

A Systematic Literature Review of Apology and Request Strategies in the EFL Context

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: apology, EFL context, request, speech acts strategies DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v9i1.1601 How to cite: Kulsawang, P. & Ambele, E. A. (2024). A Systematic Literature Review of Apology and Request Strategies in the EFL Context. <i>Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i>, 9(1), 33-53	<i>This study aims to examine the diverse strategies employed in apology and request, investigate the influence of cultural factors, social power, and social distance on these strategies, and explore the existing limitations and gaps in the literature for future research. Data collection is conducted using the qualitative technique. Qualitative content analysis is employed for data analysis. The SLR process provides a structured framework for analyzing various strategies employed in speech acts and investigates the impact of cultural variables and social distance on these strategies. Through the implementation of a predetermined review procedure, a total of 16 papers published between 2018 and 2022 were identified and analyzed. The findings demonstrated that many studies examined apologies and requests using different strategies and sub-strategies. Notably, politeness usage by Indonesian English teachers reflected social power dynamics, while linguistic strategies among Thai students and EFL learners were shaped by social distance. Thai study underscored the importance of cultural immersion, variations among interactants, and teaching factors in pragmatic competence. The PRISMA-guided systematic review effectively synthesized existing literature. The gaps, novel insights, and unresolved issues identified provided a roadmap for researchers to propel the field forward. This systematic review contributed a snapshot of current knowledge, charted a course for future investigations, identified gaps, and leveraged the strengths of systematic approaches.</i>

1. Introduction

Language serves as a sociocultural tool for communication among individuals (Al-Jarbou, 2002). The study of word meaning in context is known as pragmatics, which explores the components of meaning influenced by knowledge of the physical and social world, socio-psychological factors in communication, and the specific temporal and spatial contexts in

which words are used. Pragmatics investigates how speakers and listeners, in acts of communication, rely on context to convey meaning beyond literal interpretation (Griffiths, 2006). The speaker formulates a linguistic message with intended or implied meaning, while the hearer interprets the message and infers its meaning. Pragmatics focuses on the speaker's intended meaning, assuming shared knowledge between interlocutors (Brown & Yule, 1983; Tomas, 1995). Furthermore, intercultural communication focuses on the exchange of information between interlocutors who utilize various native languages, but share a common language and come from diverse cultural backgrounds (Kecskes, 2014).

Understanding the diverse apology and request strategies in the EFL context is closely linked to the broader field of pragmatics. This study delves into the utilization of language within certain situations to effectively communicate ideas, as well as the complex domain of speech actions, where cultural nuance in apologizing and making requests are of great importance. Speech acts are essential components of language and serve as powerful means of communication. The concept of speech acts refers to the performative aspect of utterances, including locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Within illocutionary acts, sub-categories can be distinguished; Austin (1962a) identified five categories: verdictives (expressing judgments), exercitives (exerting influence or exercising power), commissives (assuming obligations or declaring intentions), expositives (clarifying reasons or arguments), and behabitives (adopting attitudes or expressing feelings). These categories hold significant importance in the fields of pragmatics and the philosophy of language (Hamza, 2007). Pragmatics also examines the use of words and grammatical structures in conversation as they serve specific functions. Searle (1969) categorized speech acts at the locutionary act level into declaratives, representatives, commissives, directives, and expressives. Further noted that speech acts encompass various actions, such as making statements, giving commands, making requests, extending invitations, prohibiting actions, offering suggestions, apologizing, expressing praise, congratulating, expressing regret, and expressing disapproval.

The systematic literature review (SLR) holds great importance as it provides a thorough examination of apology and request tactics in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, specifically throughout the years 2018 to 2022. The investigation of pragmatics, speech acts, and intercultural communication has shed light on the complex correlation between language, culture, and successful communication. The gaps identified in existing literature, particularly the narrow scope of studies related to apology and request strategies in EFL cultures, underscore the need for further research. The investigation into Thai English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' distinct approach to apologies and requests presents an opportunity to bridge this gap and contribute nuanced insights to cross-cultural pragmatics. Moreover, the observed dearth of studies addressing social distance's impact on linguistic strategies emphasizes the need for more in-depth exploration in future research endeavors. While this SLR has advanced our understanding of apology and request strategies, it also sheds light on limitations and the current trend of the research study. The predominantly narrow focus, reliance on specific cultural and linguistic aspects, small sample sizes, and dependence on written data are notable areas for improvement. Addressing these limitations can be helpful for scholars who need to conduct research relevant to apology and request strategies. They can use this systematic review to adopt their future research to fill the gaps such as the methodology, the broader scopes, diverse samples, authentic data, robust theoretical frameworks, and a deeper exploration of

sociocultural factors in intercultural pragmatics. The systematic review process, guided by the PRISMA conceptual framework, has proven effective in collating and synthesizing existing literature. However, it remains imperative for future research to ensure robust literature searches, reproducible methodologies, and a continuous commitment to minimizing bias. The gaps, novel insights, and unresolved issues identified in this review provide a roadmap for scholars and researchers to propel the field forward. In essence, this systematic review contributes a snapshot of current knowledge and charts a course for future investigations. By embracing the identified gaps and leveraging the strengths of systematic approaches, researchers can enhance the depth, applicability, and relevance of studies in intercultural pragmatics, fostering more effective cross-cultural communication and understanding.

The apology and request have received significant scrutiny in recent years among the speech acts under investigation. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research examining the impact of cultural background on apologies and requests in the setting of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Additionally, there is a lack of understanding of the differences between EFL learners and native speakers in their use of apologies and requests (Nugroho & Rekha, 2020). Although several research have examined the cross-cultural aspects of apology and request techniques, only a few have specifically investigated this phenomenon in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2019). This study utilizes a systematic literature review (SLR) to collect and examine research on various apologies and request strategies in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, specifically within the period of 2018-2022. The research questions are outlined below:

1. What are the various strategies utilized in apology and request?
2. How do cultural factors, social power, and social distance influence the use of these strategies?
3. What are the existing limitations and gaps in the literature for future research?

2. Literature Review

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature on research that has investigated apology and request strategies in various contexts. Before presenting the review, "the preceding studies" will discuss the concepts and definitions of speech acts related to apologies and requests, which are relevant to understanding pragmatics in EFL.

2.1 Speech Acts

Austin (1962b) used the term "speech acts," which is the book, namely "How to Do Things with Words," emphasizing that by speaking a sentence, one may both carry out activities and communicate information (Parker & Riley, 1994). Speech acts consist of three elements: the locutionary act (the literal meaning of the saying words), the illocutionary act (the speaker's goal in expressing something), and the perlocutionary act (the consequence or impact arising from the intended force of the speech). Searle (1969) classified illocutionary acts into six distinct categories: a) Representatives are used to describe states of affairs, such as confessing or asserting. b) Directives are used to instruct or command someone, such as requesting or warning. c) Questions are used to seek information, such as asking or inquiring. d) Commissives are used to commit the speaker to a future action, such as making a promise or vowing. e) Expressives are used to indicate the speaker's emotional state, such

as apologizing or thanking. f) Declarations are used to change the status of an entity, such as naming or appointing.

