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Javanese Generation Z Responding to Apology Situations: Negotiating Harmony and Boundaries in Sociopragmatic Interaction

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Purpose
This study investigates the speech act of apology responses among Javanese Generation Z individuals, exploring how modern youth navigate the complex intersection of traditional cultural values and contemporary communicative norms.

Method
Using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) comprising eight distinct written situations that systematically vary sociolinguistic dimensions—such as social distance, power dynamics, and offense severity—data was collected from 53 Javanese Generation Z participants, yielding 424 utterances. The collected utterances were analyzed based on a synthesized taxonomy of apology response strategies, categorizing responses into four primary macro-strategies: Acceptance, Acknowledgement, Evasion, and Rejection along with their micro-strategies.

Results/findings
The findings show a strong tendency toward Acceptance in most situations, reflecting the enduring influence of Javanese values such as rukun (social harmony) and njaga rasa (guarding feelings). However, in more sensitive contexts—such as repeated offenses, peer accountability, and service-related issues—participants shift toward Acknowledgement and Evasion, indicating a more direct and assertive approach. Despite this shift, outright Rejection remains rare, suggesting it is still socially dispreferred.

Conclusion
Overall, Javanese Generation Z demonstrates a balance between maintaining traditional politeness and adapting to modern expectations of directness and accountability.

Keywords
Apology responses, Generation Z, Javanese culture, Speech acts, Politeness strategies.

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Abstrak

Tujuan
Penelitian ini mengkaji tindak tutur respons terhadap permintaan maaf pada Generasi Z Jawa, dengan tujuan untuk memahami bagaimana generasi muda menavigasi persimpangan yang kompleks antara nilai-nilai budaya tradisional dan norma komunikasi kontemporer.

Metode
Data dikumpulkan menggunakan Discourse Completion Task (DCT) yang terdiri dari delapan situasi tertulis yang secara sistematis memvariasikan dimensi sosiolinguistik, seperti jarak sosial, relasi kekuasaan, dan tingkat keparahan pelanggaran. Sebanyak 53 partisipan Generasi Z Jawa menghasilkan total 424 tuturan. Data tersebut dianalisis menggunakan taksonomi strategi respons permintaan maaf yang diklasifikasikan ke dalam empat makro-strategi utama: Acceptance (Penerimaan), Acknowledgement (Pengakuan), Evasion (Penghindaran), dan Rejection (Penolakan), beserta mikro-strateginya.

Hasil/temuan
Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya kecenderungan kuat terhadap strategi Acceptance dalam sebagian besar situasi, yang mencerminkan masih kuatnya pengaruh nilai-nilai budaya Jawa seperti rukun (harmoni sosial) dan njaga rasa (menjaga perasaan). Namun, dalam konteks yang lebih sensitif—seperti pelanggaran berulang, tanggung jawab antar teman sebaya, dan masalah dalam layanan—partisipan cenderung beralih ke strategi Acknowledgement dan Evasion, yang menunjukkan pendekatan komunikasi yang lebih langsung dan tegas. Meskipun demikian, strategi Rejection tetap jarang digunakan, yang mengindikasikan bahwa penolakan langsung masih dianggap kurang dapat diterima secara sosial.

Kesimpulan
Secara keseluruhan, Generasi Z Jawa menunjukkan kemampuan untuk menyeimbangkan antara mempertahankan kesantunan tradisional dan beradaptasi dengan tuntutan komunikasi modern yang lebih menekankan keterusterangan dan akuntabilitas.

Kata kunci
Apology responses; Generation Z; Javanese culture; Speech acts; Politeness strategies.

الملخص

الهدف
تبحث هذه الدراسة في الفعل الكلامي المتمثل في الرد على الاعتذار لدى أفراد "الجيل زد" (Generation Z)من الجاويين، وتستكشف كيف يتعامل الشباب المعاصر مع التقاطع المعقد بين القيم الثقافية التقليدية وأعراف التواصل الحديثة.

الطريقة
تم جمع البيانات من 53 مشاركاً من "الجيل زد" الجاويين باستخدام "مهمة إكمال الخطاب" (DCT)، التي تضمنت ثمانية مواقف مكتوبة متباينة تختلف فيها منهجياً الأبعاد الاجتماعية-اللغوية — مثل المسافة الاجتماعية، وديناميكيات السلطة، وشدة الإساءة — مما أسفر عن جمع 424 عبارة. وقد خضعت هذه العبارات للتحليل استناداً إلى تصنيف مُركَّب لاستراتيجيات الرد على الاعتذار، حيث صُنِّفت الردود ضمن أربع استراتيجيات رئيسية (كبرى): القبول، والإقرار، والمراوغة، والرفض، إلى جانب الاستراتيجيات الفرعية المرتبطة بكل منها.

النتائج
تُظهر النتائج ميلاً قوياً نحو "القبول" في معظم المواقف، مما يعكس التأثير المستمر للقيم الجاوية مثل "روكون" (الانسجام الاجتماعي) و"نجاغا راسا" (مراعاة المشاعر). ومع ذلك، ففي السياقات الأكثر حساسية - مثل تكرار الإساءة، ومساءلة الأقران، والقضايا المتعلقة بالخدمات - يميل المشاركون نحو "الإقرار" و"التجنب"، مما يشير إلى تبني نهج أكثر مباشرة وحزماً. ورغم هذا التحول، يظل "الرفض" الصريح أمراً نادراً، مما يوحي بأنه لا يزال غير مرغوب فيه اجتماعياً.

الخلاصة
بشكل عام، يُظهر أبناء "الجيل زد" (Generation Z)من الجاويين توازناً بين الحفاظ على قواعد اللباقة التقليدية والتكيف مع التوقعات الحديثة التي تقتضي المباشرة والمساءلة.

