

Apology Strategies in the Target Language (English) of Israeli-Arab EFL College Students Towards Their Lecturers of English Who Are Also Native Speakers of Arabic

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Abstract

This paper investigates the apology strategies used by Israeli Arab EFL college students in the target language, English toward their lecturers of English who are also Arab native speakers. Analysis of the apology strategies were based on strategies developed by a number of researchers (Owen, 1983; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Trasborg, 1987; Hussein & Hamouri, 1998). It is based on 42 apology e-mails sent by the students to three Arab lectures of English in the college. These e-mails were written in English. 240 apology utterances were performed in these messages. Frequencies and percentages are considered. The findings of the study reveal that the main apology strategy used by the students is "expression of apology". This strategy consists of three sub-strategies: Expression of regret, offer of apology and request for forgiveness. The next frequent apology strategy used is "Acknowledgement of responsibility" which includes five sub-categories: explicit acknowledgement, expression of lack of intent, expression of self-deficiency, expression of embarrassment and explicit acceptance of the blame. Other strategies such as expression of concern for the hearer, offer of repair, explanation of account and others were also used, but in low frequencies.

Key words: Speech acts; Apology strategies; Israeli Arab EFL students; Target language (TL)

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INTRODUCTION

Apologies are speech acts. Holmes (1990) defined them as social acts that carry an effective content. It is aimed at maintaining good relations between the interlocutors. Many researchers have investigated the speech act of apology in the recent years (Blom-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Trosborg, 1987; Hussein & Hamouri, 1998 and others). These studies focused on comparing apology strategies between native speakers and non-native speakers from different languages. The objective of this study is to investigate the apology strategies used by Israeli Arab students in the target language, English, toward their lecturers of English who are also native speakers of Arabic. In other words, the subjects are Arab learners of English who apologize in L2. The data in this study is naturally occurring data, and in real situation.

REVIEW OF RELATED MATERIAL SPEECH ACTS

Speech acts have been claimed to operate by universal pragmatic principles (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Speech acts are also claimed to vary in conceptualization and verbalization across cultures and languages (Green, 1974).

Making a statement may be the paradigmatic use of language, but there are all sorts of other things we can do with words. We can make requests, ask questions, give orders, make promises, give thanks, offer apologies, and so on. Moreover, almost any speech act is really the performance of several acts at once, distinguished by different aspects of the speaker's intention: there is the act of saying something, what one does in saying it, such as requesting or promising, and how one is trying to affect one's audience.

Austin (1962) asserts that all utterances in a language are themselves acts, based on this assumption, he posits

the existence of a set of verbs such as: state, assert, warn, remark, comment, order, request, apologize, approve, promise, express, approval and express regret. This set of verbs can be called performative verbs because the speaker may perform an act in using one of them in the first person.

He considered the following examples:

Open the window!

Could you open the window?

The three utterances include the same message (speech act), but they are not referring to the same way of addressing. The first utterance represents an explicit speech act, while the other two utterances refer to implicit/indirect speech acts.

Austin (1962) distinguishes between three acts: Locutionary force (the literary meaning of sentences, utterances or acts). Illocutionary force (the actual acts performed when they are said and perlocutionary force (they are achieved by saying something. Austin then classified performative verbs into five categories:

Behabitives: they make us express our feelings and attitudes such as thank and apologize.

Commissives: They make people commit themselves to do things such as promise and vow.

Exercitives: They try to get people do things such as invite, order and permit.

Expositives: They make us bring about changes through our utterances such resign.

Verdictives: They tell people how things are, such as swear, insist and suggest.

This study will focus on the speech act of apology which fall under the behabitives/expressive classification. This categorization makes people express feelings and attitudes.

Grice (1975) argues that there are a number of conversational principles or maxims that regulate conversation by a way of enforcing compliance with the cooperative principles: These maxims are: quality, quantity, relevance and manner.

The study of the speech act has been researched since 1960s, but the approach toward production and perception of the speech act has been for the last 15 years (Lee, 2004). For this field a number of studies of apologizing have been carried out (e.g. Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Holmes, 1990; Trosborg, 1987).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF APOLOGY

Like other speech acts, apology has attracted the attention of many researchers, especially those interested in foreign language teaching and learning. A review of related literature shows that apologies by native speakers of English and other languages as well as those learning English as a foreign language have been widely studied.