2.2 Speech Acts Across Cultures

In research on speech acts and culture, opinions are divided regarding the relationship between speech acts and culture. Fraser et al. (1980) stated that while languages may differ in how and when speech acts are performed, every language provides users with the same basic set of speech acts and strategies to perform them. The researchers suggested that speech acts vary across cultures, particularly regarding the people they address. However, when considering the sets, they include the interactional goals of each speech act. Furthermore, others contended that speech acts function according to universal pragmatic principles (Austin, 1962b; Searle, 1969; Brown & Levinson, 1978).

2.3 Politeness Strategy Theory

Politeness entails the conscientiousness of others' emotions and the creation of a pleasant environment for them. Politeness is a means of preventing any disputes that may occur during a discourse among individuals. Politeness is how people convey their respect for another person by avoiding certain behaviors or engaging in specific routines (Goffman, 1967). Indirect speaking acts can be employed as a means of demonstrating politeness. Brown & Levinson (1978) discussed politeness theory, which suggests that individuals often choose indirect communication methods instead of direct ones to demonstrate politeness, as directness might be perceived as a threat to one's social standing or reputation. According to Leech (1983), it is feasible to enhance politeness by using more indirect illocutions. This is because they provide more options and because the power of the illocution tends to be reduced and hesitant as it becomes more indirect.

2.4 Social Power and Social Distance

Apologies have received considerable focus in sociolinguistics because of their crucial function in reestablishing social peace following a real or imagined transgression (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1981). Brown & Levinson (1987) argue that social power and distance play a crucial role in determining how people from diverse cultural backgrounds view apologies. Hence, scholars in the field of interlanguage studies have placed significant emphasis on cultivating pragmatic competence, specifically sociopragmatic competence, which involves comprehending the social standing and identity of interlocutors in a discourse. Any departure from these sociopragmatic norms might lead to pragmatic misconceptions throughout the conversation (Thomas, 1983; Ziran, 2004).

Apology studies have been done to investigate the influence of several characteristics, such as gender, on apology norms in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situations within the learners' local culture (Olshtain, 1989). Prior studies on gender have suggested no substantial impact of gender on utilizing apology strategies (Ali, 2015). On the other hand, many scholars believe proficiency level influences the performance of apologies, with higher proficiency learners exhibiting better apologizing skills. Rastegar & Yasami (2014) substantiated this assertion by identifying notable disparities in apologetic tactics among learners with varying levels of competence. Istifci (2009) observed that learners with greater skill levels utilize a more comprehensive array of apology strategies and exhibit more intricate apology patterns. However, Khorshidi et al. (2016) have offered conflicting perspectives since they discovered no noteworthy disparities in using apology

strategies when considering different degrees of expertise. Tabatabaei & Farnia (2015) contended that there is no direct relationship between one's degree of proficiency and their ability to use language effectively in social contexts.

Further investigation is needed in the field of request strategies. For instance, Rue et al. (2007) examined the request strategies used by Korean native speakers, focusing on the level of directness and the impact of power and social distance. They discovered that individuals with higher power tended to use more indirect request strategies. Shams & Afghari (2011) studied the influence of gender and culture on the interpretation of indirect requests in Persian. They found that culture significantly affected the understanding of indirect speech acts, while gender did not. Felix-Brasdefer (2005) investigated the concepts of indirectness and politeness in requests among native speakers of Mexican Spanish in formal and informal situations. The study revealed that the level of familiarity between interlocutors influenced the degree of indirectness in requests.

In conclusion, politeness strategy theory, often associated with researchers like Brown & Levinson (1978), is a conceptual framework that elucidates how individuals employ language to uphold their social reputation (known as "face") and minimize possible challenges to face during communication. It deals with various strategies and linguistic choices that individuals make to be polite and avoid face-threatening acts in their speech. Furthermore, apologizing and making requests are under the broader domain of pragmatics. The field of speech acts focuses on comprehending the linguistic mechanisms employed by people to carry out diverse activities, including asserting, commanding, inquiring, apologizing, and requesting. Thus, apologizing and making requests are specific speech acts that involve expressing regret, seeking forgiveness, or asking someone to do something. Politeness strategies play a crucial role in how individuals carry out these speech acts, as they aim to maintain face and minimize potential threats to face when apologizing or making requests. According to the "EFL context," it refers to the cultural and social context in which language is used in EFL societies. Cultural norms and social conventions can significantly influence how speech acts, like apologizing and making requests, are performed in EFL cultures. For this reason, the application of politeness strategies in EFL contexts may differ from Western contexts, reflecting unique cultural values, hierarchical structures, and social expectations.

In summary, "politeness strategy theory," "speech acts of apologizing and making the request," and "the EFL context" are connected within the study of pragmatics, as they deal with how people use language, mainly when apologizing and making requests, in culturally and socially diverse contexts like those found in EFL. Politeness strategy theory provides a framework for understanding the polite strategies individuals employ when performing these speech acts, and these strategies can vary based on the specific cultural context in which the communication occurs. Researchers in pragmatics often investigate how these strategies are employed in different cultural settings, including those in EFL, to gain insights into cross-cultural communication.

Figure 1 presents examples of apologies and requests from 1998-2017, illustrating that many studies have primarily focused on learners' proficiency in apologies and requests, with only a few examining request strategies in East EFL and Southwest EFL. However, the investigation of apology and request strategies in EFL remains limited. Therefore, it is essential to conduct further research on apology and request phenomena in EFL, as it underscores the importance of politeness principles in this region.