الكلمات الرئيسية
الاستجابات للاعتذار؛ الجيل زد؛ الثقافة الجاوية؛ الأفعال الكلامية؛ استراتيجيات اللباقة

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INTRODUCTION

Research on apology response strategies has been widely conducted in cross-cultural contexts to understand how different societies manage conversational repair after an offense occurs. For instance, a comparative study of apology responses in Australian English and Bahasa Indonesia (Adrefiza & Jones, 2013) revealed notable cultural differences in the use of direct acceptance strategies, concluding that cultural norms play an important role in shaping how individuals respond to apologies. Research on cross-linguistic pragmatic transfer among second-language (L2) learners further shows that speakers' first language (L1) affects how they respond to apologies. Studies among Pakistani respondents (Rehmat et al., 2024; Saleem, et al., 2020; Saleem, et al., 2020; Saleem, et al., 2021), Arab learners (Aboud, 2020), and Chinese respondents (Chung & Chen, 2022) demonstrate that social stratification and cultural perspectives determine whether an apology is accepted directly or met with evasion. Similarly, patterns can be observed in Indonesian contexts, where studies on Javanese and Madurese (Ramlah & Sartini, 2023), Buginese sociolinguistic interactions (Zulkhaeriyah et al., 2021), Balinese conversations (Santika et al., 2022), and Indonesian EFL learners (Waluyo, 2017; Waluyo & Sutiyatno, 2020) show that responding to an apology is not a simple act but a complex negotiation of social relationships.

Particularly within Javanese culture, speech acts are closely related to social hierarchy and culturally involve politeness norms known as *unggah-ungguh*, emphasizing harmony (*rukun*) and respect (*urmat*) in both formal and everyday interactions (Fauzan, 2020; Surana et al., 2019; Susylowati, 2013). The key aspect of Javanese communication is the presentation of speech levels, ranging from *Ngoko* for close or lower-status interlocutors to *Krama Inggil* for higher-status individuals, showing sensitivity to social hierarchy, context, and interpersonal distance (Ghasani, 2018; Mustikawati, 2021). Additionally, Javanese communication is determined by cultural philosophies that highlight empathy and emotional awareness; such as *tepa selira*, as well as related principles like *adu rasa*, *angon rasa*, and *njaga rasa*, which encourage individuals to avoid confrontation and maintain social harmony (Ghasani, 2018; Wibowo, 2020). Consequently, Javanese speakers tend to employ indirectness, mitigation, and politeness strategies in sensitive speech acts, a pattern consistently observed in studies on complaints, directives, and requests, where even direct expressions are often softened to preserve interpersonal balance (Fauzan, 2020; Maruti, 2021; Rachmatika & Nurhayati, 2020; Sukarno, 2018). Comparable sensitivity to politeness has also been documented among Indonesian university students, whose choices among Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies vary across gender and interactional contexts (Akmal et al., 2022).

Despite these traditional values, communication practices continue to change because of the globalization, technological development, and generational change. It involves those who were born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, known as Generation Z, which has grown up in a highly digitalized environment where interactions mostly happened through online platforms and instant messaging applications such as Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp (Astutik et al., 2025; Mahmud, 2020; Savana & Rosiah, 2019). The forms of communication often have different pragmatic norms compared to face-to-face interaction. Studies on online communication, particularly in WhatsApp interactions, reveal that online platforms communications are characterized by brevity, relatively direct language, and the use of emojis or other paralinguistic textual features to replace nonverbal cues found in face-to-face ones (Purnomo, 2017; Shalihah & Zuhdi, 2020). Massive exposure to worldwide media and cross-cultural communication may affect the pragmatic behavior of younger generations, resulting in reforming traditional habits of indirectness or blending them with more direct communication styles (Sari & Suhono, 2024). Recent evidence even indicates that intensive engagement with online games and social media reshapes Indonesian students' interpersonal communication, lowering communicative anxiety and encouraging more direct interaction with peers and lecturers (Wijirahayu

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et al., 2026). Rapid social change is likewise mirrored in the Indonesian lexicon itself, as shown by the massive absorption of English terms during the Covid-19 pandemic (Budiono & Mubarok, 2022), while the culturally loaded expressions of Indonesian local languages are increasingly limited in use among younger speakers (Juansah et al., 2023).

Although numerous researches have examined apology expressions in Javanese contexts, most of them focus on how speakers formulate apologies instead of how those apologies are received and responded to. Previous research has explored how Javanese cultural values are reflected in apology expressions (Sari, 2021), the use of *samudana* or indirect strategies to maintain face, and the role of direct strategies in conflict resolution (Maruti, 2021). However, little attention has been given to apology responses, particularly among younger generations. Understanding apology responses is sociopragmatically important because it shows a feeling of hesitation as the speakers will likely control their expressions by searching for appropriate words and attempting to avoid face-threatening toward the hearers (Adrefiza, 2024).

This study addresses the gap by observing how Javanese Generation Z responds to apologies in different situational contexts. The study employed a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) aimed to capture participants' responses under varying sociolinguistic conditions, including power relations, social distance, and the severity of the offense. The DCT scenarios simulated everyday face-to-face encounters rather than digitally mediated exchanges, although the instrument itself was administered in written form through a digital platform. The task was presented in Javanese, and participants were instructed to respond in Javanese as they naturally would, so that their choices of speech level (*Ngoko* or *Krama*) could surface in the data. The data analysis employed a synthesized framework of apology response strategies adopted from previous studies (Adrefiza & Jones, 2013; Chen & Yang, 2010; Waluyo, 2017). Within this framework, apology responses are categorized into four macro-strategies; Acceptance (AC), Acknowledgement (AK), Evasion (EV), and Rejection (RJ). Each of them consists of several micro-strategies reflecting different ways used by individuals to manage interpersonal interactions. Thus, the study aims (1) to identify the dominant apology response strategies used by Javanese Generation Z and (2) to examine how sociolinguistic variables influence their pragmatic choices. In this study, the four macro-strategies are read as operationalizations of the negotiation between harmony and boundaries signaled in the title: Acceptance and Evasion index the maintenance of harmony (*rukun*), whereas Acknowledgement and Rejection index the assertion of personal boundaries and accountability. This interpretive lens links the standard pragmatic taxonomy to the Javanese cultural values discussed above. Beyond these two objectives, the significance of this study lies in three respects. Theoretically, it enriches the underexplored area of apology responses, as opposed to apology production, within Indonesian sociopragmatics. Culturally, it provides empirical evidence of how a generation raised in a digital and globalized communication environment negotiates long-held Javanese politeness norms, capturing pragmatic change in progress. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for language pedagogy, intercultural communication training, and character education by clarifying how young Javanese speakers balance harmony with the growing demand for directness and accountability.