Fraser (1981) asserted that we apologize when there is a behavior that violates a social norm or when an

expectation held by the offended person is not held. There are two parties: an apologizer and a recipient, when one of the two parties perceives himself as offended by action or an utterance (or lack of them), the responsible needs to apologize. By accepting responsibility and performing an apology, he/she wants to 'set things right'. In the decision to carry out the verbal apology, the speaker is willing to humiliate him/herself to an extent and admit responsibility.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p.187) listed apology as intrinsically a negative politeness strategy, which indicates speakers' "reluctant to impinge on its negative face", the hearer wants that this action be impeded by others. They added that apologies are politeness devices expressing attention to the hearer's face needs in context of an offense.

An apology for Goffman (1967, p.140) is one type of 'remedy' among others. For Holmes (1990) "it is a speech act thatintended to remedy the offense for which the apology takes responsibility and as a result, to rebalance social relations between interlocutors".

Olshtain (1989, p.156) defines apology "a speech act which is intended to provide support for the hearer who was actually or potentially affected by violation X. hence the act of apologizing is face saving for the hearer and face threatening for the speaker". Lakoff (1979) asserts that politeness and apologies are devices employed by interlocutors to help reduce frictions in interpersonal communication. Thus apologies provide a remedy for an offence and help restore harmony.

Cohen and Olshtain (1981) attempt to develop a measure of sociocultural competence with regards to apology and to account for language transfer in the development of sociocultural competence in second language (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983).

One of the most significant developments in speech act studies is the cross-cultural speech act realization patterns (CCSAP) which was conducted by Kulka and Olshtain (1984). This project aimed at investigating the realization patterns of the speech acts- requests and apologies- across a range of languages and cultures in order to establish similarities and differences in these patterns cross linguistically and between native and non-native usage to the same social constraints. The languages investigated were English, French, Danish, German, Hebrew and Spanish. They assumed that the observed diversity of the speech acts in question stems from three different types of variability. These are (a) intercultural, situational variability; (b) cross-cultural variability; and (c) individual variability.

In another study Al-Hami (1993) studies the realization patterns of the apology strategies as used by native speakers of English and Arab Learners of English. The study aimed at finding the frequency of usage of the strategies of apology among the native speakers of English and the Arab learners of English as well as specifying the types of breakdown Arab learners of English committed in using apology.

After collecting the data Al-Hami (1993, p.42) classifies the participants' responses into six strategies and three intensification devices:

- A. Expression of apology.
- B. Explanation or account.
- C. Acknowledgement of responsibility
- D. Repair.
- E. Promise of forbearance.
- F. Expressing concern for hearer.

In addition, the analysis includes the specifying the devices of apology intensification: (a) adverbials (e.g. I'm very sorry), (b) repetition (e.g. I am very very sorry), and (c) combination of strategies.

The findings of the study present differences in the Arab learners' performance compared with the performance of the native speakers. They also showed that Arab learners of English and English native speakers (NS) used nearly the same strategies. Moreover, Arab learners expressed less regret than the NS; and that English NSs tended to offer a repair, and give a promise of forbearance more than Arab learners. On the other hand, Arab learners paid more attention to explaining the reason behind the offense. The researcher concluded that differences between the NSs of English and Arab learners of English are mainly attributed to negative transfer where cultural patterns vary as well as to the lack of linguistic competence.

Hussein and Hamouri (1998) study the strategies of apology in Jordanian Arabic and American English. They categorize the participants' responses into 12 categories following (Owen, 1983; Trosborg, 1987; Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Analysis of data showed a contrastive use of the strategies of apology amongst the Jordanian and American respondents. The Jordanian speakers' strategies were more varied than the American. Moreover, the Jordanians were less direct and use more elaborated strategies than their American counterparts who opted for more concise ones.

Learning to apologize appropriately is an important part of being communicatively competent within a speech community. Non-native speakers (NNS) frequently break cultural rules and face the embarrassment of miscommunication. Apologies offer a chance to save face in threatening or difficult circumstances.

Another study deals with apology strategies of Jordanian EFL University students, is conducted by Fahmi and Fahmi (2006). This study is an investigation of Jordanian EFL University students' apologies, using 10 item questionnaire based on Sugimoto (1987). The researchers tabulate and compare the strategies used by male and female respondents for the purpose of uncovering whether or not gender differences exist. The findings showed that male and female respondents used the primary strategies of statement or remorse, accounts, compensations, promise not to repeat offense and reparation.

