

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Relationship maintenance is an important thing for people when it comes to social interaction. Thus, most people will do many kinds of strategies in order to gain quality interaction and keep their relationship with others harmoniously (Brown and Levinson 1978). For instance, as an attempt to build a better relationship, people will perform various strategies in communication (Dindia 2003). In this case, Austin (1970) believed that strategies in communication not only help people to say what they intend to say, but also help them to get their expected reaction that will be given by the interlocutors.

However, in a social interaction, we cannot deny that sometimes we make a mistake that leads to misunderstanding or resentment for the interlocutors. The mistake that we make perhaps comes from either our utterances or behavior. Certainly, it becomes the cause of unpleasant situation that gives negative impacts on the relationship between the involved parties (Hamizahbt and Paramasivam 2013). Thus, strategies in apologizing to restore relationship and make a better situation is needed.

Trosborg (1995) believed that there are many ways or forms of apologizing that are performed by people as the strategies to repair mistakes and maintain self-image. In this situation, the one who is apologizing is called as the apologizer, meanwhile, the one who is addressed by the apologizer is called as the recipient

(Fatigante, et al. 2015). Here, the apologizer attempts to express his/her guilt by uttering particular statements or expressions. If the recipient realizes or accepts it as an apology attempt, he/she will probably forgive the apologizer.

According to Trosborg (1995), one action that is commonly taken by people to fix unpleasant situation and repair relationship is the use of apology strategies. Trosborg (1995), as cited in Belfas and Musyahda (2015), believed that the use of apology strategies plays a fundamental role for the implementation of politeness towards social interaction. In relation with apology strategies that are commonly used by people, Trosborg (1995) introduced the types of apology strategies which include rejection, minimizing degree of offence, acknowledgement of responsibility, explanation or account, apology expression, offer of repair, promise and forbearance, and expressing concern for hearer.

According to Ruth and Kuntjara (2016) apology strategies can be said as a fundamental thing to be understood by those who have a job that is tightly linked with public services such as Customer Service Officers. Deviney (1998) argued that as the communicator for the company, Customer Service Officers are demanded to build a favorable relation with the customers. They have to respond properly to all kind of questions, requests, or even complaints. It is because Customer Service Officers must maintain the image of the company against public, especially the customers. For instance, when the Customer Service Officers are facing a complaint, they have to mind their words carefully. The way the Customer Service Officers apologize to the customers really matters to the maintenance of relation between both parties.

Starting from that urgency, this present study attempted to investigate the use of apology strategies by the Customer Service Officers of Traveloka on Twitter @traveloka. According to Yasmin (2020), Traveloka can be said as an influential online travel agency since it has been admitted as one of Unicorn Startups from Indonesia which valued up to US\$ 2 billion. As the only Unicorn startup in Indonesia that provides various services in travelling, tourism, and lifestyle sector with more than 10 million users, it can be assumed that Traveloka has a bigger chance in getting complaints compared to others platforms which have fewer kinds of services and users.

However, according to Warta Ekonomi (2020), Traveloka is awarded as *Innovative Company for Sustainable Features Innovation in Travel Ecosystem* on Indonesia Digital Innovation Award 2020. The award given to Traveloka is for their great innovation along with best services that are experienced by the customers. This kind of achievement that is awarded to Traveloka has proved that as a service-based company, they are professional and great enough in managing and treating the customers since it still becomes favorite travel app in Asia lately (Lee 2019).

Moreover, the utilization of Twitter for interacting with the customers has a significant role in customer services. It is because in a digital transformation era, the use of social media (such as Twitter) is popular and familiar for nowadays people. Thus, many companies are competing to change their communication patterns with the costumers so that their interaction with the customers can be effectively undertaken. The customers prefer to deliver their questions, requests, or

even complaints through the company's official social media account rather than contacting the call center via phone that requires phone credits (Setyadi 2019).

For the case of Traveloka for example, rather than the call center, its official Twitter account @traveloka becomes the main source for the customers to keep updated, ask questions, or complain for it is easier to be accessed by them. Thus, the use of apology strategies in written discourse here should be concerned carefully. For instance, when the Customer Service Officer is apologizing to the customer via phone, only that one customer can see how professional they are in dealing with customers' complaints. Meanwhile, when they are apologizing by posting a tweet, the entire @traveloka's followers can witness how bad or good the Customer Service Officers in responding the customers since every tweet that is posted publicly will last for a long time in @traveloka's timeline and every Twitter user can see it. In other words, the use of proper apology strategies in written discourse (or in @traveloka's tweets) plays a greater role for the company.

From those kinds of considerations, it is very interesting to discuss the strategies that are used by Traveloka related to customer services issues such as responding customer's complaints by apologizing. In this case, the Customer Service Officers of @traveloka have to face the complaints by giving such gentle responses in order to maintain customer's trust. The Customer Service Officers of @traveloka are fully responsible in keeping a good relation with the customers in order to save the image of the company. Therefore, they have to perform proper strategies in apologizing while facing the complaints from the customers.