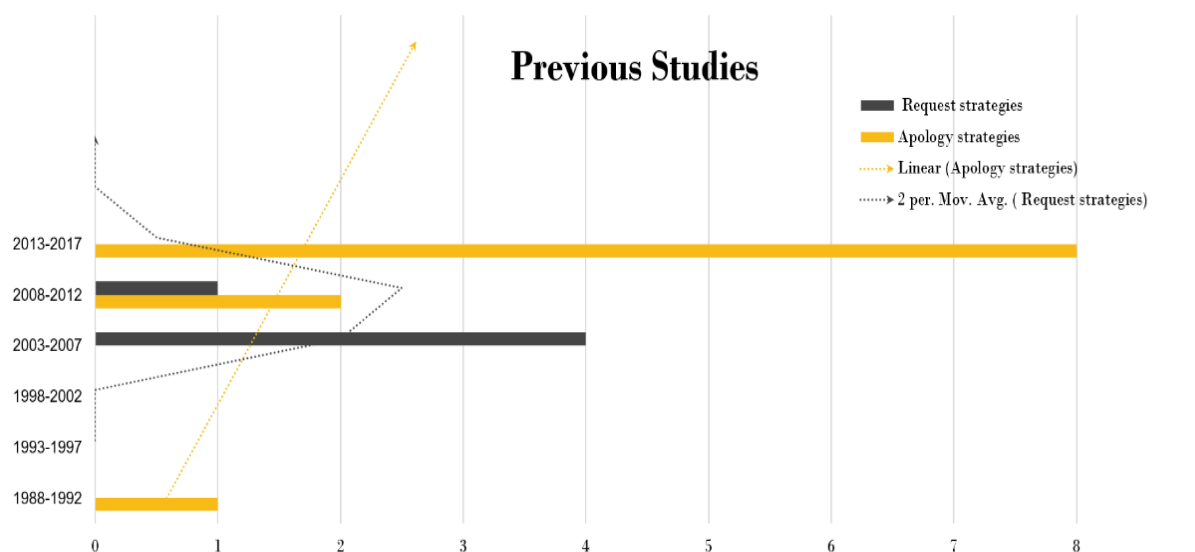


Figure 1 The previous studies in request and apologies strategies before 2018 (East Asia & Southwest Asia)

- Felix-Brasdefer (2005): The notions of indirectness and politeness in the speech act of requests among native speakers of Mexican Spanish.
- Rue, Zhang, & Shin (2007): Request strategies in Korea.
- Shams & Afghari (2011): The effect of gender and culture on indirect requests in Persian.
- Olshtain (1989): Language (ESL) or (EFL) apologize for the norm of their L1 culture.
- Istifci (2009): The higher *proficiency* learners and inclined to use a broader range of apology strategies.
- Rastegar & Yasami (2014): The significance between learners of higher and lower *proficiency* levels in apology strategy use.
- Noptana & Alexander (2014): Thai Undergraduate EFL Learners' Apologies: A Speech Act Perspective.
- Ali, 2015: Gender (sex) and apology strategies.
- Tabatabaei & Farnia (2015): Positive correlation between *proficiency* level and pragmatic competence.
- Khorshidi, Mobini & Nasiri (2016): Mohebbi & Salehi (2016): The use of apology strategies between learners of high and low *proficiency* levels.

Figure 1. The previous studies on requests and apologies studies between 1988-2017

2.5 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)

The previous study utilized the PRISMA methodology to systematically evaluate research articles authored by Elasar et al. (2021). The research focused on utilizing a comprehensive literature review to analyze apology and request tactics employed by Libyan university students in English. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted to collect and evaluate research to determine the various apology and request tactics favored by Arabic learners of English and the impact of culture and social distance on these strategies. The study investigated applied techniques, speech acts, native and foreign accents, and pragmatism. The research was collected from many sources, highlighting apologies and request tactics in varied circumstances. The articles were studied to comprehend the selected preferred approach technique and its underlying rationale. These previous studies on apologies and requests emphasize the importance of adhering to politeness principles, particularly in EFL. Therefore, integrating this knowledge into language classrooms is crucial for enabling learners to use apology and request strategies in communication effectively. PRISMA is also a tool to collect the data. Thus, considering the limited research on apology and request strategies in EFL, the following section will explore the trends and patterns in apologies and requests specific to this region.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The design of this study was a qualitative approach to observe the document. Adopting a qualitative approach implied a focus on understanding the nuances and complexities of apology and request speech acts in the EFL context. Qualitative content analysis was

particularly suitable for exploring rich, context-specific information, which aligns with the study's objective of thoroughly examining these communicative strategies.

3.2 Instrument

The study's systematic review approach was based on the PRISMA criteria. PRISMA is well-known for its capacity to guarantee transparency and reliability in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The framework offered a systematic structure for identifying, screening, and selecting relevant studies, reducing bias in searching the literature.

3.3 Data Selection Criteria

The PRISMA guidelines by Sampson et al. (2008) and resources such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and ERIC were used in this review. These resources were employed to establish the criteria for determining eligibility and exclusion, to outline the methods for extracting data, and to facilitate the review process, which encompassed screening, identification, and determining eligibility. The PRISMA ensures a transparent and comprehensive report of systematic reviews and meta-analyses. It guided this review, offering benefits such as straightforward research questions, identification of inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a defined process for analyzing a large amount of scientific literature. The review specifically searched for terms related to apology and request speech acts in the context of EFL. The electronic search for relevant information was conducted using online databases: Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and ERIC. These databases were chosen as they were considered the most appropriate sources of comprehensible information in the field of pragmatics. Specific keywords and quotation marks were used to select papers in these databases. The access number for these databases was N145.