To conclude, one can notice that the studies on apology strategies are mostly a comparison between two languages

or cultures, and comparison between native speakers (NSs) and Non-native speakers (NNSs). The current study focuses on the apology strategies carried by Arabic EFL learners to their Arabic native speakers' lecturers of English. In other words, the apology strategies used by Arab learners of English to their Arab teachers of English in the target language TL, English.

METHOD

Subjects

The participants are 42 Israeli- Arab college students. Their Major is English and they study in the department of English in Sakhnin College for Teacher Education. This college is located in the Lower Galilee, in the northern side of Israel. The students are Arabs from the area, and they are mostly female students. The respondents are 4 males and 38 females and they are studying English and are expected to be English teachers for the intermediate schooling level. They are homogenous in terms of their cultural background (Israeli Arabs), academic/linguistic experience and age. They are between 19 and 25.

Instrument

The data of the current study was collected through e-mail messages sent by the participants to their three lecturers during the second semester of academic year of 2010. The researcher in this study collected these e-mails which were written in English and tried to find out the strategies of apology use by the participants. Both the students and the lecturers are native speakers of Arabic, but they communicate in the TL, English. The apology situations in this study are authentic, in real situations and the data naturally occurred.

Analysis of data has shown a variety in the use of apologizing strategies in the target language among the subjects. The strategies employed by the participants were categorized into 10 strategies. Analyses of the apologizing strategies were based on strategies developed by a number of researchers (Owen, 1983; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Trosborg, 1987; Hussein & Hamouri, 1998). Following is a list of strategies along with examples employed by the participants in this study.

Strategy 1: Minimizing the degree of offence. This strategy is a transfer from Arabic. It consists of responses like: "it's nothing", "everyone errs" and "I am not the only one who does so".

Strategy 2: Acknowledgement of responsibility. When a compliance chooses to take one responsibility he/she can do so in varying degrees of self-blame. It has subcategories:

A. *Explicit acknowledgement of responsibility.* It consists of utterances such as "by Allah, I didn't remember and I do not pay attention".

B. *Expression of lack of intent:* Some specific utterances used in this study Are: "I do not intend to do that" and "I do not think you will respond like that".

C. *Expression of self- deficiency*. In this strategy the students translated expressions from L1, Arabic such as “I was nervous”, words are not enough to express my apology and many others.

D. *Expression of embarrassment*. This strategy was used by the students as transfer from L1. It consists of apologies like, “I am afraid to look in the mirror because it will reflect the evil inside me”, “It is not my nature”.

E. *Explicit acceptance of the blame*. This strategy includes responses like, “I know that I have committed a mistake” and “everyone makes mistakes”.

Strategy 3: Explanation of account. After the expression of apology, the speaker tries to lessen his wrongdoing by giving an explanation or account. Some responses are: “I did not come because I was sick” and “I was affected by the other girls”.

Strategy 4: Expression of apology.

A. Expression of regret. I.e. “I am sorry”.

B. Offer of apology. E.g. “I want to apologize”.

C. Request for forgiveness. i.e. “I want you to forgive me” and “I will feel sad if you do not forgive me”.

Strategy 5: Offer of repair. This strategy consists of utterances such as: “I am ready to apologize in front of the girls” and “I am ready to do whatever you want to satisfy you”.

Strategy 6: Promise of forbearance. It includes statements like, “I will not do it again” and “I will never hurt you”.

Strategy 7: Greetings. The students used utterances from Arabic, such as “salamat”, (hi) and “assalamualaikum”, (peace upon you).

Strategy 8: Interjection. This strategy is used along other strategies. It consists of utterances such as, “oh my God”, “well” and “you know”.

Strategy 9: Expressing concern for hearer. It includes utterances such as, “I am afraid I insulted you”, and “I did not mean to disrespect you”.

Strategy 10: Intensification. It consists of utterances like, “I am very very sorry” and “I am extremely sorry”.

Data Analysis

The objective of the current study is to examine the apology strategies used by Arab college students in the target language (TL), English toward their lecturers of English who are also native speakers of Arabic. In other words, to answer the following question:

What are the strategies of apology used by Arab learners of English in the target language to their Arab lecturers of English?

Forty two e-mail apology messages sent by the students to their Arab lecturers. The language used in these messages was English. The students apologized after committing an offense and they felt they should apologize. The apologies were authentic and they were done as a result of:

Misbehaving during the lecture.

Speaking loudly or nervously with their lecturers.

Having their cell-phones rung during class.

Not attending the lecture.

