whereas Data 6 is an example of IJJ utterance.

**Data 5**

*A, gomenne, wasurechatta.*  
Oh, sorry. I forgot.

The data 5 shows that BJJ apologizes directly with the expression “Gomen ne.” It is a casual apology that mainly using for friends. Then the beginner-learners said that they forgot to bring the book with the expression “Wasurechatta” as a way of taking responsibility for their mistakes. “Wasurechatta” is the plain form (*futsuutai*) of “Wasurete shimaimashita”. BJJ also expressed their surprise by using the interjection “A” at the beginning of their utterance.

**Data 6**

*A, sumanna, wasureta. Ima sugu tori ni iku kara, matte ne.*  
Oh, sorry. I forgot. I will take it now, please wait!

From data 6, IJJ uses the expression “Sumanna” as an expression of apology which followed by an acknowledgment that the speaker forgot to bring a book by saying “Wasurechatta”. Then IJJ gave direct repair offers, such as “please wait, I will take it now” by saying “Ima sugu tori ni iku kara, matte ne”. Similar to BJJ, IJJ also expressed their surprise by using the interjection “A” at the beginning of their utterance.

From the explanation above, the conclusion that could be drawn either BJJ and IJJ are using the same two main strategies when apologizing to intimate friends: the expression of apology (IFID) and the acknowledgment of responsibility (RESP). In addition, many learners, both BJJ and IJJ, employ the *futsuutai* (plain form) and informal expression of apology, such as *gomen*, *warui*, *suman*, etc.

**3.2.4. Apology Strategies Used by BJJ and IJJ to the Non-intimate Friends**

Figure 4 depicts BJJ and IJJ’s strategy for apologizing to their non-intimate friends. When compared with intimate friends, it shows that the percentage of using IFID (BJJ:100%, IJJ:100%) REPR (BJJ:90.00%, IJJ:93.33%) has increased, while RESP (BJJ:90.00%, IJJ:93.33%) has decreased, although not significantly. This shows that closeness (intimate and non-intimate) affects the choice of apology strategies for Japanese language learners, both at the beginner and intermediate levels.

The following data is an example of the variety of apology strategies which used by BJJ and IJJ toward a non-intimate friend. Data 7 is an example of BJJ utterance, whereas Data 8 is an example of IJJ utterance.

**Data 7**

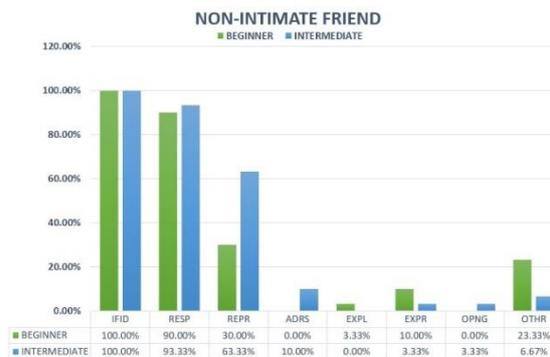
*Gomennasai, hon wo wasurete shimatta.*  
Sorry. I forgot the book.

The data 7 shows that BJJ expresses his apology to his close friends directly with the phrase, “Gomennasai”. Then, as a form of regret or acknowledgment of responsibility for the mistakes made, the BJJ admits that they forgot to bring the borrowed book with the phrase, “Hon wo wasurete shimatta”. “Wasurete shimatta” is also another plain form (*futsuutai*) of “wasurete shimaimashita”.

In addition, some BJJ offers repair by stating a phrase, for example: “Ashita kitto kimi ni kaesu” (tomorrow, I will surely return it) or “Tsugi no jugyou ni kaesu” (I will return it in the next lesson).

**Data 8**

*Gomennasai, hon wo motte kuru no wo wasurete shimaimashita. Ashita wa dou desuka.*  
Sorry. I forgot to bring that book. How about tomorrow?