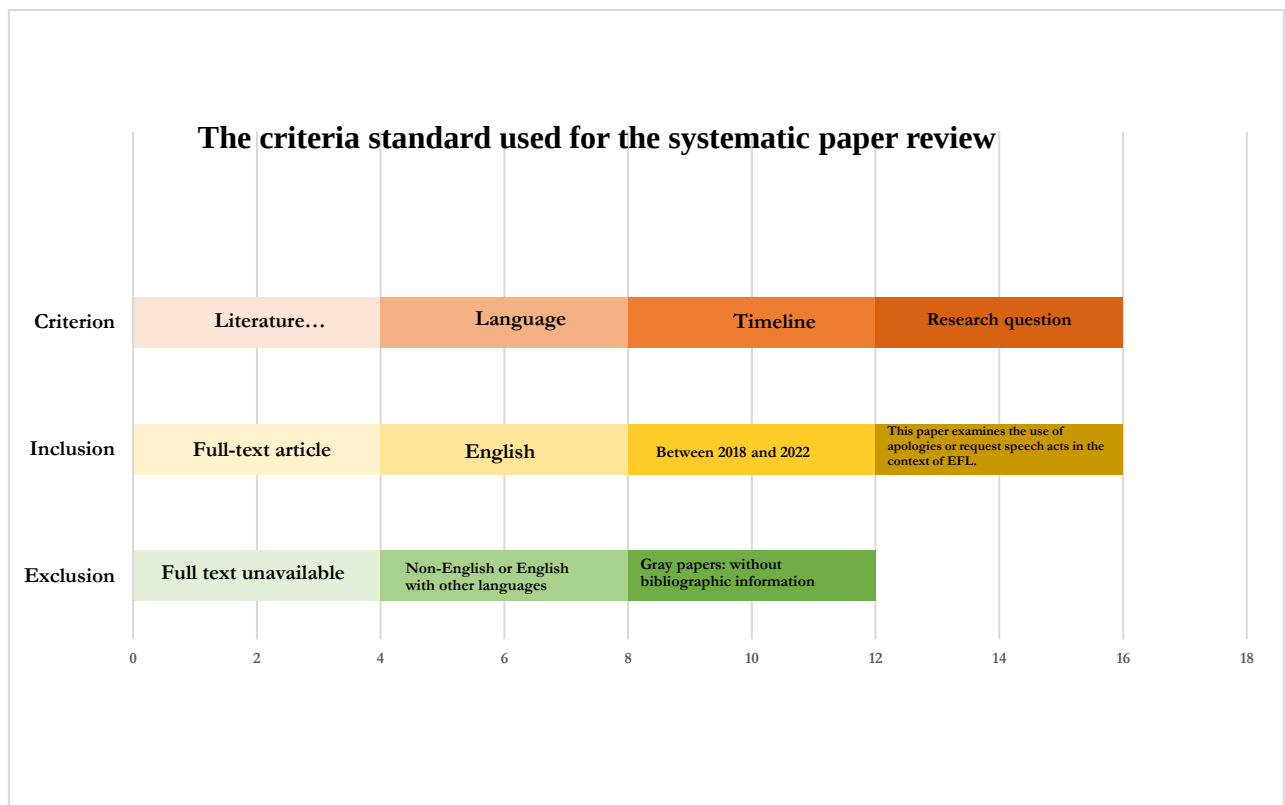


Figure 2. The criteria standard used for the systematic paper review

Several eligibility and exclusion criteria were applied and verified. This included selecting articles published in English between 2018 and 2022 that focused on apology or request strategies in the EFL context. Articles that lacked full text were not in English or English with other languages and had no bibliographic information were excluded. Only articles published in journals that focused on apology or requests were considered. At the same time, other types of publications such as literature reviews, theses, books, conference papers, data, preprints, presentations, and posters were eliminated. Duplicate records and articles in languages other than English were removed. The goal was to observe the research development and ensure a sufficient study period.

3.4 Samples

The purposive sampling was used in this study. The samples of this study were 145 previous versions of review papers selected from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and ERIC online databases.

3.5 Analytical Framework

This study draws on PRISMA conceptual frameworks to comprehensively understand the investigated literature review of apology and request strategies in the EFL context. PRISMA is an essential element of a systematic literature search review. The literature search, also known as the information retrieval process, not only provides information for a systematic review, but it is also the fundamental process determining the data that may be analyzed. The systematic review method involves additional components, including screening, data extraction, and qualitative or quantitative

synthesis techniques. The successful execution of these components relies on the identification of eligible research. Therefore, it is crucial to organize the literature search in a manner that is both strong and capable of being replicated to reduce bias as much as possible. In the study by Sampson et al. (2008), the issue has become more complex due to the ongoing development of new checklists and tools. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Statement, often known as the PRISMA Statement, is the most widely used reporting guidance for systematic reviews. It specifically addresses the literature search aspect of systematic reviews.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

The systematic review process involved three steps. The first step involved identifying keywords for the search process based on previous studies and the thesaurus employed for each online database; 145 articles were included. Duplicate articles were eliminated in the screening process. In the second stage, 130 articles were eligible for review based on title and abstract screening. The third stage involved accessing the full articles. A total of 114 articles were excluded from consideration due to their lack of emphasis on apology or request speech acts in the EFL context. During the concluding evaluation phase, 16 articles were chosen for qualitative analysis.

Data extraction and synthesis were crucial stages in the systematic review. Relevant information was extracted from each study using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. A data extraction form was used to record the gathered information from the 16 studies, presented as a diagram (see Figure 3).

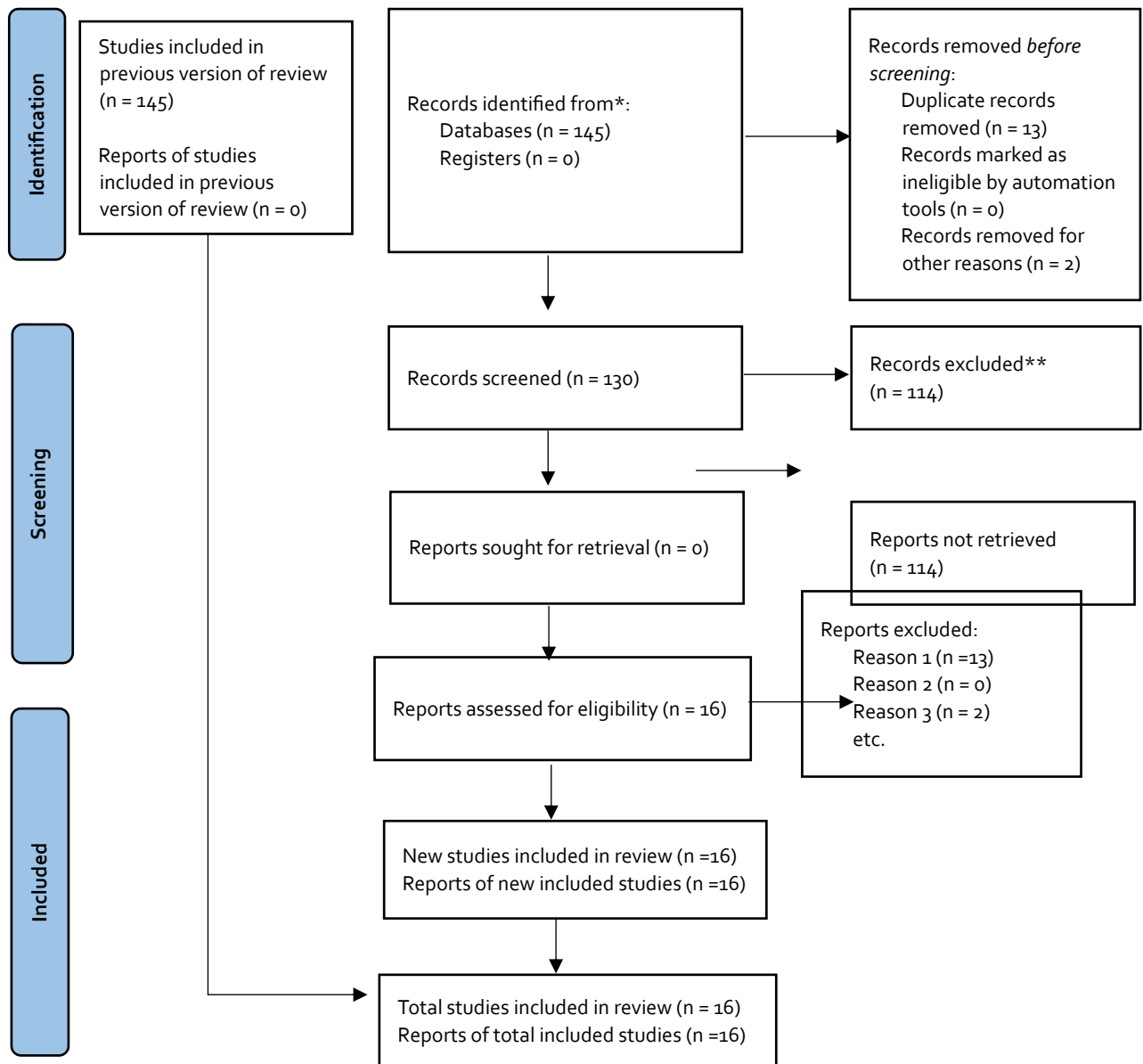


Figure 3. PRISMA flow diagram (adapted from Page et al., 2020)

4. Results

In this section, the review findings are presented and discussed. An overview of the selected studies is provided, followed by a comprehensive description of the review's findings. Separate sub-sections are then dedicated to addressing the research aims.