Attending the lecture late.

Plagiarism. Copying the task.

It is worth noting that each e-mail message may consist of more than one apology strategy. They usually begin with apology expressions and then they gave their explanation of the situation in which the offense was committed and end with a request for forgiveness. For other researchers this variation is called a combination of strategies (Hussein and Hamouri, 1998). For the current study each apology utterance is considered a separate strategy.

The following e-mail illustrates this point:

“Salamat my lecturer”, “I am really sorry about what happened at that day. I was angry for personal things, so I spoke with you impolitely. I know that this is not a good excuse, but I know that you have a big heart to forgive the others”.

In this e-mail one can notice the use of more than one apology strategy such as expression of regret, “I am sorry”, explanation of account, “I was angry for personal thing and request for forgiveness”, “I know you have a big heart to forgive the others”.

It is also worth noting that the apologies are done by the students towards their lecturers who are considered an authority, therefore, they could have an impact on their academic achievement.

Results

The subjects have provided a total of 240 apologies in 42 e-mails during the second semester of the academic year of 2010. As is quite clear from Table 1, Figure 1 and Figure 2, “expression of responsibility” is the most frequent strategy used. This strategy accounts for almost 40% of all strategies used. It consists of three sub-strategies: “Expression of regret” which accounts for (14.5%), “offer of apology” and its percentage is (12.5) and “request for forgiveness” which accounts for (12.5%). Some of the utterances used by the students for this strategy were: “I am sorry”, “I am sending this e-mail in order to show my apology” and “I will be so pleased if you forgive me.”

Minimizing the degree of responsibility accounts for 29.1%. This strategy is divided into five sub strategies: explicit acknowledgement (2%), expression of lack of intent (7.5%), expression of self- deficiency (7.5%), expression of embarrassment (1.6%) and explicit acceptance of the blame (10.5%). Some of the utterances used by the students for this strategy: “I am talking about my shameful action”, “I did not mean to hurt you”, “I am writing to tell you how I am ashamed”, “I know that I did a mistake” and “I was very confused”.

These two strategies account for (68.6%) of the overall strategies used. Whereas the remaining strategies account for (31.4%): Minimizing the degree of offence did not occur at all, explanation of account (6.6%), offer of repair

(1.6%), promise for forbearance (5%), greeting (6.5%), expression of concern for the hearer (6%), intensifiers (3.7%) and interjection (2%).

Table One illustrates the distribution of the apology strategies used by the students according to frequency and percentage.

Table 1
Distribution of Strategies Used by the Students According to Frequency and Percentage

Strategies	Frequencies	Percentage
1. Minimizing the degree of offence.	0	0
2. Acknowledgement of responsibility.	70	29.1%
a. Explicit acknowledgement.	(5)	(2%) *
b. Expression of lack of intent.	(18)	(7.5%) *
c. Expression of self- deficiency.	(18)	(7.5%) *
d. Expression of embarrassment.	(4)	(1.6%) *
e. Explicit acceptance of the claim.	(25)	(10.5%) *
3. Explanation of account.	15	6.6%
4. Expression of apology.	95	39.5%
a. Expression of regret.	(35)	(14.5%) *
b. Offer of apology.	(30)	(12.5%) *
c. Request for forgiveness.	(30)	(12.5%) *
5. Offer of repair.	4	1.6%
6. Promise for forbearance.	12	5%
7. Greeting.	16	6.5%
8. Expression of concern for the hearer.	14	6%
9. Intensifiers	9	3.7%
10. Interjections	5	2%
	240	100%

Figure 1 shows the percentage of the apology strategies used by Arab EFL students in the TL towards

their lecturers of English who are also native speakers of Arabic.

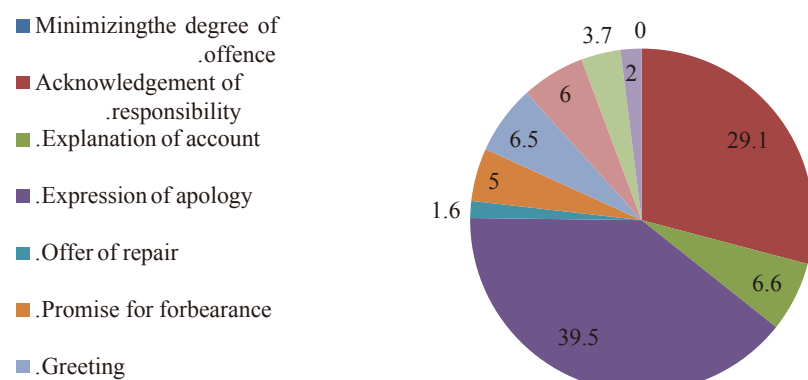


Figure 1
Distribution of Strategies Used by Arab EFL Students According to Percentage

Figure 2 represents the distribution of apology strategies used by Arab EFL students in the TL toward their Arab lecturers of English according to frequency.