This present study primarily aimed to explore the most frequent type of apology strategies performed by the Customer Service Officers of Traveloka on Twitter @traveloka and investigate the reasons of why they used a dominant type of apology strategy. Many tweets from 15<sup>th</sup> January until 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020 were selected in order to specify the data. This particular range of tweets was chosen as the source of data because there were three key events that happened during these days which may trigger the customers in giving feedback to Traveloka.

The first event is related to the most popular paying method occupied by Traveloka called PayLater. During this period, Traveloka had announced some new regulations applied in PayLater (Fadila 2020). Second, these days can be considered as the trial phase of Traveloka's new scope of service in lifestyle and entertainment sector named Traveloka Xperience which was launched in the last-mid of 2019 (Traveloka Press 2019). The last event is about the launching of the Traveloka app's newest version which had been equipped with some new features (Traveloka 2020).

Those key events are strongly connected to the customer service issues. During 15<sup>th</sup> January until 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020, the Twitter account of @traveloka might be overflowed by customer's feedbacks concerning to those related events. In this kind of situation, proper responses are highly required to be performed by the Customer Service Officers of @traveloka. So that the relationship between the company with the customers can be maintained and the customers' trust can be restored as well.

In order to gain knowledge about apology strategies that are essential for analyzing the data, a review on previous studies is highly needed. Dzihni (2015) investigated apology strategies used by the Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, on her national apology speech. Investigating apology strategies can also be generated from movies as Ilmah's (2015) work that focused on exploring the apology strategies used by the main characters on *Stuart Little 2* movie. Belfas and Musyahda (2015) also investigated the types of apology strategies that were frequently used in real-life conversation between the customer service officers of Telkomsel and their customers. Compared to all of those studies, there are some gaps that can be highlighted compared to this present study. All of those studies concerned to the use of apology strategies in a spoken discourse. Meanwhile, this study focused on the use of apology strategies in a written discourse. Another gap is that one of those studies discussed apology strategies used by the Customer Services Officers of in a real-time situation. In another hand, the present study examined the strategies of apologizing used in the social media interaction.

Some researchers have conducted study of apology strategies in written discourse. However, the use of apology strategies within social media interaction, especially on Twitter, is still considered as an interesting issue to be discussed. Thus, this research is expected to provide a new insight on apology strategies from a new object of study. Moreover, the result of the present study is also expected by the writer to give such a practical guide for the reader on the use of apology strategies in a public service landscape within social media interaction.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problems**

In accordance with the background of the study that has been stated above, two questions were established in order to guide the study. The questions include:

1. What is the most frequent type of apology strategies performed by the Customer Service Officers of Traveloka on Twitter @traveloka?
2. Why do the Customer Service Officers of Traveloka on Twitter @traveloka use a dominant type of apology strategy?

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

In relation with the research questions that are established above, the aims of this study can be stated as follows:

1. To examine the most frequent type of apology strategies performed by the Customer Service Officers of Traveloka on Twitter @traveloka.
2. To investigate the reasons of why the Customer Service Officers of Traveloka on Twitter @traveloka used a dominant type of apology strategy.

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study are expected to provide contributions both theoretically and practically. This present study may theoretically contribute in providing further information about the development of apology strategies research for anyone who is interested in the study of Pragmatics. Besides, this study may also give the scholars a brand-new perspective, specifically the use of apology strategies in one of social media platforms (Twitter).

For the practical contributions, this study may help those who work as Customer Service Officers to understand how to face customers' complaints properly by using apology strategies. It is because this study may guide people in becoming a professional public service employee who is able to handle complaints from the customers in a right way. By knowing the importance of using proper apology strategies from this study, people who work as Customer Service Officers will be able to maintain the relationship between the company and the customers.

### **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

Apology strategies : known as the ways of apologizing that are commonly performed by people in order to repair their relationship against the others and fix unpleasant situation (Trosborg 1995).

Customer Service Officers : the employees of a certain company whose work generally deals with customer service stuffs. They are the representative of the company who have great impact, contact, and interaction towards the customers (Deviney 1998).

Traveloka : a digital booking platform for travel and lifestyle needs which offers various services related to transportation, accommodation, and lifestyle products. It has been recognized as the Unicorn Startup from Indonesia that provides some key products on several



sectors for its consumers including attraction and activities reservation, connectivity, as well as culinary directories (Traveloka Press 2019).

Twitter

: a kind of social media platform that allows its users to share stories, thoughts, moments, pictures, or even videos through posting tweets. It also facilitates the users in interacting with people all over the world (Curran, O'Hara and O'Brien 2011).