Korean EFL Learners’ Apology Strategies: Being Appropriate in Interlanguage Speech Acts

Min, Sujung
(Kongju National University)

Min, Sujung. “Korean EFL Learners’ Apology Strategies: Being Polite in Interlanguage Speech Acts.” Modern Studies in English Language & Literature 57.3 (2013): 283–302. Among the speech acts we engage in daily, apology is frequently used in conversation to fill the various needs and enhance interpersonal relationships. The role of apology is to maintain and restore the interpersonal relationship and the speech act of apology is realized in different patterns from culture to culture. Relying on the two means of data collection from 20 Korean EFL learners and 20 native English speakers, the study examines how the Korean EFL learners perform apology speech act depending on social status of their interlocutors and how their speech act of apologies differ from that of native speakers of Standard varieties of English. Results showed that both Korean EFL learners and native English speakers used an explicit apology most frequently. Unlike native speaker, however, Korean EFL learners showed the contrastive distribution in using the Upgrader depending on the social status of interlocutors. (Kongju National University)

Key Words: speech acts, apologies, EFL learners, interlanguage, pragmatics

I. Introduction

The variations in speech forms depend on the context, that is, who we are talking to, when and where we are talking, what we are talking about. Therefore, as Kasper (1989) and Schmidt (1993) claim, acquiring pragmatic knowledge of target language including contextual
distributions of speech acts and appropriate uses of the strategies of each speech act is essential for language learners.

Among various speech acts, apologies are called for when there is some offensive behavior which has violated social norms (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). Consequently, apologies are inextricably tied to politeness in nature and can be realized differently from culture to culture. The effects of social variables such as status and distance on the selection of apology strategies often vary with the culture. In light of cross-cultural communication, therefore, even for the fluent EFL learners, the inappropriate use of apologies in some situations often results in pragmatic failure and lead to the judgement that the speaker is being impolite and uncooperative.

There have been research on speech act of apologies of nonnative speakers of English (Cordella, 1991; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Frescura, 1993; Mejer, 1992; Trosborg, 1987). In Korean EFL contexts, several studies on speech act of apologies (Chun, 2013; D. Kim, 2001; Koo, 2001; Shim, 2009) reported that even fairly advanced English learners often lack pragmatic competence and fail to convey politeness value properly. However, the use of apologies in Korean EFL learners' discourse compared to that of native speakers of Standard varieties of English still represents a little-studied area and we do not know much about how it is typically realized in EFL learners' interaction and how it is different from that of native speakers'.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate how Korean EFL learners perform the speech act of apologies and compare this with that of native speakers of Standard varieties of English.