4.1 The Diverse Strategies Employed in Apology and Request

The systematic review of existing literature has identified two main types of speech act strategies: apology speech acts and request speech acts. Figure 4 presents the literature that has been categorized into these two groups. It is crucial to acknowledge that the number of literature sources within each category varies significantly, as shown in Figure 4.

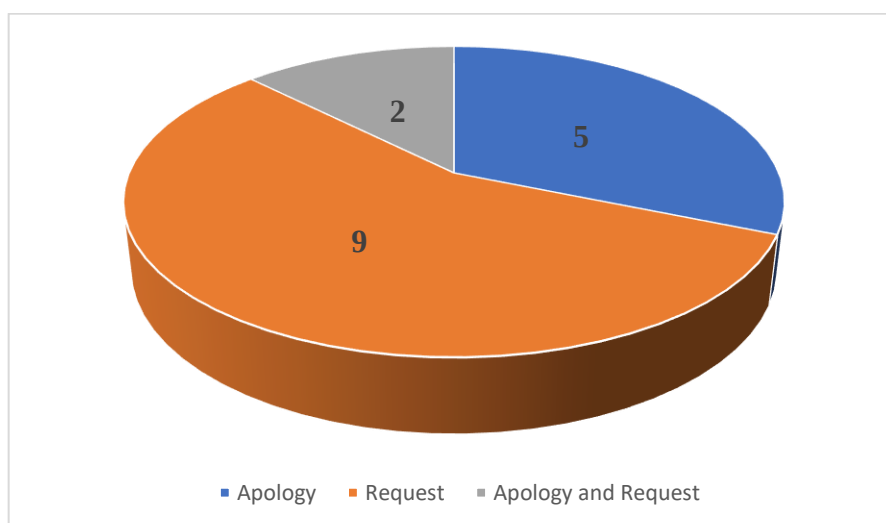


Figure 4. Classification under apology and request strategy

The systematic review uncovered interesting strategies related to apologies and requests in speech acts.

Based on request and apology strategies, this section analyzed sixteen articles, nine in the EFL countries and seven in Thai. The overall categorization of the studies in the EFL context is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: The studies in the EFL context

Authors	Study Title	Strategy	Instrument	Method
1. Rustandi (2018)	The University Students' Expressions of Politeness Strategies on Students' Request in Classroom Interaction in Indonesian Context	Request	DCT	Qualitative
2. Nugroho & Rekha (2020)	Speech Acts of Requests: A Case of Indonesian EFL Learners	Request	DCT Questionnaire FGD	Qualitative
3. Khairunnisa (2020)	International Modification in Requesting Used by EFL Learners	Request	Background survey DCT	Qualitative
4. Berowa (2022)	Contrasting EFL Politeness Strategies in Business Email Communications: China, Hongkong, and the Philippines	Request	A business email	Qualitative
5. Darong et al. (2020)	Politeness Markers in Teachers' Request in Classroom Interactions	Request	The observation and field notes Recorded	Qualitative
6. Mahmud et al. (2018)	Promoting a Balance of Harmony and Authority in Indonesian Research Seminars through Politeness Strategies	Request	Recording	Qualitative
7. Huwari (2018)	A Study of Apology Strategies in English: A Case Study on Jordanian and EFL Undergraduate Students at Zarqa University	Apology	DCT Semi-structure interview	Qualitative
8. Bilfirdausi (2019)	I'm Sorry for My Bad English: Why Does EFL Learner Say It?	Apology	The observation Interview	Qualitative
9. Eliza (2019)	Pragmatic Transfer in Apology Employed by English University (UIN) Raden Fatah Education Students of Islamic State	Apology	DCT The observation	Qualitative

After examining multiple apology and request strategies studies, Table 1 outlines the nine articles focused on EFL contexts.

According to request strategy in the EFL context, Rustandi (2018) researched the politeness strategies employed by university students in the Indonesian classroom setting. The study aimed to identify the politeness strategies used by Indonesian students when making requests, revealing four main strategies: query preparatory, hedged performative, suggestory preparatory, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. Similarly, Nugroho & Rekha (2020) explored the request strategies used by Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and the reasons behind their choices. The study found that Indonesian EFL learners predominantly utilized conventionally indirect request strategies, indicating a preference for subtle and indirect approaches. The researchers also conducted a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to gain insights into the cultural factors and social distance influencing the learners' preference for conventionally indirect requests. Khairunnisa (2020) focused on internal modification in requests among EFL learners, investigating various internal modification strategies and identifying influencing factors. The research revealed that EFL learners' use of internal modification in requesting was limited compared to native speakers. Factors such as proficiency level, contact with native speakers, and immersion in English-speaking environments were found to impact the effectiveness of these strategies. Berowa (2022) examined politeness strategies in business email communications, specifically contrasting those employed in China, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. The study found that the three countries commonly used the "please" politeness strategy for requests in electronic communications. However, variations were observed, with China and Hong Kong employing gratitude and deference strategies, while the Philippines displayed hedging expressions such as "I suggest," indicating a more democratic approach. Darong et al. (2020) studied the politeness markers Indonesian English teachers use in classroom interactions. The analysis of audio-recorded interactions, observation, and field notes revealed that teachers employed various internal and external politeness markers to mitigate the illocutionary act of requests. Similarly, Mahmud et al. (2018) explored politeness strategies used in Indonesian research seminars to balance harmony and authority. The study revealed that speakers employed strategies such as attentiveness, identity markers, native speech, reaching agreements, humor, indirectness, requesting clarification, and expressing regrets to achieve this balance.

Considering the apology strategy, Huwari (2018) compared apology strategies utilized by Jordanian and EFL undergraduate students at Zarqa University. The study aimed to understand cultural differences in apology behavior between these two speech communities. The findings indicated that both groups frequently employed account and compensation strategies. However, EFL participants displayed less utilization of gratitude when apologizing to individuals of equal or lower status. Bilfirdausi (2019) examined why an EFL learner apologized for his bad English and the impact of this behavior on his speech delivery. The study revealed that cultural and psychological factors influenced the learner's use of the apology strategy, driven by pragmalinguistic failure and the need for safety. Eliza (2019) investigated apology strategies employed by English education students at Islamic State University (UIN) Raden Fatah, examining the influence of pragmatic transfer on these strategies. The findings revealed five apology strategies used by the students, with the expression of regret using the word "sorry" being the most frequent. The study also emphasized the impact of social status on the choice of formal or informal language. These studies offer valuable insights into the strategies and variations in politeness, apology, and

request behaviors across different cultural and linguistic contexts. They underscore the importance of cultural factors, social distance, pragmatic transfer, and psychological influences in language learners' language use. Understanding these variations and factors is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication and language teaching.