METHOD

This research employed a descriptive quantitative approach within the broader framework of cross-cultural sociopragmatics by quantifying the frequency of particular speech act strategies. It presents an empirical overview of generational patterns in language use while retaining qualitative analysis to interpret pragmatic nuances and cultural motivations. This study involves 53 participants of generation Z individuals aged 18–24 who are native Javanese speakers residing in Javanese-dominant regions of Indonesia, namely Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Using purposive sampling technique, this group represents the intersection of traditional Javanese upbringing and exposure to digital communication. The criteria of age, language, and geography ensured a homoge-

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neous sample. The sample size was sufficient for qualitative pragmatic saturation (Mackey & Gass, 2005) and exceeded the suggested range of 12–30 participants (Guest et al., 2006), ensuring dependability and trustworthiness.

The data were collected with an open-ended written Discourse Completion Task (DCT), a validated instrument in cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). It consisted of eight scenarios designed to elicit apology responses, incorporating sociolinguistic variables: Power (P), Social Distance (D), and Rank of Offense (R) (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2013). The scenarios included: lecturer forgetting to return an assignment, junior forgetting a borrowed book, HR manager delaying an interview, waiter bringing wrong food, close friend arriving late, stranger scratching a motorcycle, close friend causing emotional offense, and stranger bumping into the respondent on a bus (**Table 1**).

The questionnaire, which had been previously translated into Javanese, was distributed digitally to the 53 participants, who were instructed to respond naturally in Javanese. This produced 424 utterances (53 x 8). The data analysis followed systematic coding procedures (Wensi et al., 2018). First, responses were translated into Indonesian and English to ensure pragmatic equivalence. Second, each utterance was classified into four macro-strategies—Acceptance (AC), Acknowledgement (AK), Evasion (EV), Rejection (RJ)—based on communicative intent. Third, utterances were further coded into 33 micro-strategies using an established taxonomy **(Table 2).** When multiple strategies appeared in a single response, only the dominant pragmatic force was coded to avoid duplication. This head-act-based coding follows the established convention in speech act analysis (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), in which the dominant pragmatic force of an utterance determines its category, while accompanying supportive moves—such as politeness markers, honorific speech-level choices, and mitigating formulas—were retained and considered in the qualitative interpretation of the examples. To ensure the consistency of the coding, all utterances were independently reviewed by a second rater with a background in pragmatics. Any differences in the classification of the data were discussed until a consensus was reached. The final coding was based on the mutually agreed classifications.

RESULT/FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Crucially, these situations were carefully designed to reflect the key sociolinguistic variables outlined by (Holmes, 2013) and (Brown & Levinson, 1987), namely Power (P)—whether the apologizer holds higher (+P), equal (=P), or lower (-P) status than the respondent; Social Distance (D)—whether the apologizer is socially distant or stranger (+D), an acquaintance (=D), or a close friend (-D), and Rank or Severity of Offense (R) which are high (+R), medium (=R), and low (-R). It is high (+R) if the offense involves significant consequences, such as material loss, emotional harm, damage to relationships, or high-stakes situations. It also presents repeated offenses or violations of strong social expectations indicating more serious apology and greater effort to repair. Medium (=R) if the offense causes noticeable inconvenience or disruption but remains manageable and repairable without long-term impact. It specifically involves moderate responsibility and does not severely threaten social relationships or outcomes. Low (-R) if the offense is minor, accidental, or socially tolerable, with little to no lasting consequences. It is easily forgiven and requires minimal effort to repair and often occurs in everyday interactions.

This study categorized apology responses into four primary macro-strategies: Acceptance (AC), Acknowledgement (AK), Evasion (EV), and Rejection (RJ), following Adrefiza and Jones (2013). Each macro-strategy is further divided into specific micro-strategies adopted from Chen and Yang (2010) as follows in Table 2.

It should be noted that several micro-strategies labels; such as Advice/Suggestion, Request, Questioning/Surprise, and Expressing Emotion, recur under different macro-strategies. Following Adrefiza and Jones (2013) and Chen and Yang (2010), these identically labeled micro-strategies are not interchangeable: they are distinguished by the dominant pragmatic force of the utterance and its sequential position within the response. For

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example, Advice/Suggestion under Acceptance follows an explicit token of forgiveness (It's alright, but next time be careful), whereas under Evasion it substitutes for any direct uptake of the apology, and under Rejection it co-occurs with reproach and the withholding of forgiveness. Classification was therefore determined by the overall orientation of the response toward the apology: accepting, conditionally accepting, sidestepping, or refusing it, rather than by the surface label alone.