**Figure 4** Percentage of apology strategies used by BJJ and IJJ to non-intimate friend.

In data 8, IJL uses “*Gomennasai*” as an expression of apology that followed by “*Hon wo motte kuru no wo wasurete shimaimashita*” to admit forgotten to bring the book. In addition, intermediate-level learners indirectly offered repair by asking “*Ashita wa dou desuka*” (How about tomorrow?), which implied “Can I return it tomorrow?”.

A conclusion could be drawn from the discussion above that when apologizing to non-intimate friends, BJJ and IJL employ the same two strategies: the expression of remorse (IFID) and the acknowledgment of responsibility (RESP). However, In IJL, the offer of repair (REPR) is utilized as one of the main strategies. This tendency is similar to the findings of Savannah and Meisa (2021), which described that learners’ apologies change based on the substance of their utterances. Some use the *teineigo* or *keigo* (formal form), while others use the *futsuutai* (plain form). In addition, the expressions used to apologize vary between *sumimasen*, *gomenasai*, etc.

The findings of this study reveal that Indonesian as Japanese learners, both at the beginner and intermediate levels, tend to employ different apologies depending on their relationship with the interlocutor. Specifically, the dominance of power influences the selection of apology strategies employed by learners. When the interlocutor is unequal, learners tend to use expressions of direct apologies (*meikakuna shazai hyoumei*), statements of responsibility (*sekinin shounin*), address terms (*yobikake*), and offers of repair (*hoshou no moushide*) respectively. Meanwhile, when the interlocutor is on more equal position with the learner, expressions of apology (*meikakuna shazai hyoumei*), expressions of responsibility (*sekinin shounin*), and offers of repair are typically employed (*hoshou no moushide*). The increasing usage of the offer of repair strategy (*hoshou no moushide*) as learners progress from beginner to the intermediate level demonstrates an improvement in pragmatic competence alongside the rise in linguistic proficiency.

In addition to the four main strategies of apologizing described above, the level of utterance also varies. For instance, the Japanese language has a plain form (*futsuutai*) and a polite form (*teineigo*). Learners modify the form of speech based on social status and closeness to the interlocutor, such as employing polite forms (*teineigo*) when apologizing to intimate and non-intimate lecturer and the plain form (*futsuutai*) while apologizing to intimate friends. However, when apologizing to non-intimate friend, the learners’ choice of speech for both BJJ and IJL varies from using the polite form and using the plain form.

According to the findings of this study, there are still a significant number of learners who struggle to discern the use of apologetic expressions in Japanese. As known before, various expressions of apology vary from the

highest level of the polite form (*sonkeigo*) to the regular level form (*futsuukei*), including *Moushiwake gozaimasen*, *Moushiwake arimasen*, *Sumimasen*, *Gomen*, *Gomennasai*, *Warui*, etc. Most of Japanese learners, both BJJ and IJL, use the expression *gomenasai* when apologizing to a lecturer whose position is higher than the learners, while using the expression *sumimasen* when apologizing to an intimate friend. According to Yamamoto (2004), before starting to speak, Japanese speakers evaluate the situation that made the apology happened and the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor before selecting the proper expression. Students should be more careful when selecting the appropriate expression because pragmatic failures are regarded as disrespectful by native speakers (Wannaruk, 2008; Zhao & Fukuoka, 2013).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the findings, it can be concluded that both beginner and intermediate Japanese learners employ similar strategies generally. They tend to apologize immediately (*meikakuna shazai hyoumei*), then take responsibility (*sekinin shounin*). However, intermediate Japanese learners prefer using the offer of repair (*hoshou no moushide*) strategy more frequently than beginner Japanese learners. This suggests that the ability to master grammar and pragmatic competence improves in line with the development of language skills.

The findings in this study are still limited in their use of apologetic strategies in a variety of one situation with four different interlocutors. The wide variation in different situations needs to be investigated further in future research. This study is expected to develop a framework for future interlanguage pragmatic research or in the development of Japanese as a Foreign Language learning materials in Indonesia.

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