Apart from the nine articles in the EFL context, the categorization of the studies in the Thai context is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: *The studies in the Thai context*

Authors	Study Title	Strategy	Instrument	Method
1. Chiravate (2019)	An Interlanguage Study of Thai EFL Learners' Apology	Apology	A questionnaire	Qualitative
2. Khanapornvorakarn & Gadavanij (2022)	Intercultural Pragmatic Analysis of "Sorry" in Inflight Service Refusals by Flight Attendants: A Case Study of a Thai Airline	Apology	A questionnaire	Qualitative
3. Kanchina & Deepadung (2019)	Request Modifications Used by Chinese Learners and Native Speakers of Thai	Request	DCT	Qualitative
4. Khamkhien (2022)	Speech acts or speech act sets of refusals: Some evidence from Thai L2 learners	Request	ODCT	Qualitative
5. Pan (2022)	A Corpus-Based Study on Politeness Used by L1 Thai EFL Learners	Request	The daily English conversations AntConc A Chi-square test (SPSS)	Mixed-methods
6. Boonsuk & Ambele (2019)	Refusal as a Social Speech Act among Thai EFL University Students	Apology and Request	DCT	Qualitative
7. Zhang et al. (2019)	Pragmatic Competence in Business Context: A Case Study of Thai EFL University Students	Apology and Request	DCT Interview	Qualitative

Upon reviewing the various studies on apology and request strategies, the following summary can be derived from Table 2, which presents seven articles related to the Thai context.

Regarding the apology strategy in Thailand, Chiravate (2019) conducted a study on Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' perception of offense context and apology strategies compared to native English speakers. The research revealed differences in offense context perception due to cultural background. However, it showed that Thai EFL learners who had extensive exposure to the target language had greater similarities in their use of apology strategies compared to native speakers. Khanapornvorakarn & Gadavanij (2022) explored how Thai EFL flight attendants used the word "sorry" in refusals during in-flight services. The study analyzed the semantic formulas, strategies, and pragmatic transfer associated with "sorry" in these refusals, observing the influence of contextual factors and situational contexts.

Based on request strategy, Kanchina & Deepadung (2019) investigated request modifications used by Chinese learners of Thai compared to native speakers of Thai. The study categorized and identified the participants' external and internal modification types, finding both shared and distinct modification types among the two groups. Khamkhien (2022) focused on how Thai students expressed refusals in communication scenarios, considering the interlocutor's status. The analysis of responses revealed linguistic form discrepancies, with indirectness and a combination of direct and indirect strategies being common. Pan (2022) conducted a corpus-based study on the politeness strategies employed by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversation. The findings showed a preference for the negative politeness super-strategy, with limited range and patterns in their usage of politeness strategies.

Furthermore, apology and request strategies were explored by Boonsuk & Ambele (2019). They explored refusal strategies employed by Thai EFL university students. The study identified direct and indirect refusal strategies, observed the absence of adjuncts to refusals, and identified two new sub-strategies. Zhang et al. (2019) investigated the development of pragmatic competence among Thai EFL university students majoring in business studies. The study revealed significant improvement in pragmatic competence among third-year students, highlighting explicit instruction, textbooks, multimedia input, and language proficiency.

These studies provided valuable insights into the apology and request strategies used in various settings within EFL, emphasizing the influence of cultural background, immersion in the target language, individual differences, and instructional factors on learners' pragmatic competence. The findings have implications for language teaching and intercultural communication, suggesting the importance of effective pedagogical interventions and pragmatic instruction to enhance learners' pragmatic competence in diverse language learning environments.

Furthermore, the findings from these studies suggested that language teachers can benefit from this research by incorporating insights into their teaching methods. They can design instruction that considers cultural factors, individual differences, and exposure to the language to improve their students' pragmatic competence in apology and request situations. Understanding how apology and request strategies vary across cultures is vital for successful intercultural communication. These findings enhance the awareness of cultural differences and enable persons involved in international communication to adjust their communication methods accordingly, resulting in more efficient and considerate interactions.

4.1.1 Trends in Request and Apology Strategies Research

Figure 5 illustrates the trend of apology and request strategies, showcasing their varying proportions. The findings are particularly intriguing, showing a significant surge in request strategies from 2018 to 2022. In contrast, the apology strategy experienced a remarkable increase from 2018 to 2019 but declined considerably in 2022. Additionally, the corroborative strategies, which encompass both apologies and requests, were only observed in the initial stages from 2018 to 2019. Based on these results, the isolation strategy, particularly the request strategy, emerged as the most favored approach.