Table 1. The eight DCT scenarios mapped

Code	Situation	Variable
DCT-1	Your professor said sorry to you as she/he forgot to return your term paper that day because she/he didn't finish reading it.	+P, +D, -R
DCT-2	Your junior apologized for being forgotten to bring your book she/he borrowed which he promised to return that day.	-P, +D, =R
DCT-3	A staff manager apologized for keeping you waiting for half an hour for a job interview because she/he was called to an unexpected meeting.	+P, +D, +R
DCT-4	A waiter in the restaurant where you were having dinner apologized for bringing the wrong menu after half an hour waiting.	=P, +D, =R
DCT-5	Your notorious unpunctual friend said sorry for coming late again to do a joint paper with you whilst the due date was the day after that day.	=P, -D, +R
DCT-6	Your motorcycle was accidentally hit by another rider in the campus parking area. It got minor scratch.	=P, +D, +R
DCT-7	Your friend offended you seriously during a group discussion meeting; but soon after the meeting ended, she/he apologized for what he had done.	=P, -D, +R
DCT-8	You were accidentally hit by another passenger's bag in a bus when she/he was about to put it off from her shoulder.	=P, +D, -R

The first aim of this study is to identify the dominant apology response strategies used by Javanese Generation Z. The findings were captured through counting the frequency of the macro- and micro-strategies used in general. The overall distribution of macro-strategies across the eight DCT situations highlights a significant cultural preference for Acceptance (AC) with 264 utterances or 62.27% with the highest preference in DCT-3, followed by Evasion (EV) with 70 or 16.51%, Acknowledgement (AK) with 63 or 14.86%, and Rejection (RJ) as the least used with 27 or 6.36%. The Acceptance (AC) shows its dominance in all situations except DCT-5 where Acknowledgement (AK) comes as the most preferred utterance.

The macro-strategies were then broken down into detailed micro-strategies to further reveal the specific linguistic realizations used by participants. The results indicate that, among the nine micro-strategies in the Acceptance (AC) macro-strategy, Absolution is the most frequently used with 90 utterances (21.23% of the total data), followed closely by Dismissal with 86 utterances (20.28%), while Thanking is the only micro-strategy not chosen at all (0 utterances). In the Acknowledgement (AK) macro-strategy, Warning/Threatening is the most dominant strategy with 30 utterances (7.08%). In the Evasion (EV) macro-strategy, Advice/Suggestion is the most frequently uttered with 26 utterances (6.13%), followed by Questioning/Surprise with 25 utterances (5.90%); once again, Thanking is not chosen by any participant (0 utterances). In the Rejection (RJ) macro-strategy, Asking for Compensation is the most preferred with 9 utterances (2.12%), while Thanking, Advice/Suggestion, and Request are not selected at all (0 utterances). The complete frequencies of all micro-strategies are presented in Table 3.

Sociolinguistic Variables Influence Pragmatic Choices

The second aim of this study is to examine how sociolinguistic variables influence the participants' pragmatic choices. To identify these variables, each situation from DCT-1 to DCT-8 was carefully analyzed. Every utterance produced by the participants was examined in detail to understand which sociolinguistic factors—such as power, social distance,

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Table 2. The macro-and micro-strategies of apology response strategies (ARs)

Apology Response Strategies		Sample Expressions	Javanese Ngoko Version
Acceptance (AC)			
1	Absolution	'That's OK'	Ora apa-apa
2	Dismissal	'It doesn't matter', 'Don't worry'	Ora masalah
3	Formal	'I accept your apology', 'I forgive you'	Tak ngapura
4	Thanking	'Thanks (for apologizing)'	Matur nuwun wis njaluk ngapura
5	Advice/Suggestion	'You should remember next time'	Sesok meneh ojo lali
6	Requests	'Please return it as soon as possible'	Tulung ndang dibalekke
7	Expressing Empathy	'I understand that stuff happen'	Aku iso paham
8	Expressing Emotion	'I'm disappointed'	Aku kuciwa
9	Questioning/Surprise	'How could you do that to me?'	Kok tegel karo aku?
Acknowledgement (AK)			
1	Absolution Plus	'That's OK, but …'	Ora apa-apa, nanging…
2	Negation Plus	'It doesn't matter, but …'	Ora masalah, nanging…
3	Formal Plus	'I accept your apology, but …'	Tak ngapura, nanging…
4	Advice/Suggestion	'You should have called me'	Kudune aku ndang dikabari
5	Warning/Threatening	'Don't do that again next time'	Ojo dibaleni meneh
6	Evaluating	'It's ridiculous', 'You're horrible'	Ora patut, kowe kebangeten
7	Expressing Emotion	'I'm angry', 'I'm disappointed'	Aku nesu, aku kuciwa
Evasion (EV)			
1	Deflecting/Explaining	'We had lovely time anyway'	No representation found
2	Thanking	'Thanks for letting me know'	Matur nuwun wis ngomong
3	Questioning/Surprise	'How could that happen?'	Kok iso kaya ngono?
4	Request	'It would be great if you drop it off ASAP'	Apike ndang cepet digawa mrene
5	Advice/Suggestion	'You should be careful next time'	Sesok meneh luwih ati-ati
6	Expressing Emotion	'I'm a bit pissed at you at this moment'	Aku rada mangkel karo kowe saiki
Rejection (RJ)			
1	Refusals	'I don't think that dinner's gonna do much now'	Tak kira traktiranmu ora ana gunane
2	Advice/Suggestion	'You should have called me'	Kudune kowe ngabari aku
3	Requests	'Please give it back soon'	Tukung ndang balekno
4	Warning	'I won't tell you any more secrets'	Aku ora bakal-crita-crita meneh nang kowe
5	Blaming	'I told you a secret, but you told everyone'	Aku crita wewadi malah mbok critakne wong akeh
6	Swearing	'You're really shit'	Kowe pancen kebangeten/ kurang ajar
7	Asking for Compensation	'You have to replace it with the new one'	Kowe kudu ngganti nganggo sing anyar
8	Evaluating	'That's not good', 'You're horrible person'	Kowe ora apik, kowe wong kurang ajar
9	Non-Apology	"Sorry" 'Sorry, I can't forgive you'	Aku ora isa ngapura kowe
10	Expressing Emotions	'I'm really angry'	Aku nesu banget
11	Thanking	'Thanks'	Matur nuwun

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Table 3. The realizations of micro-strategies used by participants