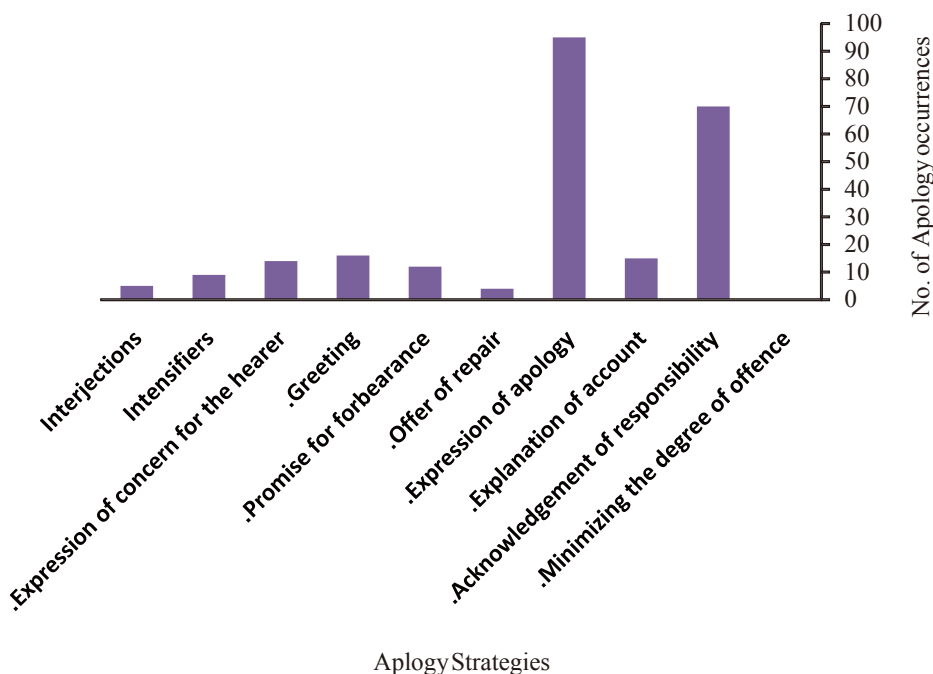


Figure 2
Distribution of Strategies Used by Arab EFL Students According to Frequency

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Analysis of the 42 emails sent by the Arab EFL students in the TL to their Arab lecturers of English has shown that the students used different strategies for apologizing. The most frequent apology strategy used was expression of apology (39.5%). This shows that Arab students use the expression “I am sorry” or “I want to apologize” for their apology in L2. This, the researcher believes, could be attributed to fact that the students transferred it from L1. In other words, it is a translation of the Arabic utterances: [anaaaasef], (I am sorry) or [bdiaatather] (I would like to apologize). Moreover, Arab EFL students asked their lecturer to forgive them. This is due to the fact that the students could be afraid of the lecturers’ authority, they were afraid that not forgiving them might affect their academic achievement.

Analysis of data also shows that the next frequent strategy used by the students in this study is acknowledgement of responsibility (29.1%). The students admitted that they had committed an offence and they took the responsibility for that offence. They also indicated a lack of intent and attributed the offence to outside factors such as being nervous or having a bad mode or being in a bad situation.

One important finding in this study is that the strategy of minimizing the degree of offence did not occur at all.

This, the researcher believes, might be attributed to the fact that the students acknowledge their responsibility to the offence committed.

Other strategies were also used but with low frequency, these strategies are: Greeting, interjection, intensification, concerning for the hearer, explanation of account, offer of repair and promise of forbearance.

As has been evidence by the findings of this research that Arab EFL students transferred apology strategies from Arabic to the target language, in this study English.

This justified Johnson (1982) who asserted that Learners do not only transfer language rules but also language use.

It is worth noting that the subjects in this study used these strategies to apologize to their lecturers who are considered as an authority for them. This implies that these students may use different apology strategies with other people and outside the college. The students also apologized behind the screen, they may apologize differently in face to face interaction.

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