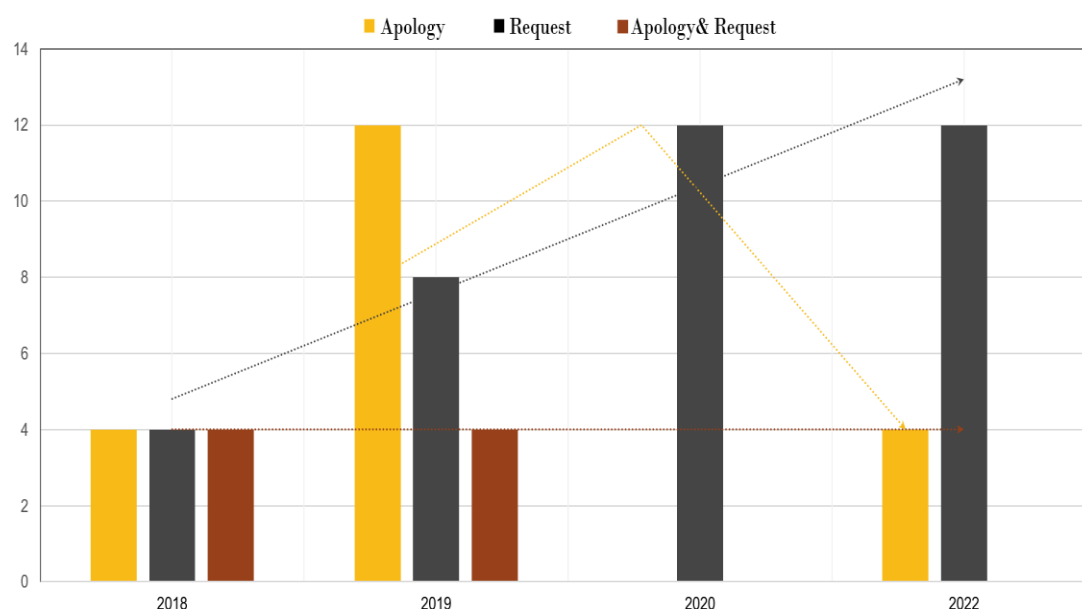


Figure 5. Trends in request and apology strategies research between 2018-2022

4.2 Cultural Factors, Social Power, and Social Distance

Regarding cultural factors, social power, and social distance, multiple studies in the EFL context emphasize the importance of these factors in shaping apology and request strategies. Scholars such as Rustandi (2018); Nugroho and Rekha (2020); Berowa (2022); Mahmud et al. (2019); Huwari (2018); Bilfirdausi (2019); Eliza (2019) have explored the influence of culture, social power, and social distance on politeness strategies, particularly in the context of apologies and requests. Cultural factors encompass shared beliefs, values, and norms within a society and significantly impact individuals' understanding and expression of politeness. Rustandi's (2018) research in the Indonesian context revealed specific politeness strategies employed by university students, such as query preparatory, hedged performative, suggestory preparatory, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. Nugroho & Rekha (2020) found that Indonesian EFL learners predominantly used conventionally indirect request strategies, indicating the influence of cultural factors. Berowa (2022) highlighted cultural variations in politeness strategies in business email communications across China, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, reflecting cultural norms and expectations. Huwari (2018) compared apology strategies between Jordanian EFL learners and EFL undergraduate students, revealing differences influenced by cultural nuances.

Social power, referring to relative authority, status, or hierarchy, also shapes politeness strategies. Darong et al. (2020) observed Indonesian English teachers using politeness markers to mitigate directness in requests, considering the power dynamics between teachers and students. Mahmud et al. (2019) explored politeness strategies in Indonesian research seminars, highlighting strategies like attentiveness and expressing regrets to balance harmony and authority. Social distance, which relates to the perceived psychological or social proximity between individuals, also influences the selection of politeness strategies. Eliza (2019) found that individuals with lower social status tend to adopt more polite strategies in various social relationships, while those with higher or equal status exhibit less

polite and more casual expressions. Huwari (2018) noted the use of compensation strategies in apology behavior, influencing the perceived social distance.

Based on the provided information about the research papers in the Thai context, several of them appear relevant to the themes of culture, social power, and social distance. Here is a conclusion highlighting the relevance of each paper to these themes. Chiravate (2019) explored Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' perception of offense context and apology strategies compared to native English speakers, which is relevant to the theme of Culture. This study examined the influence of cultural background on the perception of offense and emphasized the role of culture in shaping communication norms and strategies. Khanapornvorakarn & Gadavanij (2022) focused on how Thai EFL flight attendants use the word "sorry" in refusals during in-flight services, which is pertinent to Social Power. It delved into how language is wielded in a service industry context, where power dynamics between flight attendants and passengers can influence communication strategies. Kanchina & Deepadung (2019) investigated request modifications used by Chinese learners of Thai compared to native speakers of Thai; this study touched upon cultural and social distance. This study examines how learners from diverse cultural and linguistic origins modify their language usage to conform to the Thai-speaking environment. Khamkhien (2022) focused on how Thai students express refusals in communication scenarios, considering the interlocutor's status, which is particularly relevant to Social Distance. The researcher investigated the impact of power dynamics and social distance on the selection of language strategies in communication. Pan (2022) examined a corpus-based study on politeness strategies employed by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversation pertinent to culture and social Power. The result sheds light on how learners navigate cultural norms and power dynamics in intercultural communication. Boonsuk & Ambele (2019) explored refusal strategies that Thai EFL university students employed in this study as relevant to culture and social power. The finding represented how cultural norms and power dynamics shape communication in refusal contexts. Zhang et al. (2019) investigated the development of pragmatic competence among Thai EFL university students majoring in business studies; this research is linked to social power. The researcher examined how language proficiency and explicit instruction influence students's ability to navigate communication in a professional context.

In conclusion, these research papers comprehensively explored language and communication in diverse cultural and social contexts. They highlighted the intricate interplay between culture, social power dynamics, and social distance in shaping language use. From examining apology and request strategies in Thai EFL learners with varying degrees of exposure to English to analyzing how linguistic politeness strategies were employed in intercultural conversations, these studies illuminate the multifaceted nature of communication. Whether investigating the influence of cultural backgrounds, power dynamics in service industries, or the adaptation of linguistic strategies among learners from different cultures, these papers provide useful insights into the intersection and effect of culture, social power, and social distance on language usage in different communication situations.

Moving on to Figure 6, it presents an overview of 16 studies, with eight continuing to emphasize the significance of cultural factors, social power, and social distance. This highlights the interconnectedness of various variables and is essential in communication phenomena. They are crucial in guiding speakers to interact appropriately and suitably with

individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, social distance is essential in assessing the relationship between interlocutors in a given situation and their level of familiarity or intimacy with each other.

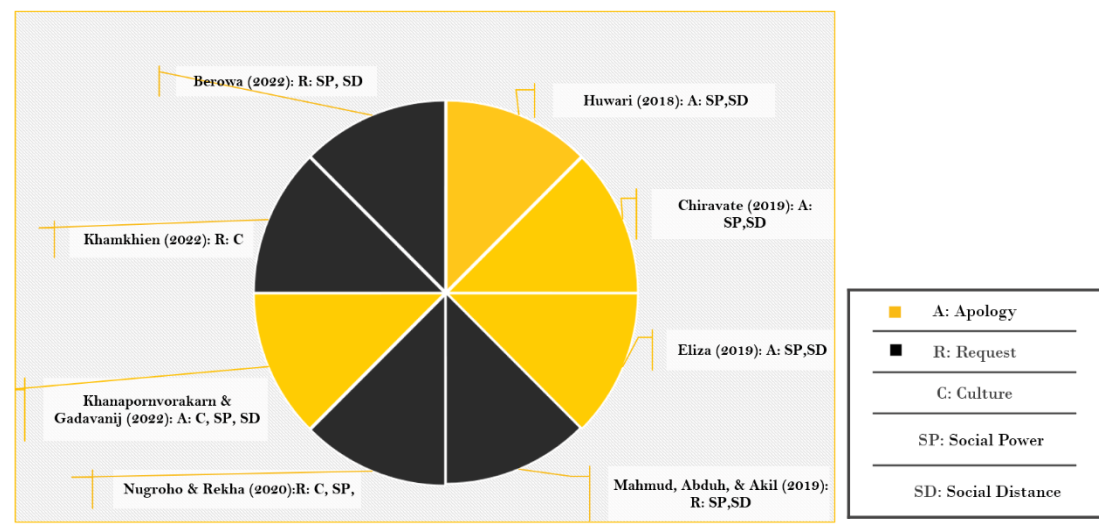


Figure 6. Cultural factors, social power, and social distance

4.3 Limitations and Gaps from the Current Reviewed

While the papers offered valuable insights into apology and request strategies across different cultural and linguistic contexts, several limitations and gaps should be acknowledged. Firstly, some studies had a narrow scope, focusing solely on specific speech acts like requests and apologies while neglecting other essential acts such as refusals, compliments, or invitations. This narrow focus limits the breadth and applicability of the findings. Examining a more comprehensive range of speech acts was essential to understanding interlanguage pragmatics better and addressing this limitation.