Apology Response Strategies		Total Appearance
Acceptance		**264**
1	Absolution	90
2	Dismissal	86
3	Formal	7
4	Thanking	0
5	Advice/Suggestion	20
6	Request	39
7	Expressing Empathy	13
8	Expressing Emotion	3
9	Questioning/Surprise	6
Acknowledgment		**63**
1	Absolution Plus	2
2	Negation Plus	8
3	Formal Plus	5
4	Advice/Suggestion	1
5	Warning/Threatening	30
6	Evaluating	9
7	Expressing Emotion	8
Evasion		**70**
1	Deflecting/Explaining	3
2	Thanking	0
3	Questioning/Surprise	25
4	Request	5
5	Advice/Suggestion	26
6	Expressing Emotion	11
Rejection		**27**
1	Refusal	3
2	Advice/Suggestion	0
3	Request	0
4	Warning	2
5	Blaming	2
6	Swearing	3
7	Asking for Compensation	9
8	Evaluating	1
9	Non-Apology	3
10	Expressing Emotion	4
11	Thanking	0

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and severity of offense—played a role in shaping their responses. By looking closely at how participants reacted in each scenario, it becomes possible to see how these variables influence their choice of strategies. The following section presents the analysis of each situation.

DCT-1: Lecturer Apologizes to Student (+P, +D, -R)

In DCT-1, the apologizer holds significantly higher social and institutional power (+P) and is socially distant (+D) from the respondent. However, the offense is considered as relatively minor (-R) because it does not cause serious harm, a delay of returning the student's assignment. The results showed that the Javanese Generation Z overwhelmingly chose Acceptance (AC), 45 out of 53 responses, followed by Acknowledgement (AK) 4, and Evasion (EV) 4. The primary micro-strategy was AC (Absolution) with 38 instances, formulated predominantly in *Krama Inggil* (high Javanese) to show immense and unwavering respect. A notable finding showed that zero participants chose Rejection (RJ). Here are instances of the utterances:

Participant S03: "Nggih, Bapak. Mboten nopo-nopo." (Yes, Sir. It is not a problem.)
Participant S11: "Boten nopo-nopo, soale nggih kula ngertos nik njenengan nggih katah pekerjaan." (It is no problem, because I understand that you have a lot of work.)
Participant S34: "Nggih Pak/Bu, mboten nopo-nopo." (Yes, Sir/Ma'am. No problem.)
The responses here demonstrate that when addressing an older, higher-status individual

Generation Z heavily relies on empathy and absolving the superior's guilt, fully aligning with the traditional Javanese ethos of *urmat* (respect) and the desire to maintain high face-saving parameters.

DCT-2: Junior Student Apologizes to Senior (-P, +D, =R)

In DCT-2, the power dynamic is reversed; the apologizer is a junior student (-P) who has lower status and is not closely related to the respondent (+D). The offense is considered as moderate (=R) since it involves responsibility and inconvenience but no serious damage. While Acceptance (AC) still dominated with 36 instances, followed by Evasion (EV) 10, Acknowledgement (AK) 4, and Rejection (RJ) 3. The linguistic register shifted dramatically down the *Krama Inggil* to *Ngoko* (low/informal Javanese). The primary micro-strategy was AC (Request) with 30 instances where the participants demand the apologizer to return the book borrowed in a particular times. Here are instances of AC (Request) utterances:

Participant S22: "Yo wis, ora apa-apa. Nanging ojo lali sesuk kudu dibalèkaké ya, soale buku kuwi tak butuh." (Okay, no problem. But, don't forget to bring it tomorrow because I need that book.)
Participant S32: "Rapopo,mengko nek kelingan digawa wae." (It's okay. Bring it once you remember.)
Participant S52: "Owlh,yowes rapopo.mengko sore di balekke ya! soale arep tak anggo." (Okay, no problem. But don't forget to bring it this afternoon because I need it badly.)

However, the presence of Rejection (3 instances) and Evasion (10 instances) via questioning and blaming indicates that when the respondent holds superior power, they feel socially licensed to express irritation openly, showcasing a departure from absolute politeness when the social hierarchy permits such communicative freedom. The instances are:

Participant S14 (EV-Questioning): "Eyalah kok iso lali wes omong Meh balekke Saiki to." (Oh my, how could you forget when you already said you'd return it now?)

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Participant S26 (RJ-Swearing/Blaming): "Oooo tekke koe i pekok lalenan, sesok gowo wah." (Oh you fool, so forgetful, bring it tomorrow!)

DCT-3: HR Manager Apologizes to Job Applicant (+P, +D, +R)

Similar to DCT-1, the HR Manager holds higher power (+P), combined with a highly formal setting (+D) here in DCT-3. The offense is considered as high severity (+R) because it potentially affects an important opportunity of a job interview and possibly the applicant's future. The responses were highly polite using *Krama Inggil*, utilizing Acceptance (AC) extensively where AC (Absolution) is appeared 24 times, AC (Dismissal) 10, and AC (Expressing Empathy) 10. The remaining instances showed Evasion (EV) 4, Acknowledgement (AK) 2, and zero was willing to express Rejection (RJ).

Participant S03 (AC-Absolution): "Nggih, Bapak. Mboten nopo-nopo." (That's okay, Sir.)
Participant S39 (AC-Dismissal): " nggeh pak/bu, mboten dados masalah. kula saged mangertos amargi rapat mendadak punika kadhangkala langkung dipun pentingaken." (That's okay, Sir/Madam, no problem. I can understand that a sudden meeting must be very important.)
Participant S18 (AC-Expressing Empathy): "Saestu mboten nopo nopo, niku nggih njenengan acarane mendadak." (I understand really. I understand that the meeting was also sudden.)

DCT-4: Waiter Apologizes to Customer (=P, +D, =R)

In DCT-4, the power dynamic is purely transactional. The customer is technically superior in the service context, but they are socially equal in status (=P). The distance is high (+D) because they are strangers to each other. The offense is considered as moderate (=R) because it causes inconvenience, though it can be corrected. Here, Acceptance dropped significantly to 21 instances. Acknowledgement (12), Evasion (12), and Rejection (8) combined to form the majority, marking a significant shift in strategy.

Participant S21 (AC-Request): "Mboten nopo-nopo mpon niki mawon." (It's okay. This one is fine.)
Participant S09 (AK-Warning): "Ora masalah, Mbak. Sik penting sesuk meneh ojo dibaleni." (No problem. Just make sure it doesn't happen again next time.)
Participant S29 (EV-Questioning): "Piye to kok iso salah. Jane moco po ra pesenanku?" (How could this happen? Did you even read may order or not?)
Participant S11 (RJ-Asking for Compensation): "Niki pripun nggih? nik boten saget sami kalih menu sing kula pesen mending artane dikundurke mawon, ngapunten." (What should we do then? If it can't be the same as the menu I ordered, it's better to just cancel it. Sorry.)
Participant S46 (RJ-Blaming): "Pie ki mas/mbak wong yo wes dienteni ket mau kok malah kliru barah saman ke, ha genti ah." (How is this, bro/sis, I've been waiting since earlier and you bring the wrong thing, change it now.)

This scenario reveals that Generation Z shows less tolerance for transactional errors and is more willing to express dissatisfaction openly by using strategies such as asking for compensation or assigning blame to maintain their consumer rights. At the same time, their language use varies between *ngoko* and *krama inggil*, reflecting a flexible approach to traditional speech levels. While *krama inggil* represents a sense of politeness, the use of *ngoko* indicates a change to informality and directness. Overall, this pattern emphasizes how Generation Z balances cultural norms with a more modern, assertive, and pragmatic communication style.

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DCT-5: Close Friend Apologizes to Close Friend for Coming Late (=P, -D, +R)

This scenario in DCT-5 showed a relationship between two close friends which definitely has equal power (=P) and close distance (-D). However, the offense is high (+R) because it is repeated behavior affecting trust or responsibility. It shows one of the most striking shifts in the entire dataset. Acceptance dropped sharply to just 8 instances, while Acknowledgement (20 instances) and Evasion (18 instances) became the most common responses, with Rejection (7 instances) also appearing quite frequently. This pattern suggests that when the offense is repeated and comes from a close friend, participants are far less inclined to simply accept the apology by responding more cautiously or even critically.

Participant S48 (AK-Warning): "Yorapopo ning tanggungjawab karo tugasmu, koe wiw bola bali telat." (It's okay but take responsibility for your task, you are repeatedly late.)
Participant S42 (AK-Evaluating): "Sakjanne koe ki mikir ra to, iki ki tugas kelompok ora individu, ha nek aku le nggarap ngene ki pie jal, yowes koe lek ngeprint yo." (Do you actually think or not, this is a group task not individual, if I do it like this what happens, whatever, you just do the printing.)
Participant S19 (EV-Questioning): "Piye to kow kie? Niat opo ora iki asline ki?" (What's wrong with you? Are you actually serious about this or not?)

The heavy reliance on Acknowledgement, particularly Warning/Threatening (11 instances) and Evaluating (8 instances) and Evasion through Questioning (9 instances) indicates that Generation Z places needs on accountability, even within close relationships. The combination of intimacy and repeated offense reduces the need to maintain *unggah-ungguh*, making participants to speak more bluntly and directly. In this context, closeness does not soften the response; rather, it creates space for more honest, sometimes face-threatening expressions as a way of setting firm personal boundaries.

DCT-6: Stranger Apologizes to Participant for Damaging A Motorbike (=P, +D, +R)

In DCT-6, the stranger has equal power (=P) but high social distance (+D). The offense is considered as severe (+R) since it involved physical/property damage and possible financial consequences. Interestingly, Acceptance remains quite high (32 instances), representing that many participants still lean toward maintaining harmony, even in uncomfortable situations. At the same time, Rejection (5 instances) appears in a more purposeful and focused way, especially through requests for compensation. These responses reflect a balanced approach of trying to stay polite and composed while also willing to assert their rights when there is a clear material loss. This shows how Generation Z navigates between cultural values of harmony and a growing awareness of fairness and accountability in everyday interactions.

Participant S01 (AC-Absolution): "Nggih mas mboten nopo nopo, ngatos atos nggih." (Yes bro, no problem, be careful next time.)
Participant S40 (AC-Dismissal): "Ora opo-opo. Mung kegores sithik kok." (It's okay. Just a little scratch.)
Participant S26 (RJ-Asking for Compensation): "Weroh ora jane ono hondaku ning jejermu, cetke ulang wahh." (Did you not see my motorcycle next to you, repaint it!)

DCT-7: Close Friend Apologizes to Participant for Insulting (=P, -D, +R)

DCT-7 tested a severe positive face threat. The power is equal (=P) and the relationship is close (-D). The offense is high (+R) because emotional harm is significant, especially within close relationships where expectations are stronger. Despite the insult, because the friend apologized immediately, 35 participants utilized Acceptance to maintain group cohesion.

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Participant S47 (AC-Advice/Suggestion): "Yo ra po po. Ning sesuk meneh ati ati le ngomong ndak nglarani kancamu." (It's alright, but next time be more careful with your words so you don't hurt your friend.)
Participant S38 (AC-Dismissal): "Aman wae." (No worries, it's all good.)

This finding shows a deeply rooted Javanese cultural tendency reflecting the ability to hold back personal feelings to maintain social harmony, or *rukun*. Although a written DCT cannot reveal participants' actual inner feelings, the linguistic form of many acceptances: brief tokens of absolution immediately followed by cautionary advice or mitigated reproach, suggests that the apology was accepted primarily to avoid tension or public conflict rather than as an expression of full emotional resolution. This pattern is consistent with the concept of *njaga rasa*, where individuals consciously manage their outward behavior to keep interactions smooth and respectful, even when there is experience of discomfort or dissatisfaction inside. In this sense, acceptance does not always mean genuine forgiveness but rather a thoughtful social strategy to maintain balance in relationships and avoid unnecessary conflicts.