Secondly, the setting of the studies predominantly revolved around specific cultural and linguistic groups, such as Indonesian, Thai, Chinese learners of Thai, Jordanian, and EFL undergraduate students, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The findings may only be partially applied to other cultural and linguistic groups, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. It was necessary to conduct comparative studies across multiple cultural and linguistic groups to explore cross-cultural differences and similarities in politeness, request, and apology strategies.

Thirdly, some studies employed small sample sizes, which may hinder the representativeness of the findings and restrict their generalizability to a larger population. Therefore, it was crucial to include more extensive and diverse samples to enhance the validity and generalizability of the results. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking participants' development over time would offer a more thorough comprehension of the acquisition and development of request and apology strategies. Moreover, many studies heavily rely on written data, such as Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) or written questionnaires, which may need to fully capture the complexity and nuances of spontaneous oral communication in real-life situations. Incorporating more authentic data, such as recordings of actual interactions, would increase the ecological validity of the findings and provide a more accurate representation of language learners' pragmatic competence.

Furthermore, some studies needed a clear analytical framework or theoretical foundation, which may undermine the interpretability and reliability of the results. Further research should utilize robust analytical frameworks or theoretical models to guide the analysis and interpretation of data, thereby enhancing the validity and theoretical contributions of the studies. Furthermore, the research design and analysis did not thoroughly investigate or incorporate sociocultural characteristics such as social distance, cultural background, and exposure to the target language. More in-depth investigations are needed into how these sociocultural factors influence language learners' pragmatic competence. Exploring the role of societal norms, power dynamics, and contextual factors would enrich our understanding of interlanguage pragmatics.

Addressing these limitations and gaps requires researchers to broaden the scope of their studies by including diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, employing more extensive and diverse samples, incorporating naturalistic data, establishing robust theoretical frameworks, and considering the influence of sociocultural factors. By doing so, researchers can provide more comprehensive and applicable insights into request and apology behaviors in interlanguage pragmatics.

5. Discussion

The literature review of EFL learners' apology and request strategies reveals that many studies investigate these strategies and their sub-strategies to support the collected data. Apology and request strategies are essential in interpersonal communication, particularly in diverse cultural contexts. The discussed studies shed light on the variations and factors influencing these strategies in different contexts within EFL countries, particularly Thailand. Regarding proficiency and learner pragmatic strategies, high- and low-proficiency learners employed different learner strategies to tackle the comprehension of speech acts, implicatures, and routines in different contexts (Hsuan-Yu Tai, 2021).

Regarding refusals, Thai learners employ direct and indirect strategies, utilizing excuses, reasons, and explanations. The preference for negative politeness strategies and the limited range of politeness strategies and lexical patterns in English conversations reflect the pragmatic performance of these learners (Aijmer, 2019). The studies emphasize the significance of pragmatic competence in various contexts, including social and business situations. They contribute to effective communication and intercultural competence among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners by providing insights into appropriate apology and request strategies. According to Taguchi & Kim's (2016) politeness theory, people prefer indirect politeness over direct ones since directness may be face-threatening. Leech (1983) also suggests that using more indirect illocutions increases the degree of politeness by adding optionality and diminishing the force of the illocution. Thus, some activities and values deemed appropriate and polite in one context and culture could be regarded as offensive in another (Chang & Wei, 2020). The indirect strategies are to know how to use language in socioculturally appropriate ways, considering the learners and the context of the interaction (Taguchi, 2023).

Cultural factors are inherent in human nature and are present in interlocutors' behavior, interactions, challenges, problem-solving, and speech. When individuals from different regions or countries communicate, cultural characteristics can be observed in how words, phrases, and sentences are articulated and understood. Culture and language cannot be

regarded as separate variables in the communication process (Tsepilovaa & Mikhaleva, 2015). Speech acts exhibit variation across cultures, particularly in their delivery, but they share universal pragmatic principles regarding interactional goals. Brown & Levinson (1987) propose that social power and distance are crucial sociolinguistic factors that impact the interpretation of apologies across individuals from diverse cultural contexts. It is essential for speakers to accurately acknowledge the social influence of the person they are speaking to select the most fitting and relevant strategy while engaging with persons from different cultural backgrounds (Idris & Ismail, 2023). Additionally, social distance is significant in considering the relationship between interlocutors in a specific situation and their level of familiarity or intimacy (Masaeed et al., 2018).

The thorough literature evaluation confirms the significance of pragmatics and speech acts in communication. Pragmatics is highlighted as a field that examines how language users rely on context to convey meaning beyond literal interpretation. Speech acts, including apologies and requests, are identified as essential components of language with various categories and functions. Furthermore, the systematic literature review in the EFL context underscores the limited research on apology and request strategies in the EFL context. This study highlights a deficiency in the existing research, specifically on the impact of cultural background and language experience on how Thai English learners express apologies in a foreign language.

Moreover, other scholars can use this systematic literature review for the pedagogical implications by providing insights into apology and request strategies. The review suggested that language teachers can incorporate these insights into their teaching methods, considering cultural factors, individual differences, and exposure to the language to enhance students' pragmatic competence in intercultural communication. According to the current trends and future directions, while the review primarily focuses on studies conducted up to 2022, it also hints at current trends in apology and request research in the EFL context. The authors express the importance of effective pedagogical interventions and pragmatic instruction, emphasizing enhancing learners' pragmatic competence in diverse language learning environments.

6. Conclusion

The present study examines the diverse strategies employed in apology and request, investigates the influence of cultural factors, social power, and social distance on these strategies, and explores the existing limitations and gaps in the literature for future research. The investigation is focused on understanding the nuances and complexities of apology and request speech acts in the EFL context using the PRISMA framework. The limitation of this research is that the focus on the EFL context, which is related to apology and request strategies, pertains to the potential need for more generalizability to a broader, more diverse cultural landscape. From the research problem proposed, the study concludes that The Thai study's emphasis on cultural immersion, variability across participants, and instructional variables yielded valuable insights into the complex aspect of pragmatic competence. Acknowledging social distance as an essential component for successful communication and appropriate interactions highlighted the significance of considering sociocultural nuances in language usage, especially in intercultural environments.

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