DCT-8: Stranger Apologizes to Participant for Minor Accidental Offense (=P, +D, -R)

In DCT-8, the power is equal (=P) and distance is high (+D) since they are strangers. The offense is considered as low (-R) because it is accidental and has minimal impact. A minor physical bump by a stranger on public transport resulted in one of the highest rates of Acceptance (40 instances), second only to the lecturer scenario, with a strong reliance on the Dismissal micro-strategy (25 instances). This shows that participants generally see such incidents as trivial and not worth escalating, especially since they are accidental and involve no lasting harm. In these short and impersonal interactions, maintaining smooth social flow takes priority, and a simple dismissal allows both parties to move on quickly without awkwardness. It reflects a shared understanding that not every offense requires a serious response, particularly in crowded public spaces where minor disruptions are expected and easily forgiven.

Participant S17 (AC-Dismissal): "Nggih mboten nopo-nopo kok. Aman." (It's totally fine, no worries.)
Participant S47 (AC-Dismissal): "Owalah mboten nopo-nopo. Aman." (Oh, it's nothing. It's all good.)

The data collected from 53 Javanese Generation Z participants provides a very rich and meaningful picture about how language, culture, and social values interact in a society that is currently experiencing transition. From the overall findings, it can be clearly seen that Javanese communication today cannot be described as purely traditional or fully modern. Instead, it exists in middle space, where older cultural values still play an important role, but at the same time new ways of thinking and communicating are also influencing how people respond in daily interaction.

One of the most important cultural values that still strongly appears in the data is *njaga rasa*, which refers to maintaining harmony, controlling emotions, and avoiding conflict in social relationships. This supports the findings of Ghasani (2018) and Wibowo (2020), where the value of *njaga rasa* becomes the foundation of numerous responses, especially in situations where participants try to keep the interaction smooth and prevent discomfort for others. However, what makes Generation Z interesting is that they do not always apply this value in a fixed or rigid way. In some contexts, they clearly prioritize harmony, but in other contexts, they are willing to be more direct, expressive, and even confrontational. This shows that they are not simply following tradition but actively negotiating between traditional expectations and modern communication styles.

This negotiation reflects a broader sociocultural shift. Generation Z grows up in a very

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different environment compared to previous generations since they are exposed to digital communication, global media, and more individualistic values, which affects their perceptions on relationships, responsibility, and communication. As a result, their pragmatic behavior becomes more flexible and context-dependent. They are able to adjust their language and strategies depending on who they are talking to, what kind of relationship they have, and how serious the situation is.

The Enduring Legacy of *Rukun* and Sociolinguistic Hierarchies

In many of the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) scenarios, especially those involving higher-status individuals such as lecturers and HR managers, as well as situations involving strangers with minor accidental offenses, the dominant response strategy is Acceptance. Participants mostly chose to accept the apology without questioning or challenging it. This pattern shows that the traditional value of respecting hierarchy is still very strong among Javanese Generation Z.

According to Holmes (2013), power relations play an important role in shaping language use. This study shows that participants tend to present a high level of sensitivity to hierarchical relationships, and they adjust their responses accordingly. They avoid confrontation while try to maintain a respectful interaction, even when there is inconvenience. It explains that Javanese speakers tend to prioritize harmony and respect over personal expression, especially in formal or hierarchical contexts is also consistent with previous studies (Fauzan, 2020; Saleem, et al., 2021). What interesting here is that even though Generation Z is often described as more outspoken and less bound by tradition, in this case they still follow these cultural norms quite strongly.

The use of language further supports this observation. Many participants used simple and formulaic expression "It's okay", "no problem", "it's alright", or "no worries" or in Javanese means *"Mboten nopo-nopo"* or *"Ora opo-opo"* which function as absolution or dismissal strategies. It even sometimes preceded with *"Nggih"* which means *"Yes"*. These expressions are not just polite responses, but also serve an important social purpose. By minimizing the seriousness of the offense, participants help to reduce the emotional tension in the interaction and allow the situation to end smoothly. This behavior reflects the concept of *tepa selira*, which emphasizes empathy and understanding toward others. Participants show that they are willing to tolerate small mistakes and not make the situation worse. This indicates that traditional cultural values are still deeply internalized, even among younger speakers.

Another important aspect is the consistent use of *krama*, the high-level Javanese speech register, in interactions with higher-status individuals. Although Generation Z is more familiar with informal communication, especially through digital platforms, they still demonstrate a clear awareness of when formal language is required. They are able to switch between *ngoko* and *krama* depending on the context, which shows that they still possess strong sociolinguistic competence (Mustikawati, 2021; Susylowati, 2013). In these scenarios, maintaining *rukun* (social harmony) becomes the main priority. Participants are willing to suppress their personal feelings or inconvenience to create and maintain a respectful and stable interaction. This shows that despite the influence of modernization; traditional hierarchical values are still very much alive.

Asserting Boundaries: The Shift to Acknowledgement and Evasion

While the influence of traditional values remains strong, the data also reveals significant changes in certain contexts, especially those involving close relationships and repeated offenses. The scenario of a chronically late friend (DCT-5) shows a very different pattern compared to hierarchical situations. In this case, Acceptance is no longer dominant while participants rely more on Acknowledgement and Evasion strategies. This indicates that context plays a very important role in pragmatic decision-making. When the offense is not a one-time mistake but a repeated behavior, participants become less tolerant by expecting accountability and change from the person who apologizes. This is particularly

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true in close relationships, where there is an expectation of mutual respect and responsibility.

One of the most noticeable features in this scenario is the high level of directness. Many participants used strong *ngoko* expressions that include evaluation, criticism, and even warning. For example, some responses directly question the behavior of the offender. This kind of directness is quite different from traditional Javanese communication, which often relies on indirect strategies (*samudana*) to express dissatisfaction (Maruti, 2016).

This change can be linked to the influence of modern communication environments exposing Generation Z to more direct and less formal communication. This involves the use of digital platforms such as social media and messaging applications (Astutik et al., 2025; Mahmud, 2020; Purnomo, 2017; Shalihah & Zuhdi, 2020). The platforms encourage quick, clear, and sometimes blunt expression of thoughts and feelings resulting younger speakers to become more comfortable using direct language, even in situations that traditionally require politeness. It reflects the change in the meaning of politeness. In close relationships, being honest and direct can be seen as a form of care and responsibility. Participants seem to believe that a sincere apology should be followed by real behavioral change. This is why many responses include conditions or expectations for the future. This tendency is consistent with recent findings that digitally immersed students develop more direct and lower-anxiety communication styles, even in interactions with their lecturers (Wijirahayu et al., 2026).

A similar pattern can be observed in transactional contexts, such as restaurant interactions. In these situations, participants are more open to express dissatisfaction, ask for corrections, or even demand compensation. This reflects a more modern, consumer-oriented perspective. They see themselves not only as participants in a social interaction, but also as customers who have certain rights. In traditional Javanese culture, people tend to avoid complaining in public because it can create discomfort or embarrassment. However, Generation Z appears more confident in asserting their needs while trying to maintain the politeness. This shows a change toward a more balanced communication style, where harmony and assertiveness present together.

The Social Stigma of Outright Rejection

Despite these changes toward more direct and assertive communication, one important pattern remains consistent across the data: the low frequency of outright Rejection. In many scenarios, rejection is either absent or appears only in very small numbers. This is further strengthened by only 3 appearances of RJ-Swearing where they also only appear where the participants have higher power (+P) or high severity (+R). This is a significant finding because it shows the limits of pragmatic change within this cultural context.

From a pragmatic perspective, rejecting an apology is considered a very strong and face-threatening act. It signals that the speaker does not accept the attempt to repair the relationship (Chung & Chen, 2022; Trang & Khuong, 2022). In Javanese culture, such an action is generally avoided because it can lead to conflict and disrupt social harmony. This is supported by previous research (Sari, 2021; Zulkhaeriyah et al., 2021) showing that Javanese speakers tend to avoid direct rejection by using the strategies that allow the interaction to continue, even if the problem is not fully resolved.

An important insight from this study comes from the participants' explanations. In scenarios involving emotional offense, especially from close friends, several participants explained that they would still accept the apology verbally, even if they are still hurt inside, to avoid further conflicts. This behavior reflects the concept of *njaga rasa*, where individuals manage their outward expressions to maintain harmony. It creates a situation where there is a difference between what is said and what is felt. On the surface, everything appears calm and resolved, but internally there may still be negative emotions. This kind of duality is not a sign of dishonesty, but rather a cultural strategy. It allows individuals to protect relationships and maintain social stability. In this sense, communication is not on-

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ly about expressing personal feelings, but also about managing social dynamics.

From this discussion, it can be concluded that Javanese Generation Z demonstrates a complex and dynamic communication style. They are more direct and assertive compared to previous generations, especially in situations involving peers and transactional interactions. However, they still maintain core cultural values such as *rukun* and *njaga rasa*. Their pragmatic behavior shows a balance between tradition and modernity. They adapt and reinterpret these norms based on context to create a communication style which is flexible, situational, and highly responsive to the demands of contemporary social life. Overall, this study highlights that cultural change is not a process of replacement, but a process of adaptation. Javanese Generation Z is not leaving their cultural identity behind, but reshaping it in a way that fits their lived experiences in a modern world.

CONCLUSION

This study systematically classified apology response strategies to understand how Javanese Generation Z behaves in different social situations. The findings clearly demonstrate that Acceptance remains the most common and natural strategy for this generation. Many participants relied on simple responses like absolution and dismissal, especially when dealing with people of higher status, authority figures, or even strangers. This pattern strongly shows that traditional Javanese values, such as politeness, *tepa selira* (empathy), and the desire to avoid conflict (*rukun*), are still deeply rooted in their way of communicating. These findings underscore the importance of the present study: it offers empirical evidence of how a culturally distinctive politeness system is preserved, negotiated, and gradually reshaped by a generation standing at the crossroads of tradition and global digital communication.

However, the findings also show that there are important changes happening. In situations that are more serious, involve service problems, or repeated mistakes from friends, participants do not just accept apologies easily. Instead, they start to use strategies like Acknowledgement and Evasion. This means they may give warnings, question the situation, or express their evaluation more clearly. It shows that Javanese Generation Z is able to set boundaries and ask for accountability. In a way, they are slowly adjusting traditional communication styles by becoming more direct and assertive, influenced by modern and global communication patterns. Even so, they still rarely use full Rejection, which means they still try to maintain harmony and avoid completely breaking the relationship. Because of this, Javanese Generation Z can be seen as a kind of bridge between tradition and modernity. They still respect cultural values like hierarchy and harmony, but at the same time they also develop the confidence to deal with more demanding social and professional situations today.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. First, the written DCT elicits planned, self-reported responses rather than spontaneous speech, so the data represent what participants believe they would say rather than what they would actually say in real interaction. Second, and notably given the digital-native framing of Generation Z in the introduction, the instrument could not capture the paralinguistic and digital features, including emojis, stickers, text styling, and response timing, that characterize much of this generation's everyday communication. Third, any interpretation of participants' internal feelings in this study is necessarily an inference from linguistic form, as no interviews or retrospective verbal reports were collected. Finally, the sample was limited to 53 participants from Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta, so the findings cannot be generalized to all Javanese speakers, let alone to other Indonesian cultural groups.

In light of these limitations, future research would benefit from examining more natural forms of communication beyond written DCT responses. Researchers can focus on real conversations, use role-play, or analyze digital communication such as WhatsApp chats. This can capture other important aspects like tone, emojis, or facial expressions, which cannot be seen in written data. It is also suggested to compare Javanese Generation

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Z with other Indonesian cultural groups, such as Sundanese, Batak, or Minangkabau, to better understand how different cultural backgrounds influence communication styles in the modern digital era. Such comparative work is increasingly urgent, given the evidence that local-language expressions are shifting and falling out of use among younger Indonesian generations.

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