

The Effect of Gender on Apology Strategies Used by Egyptian EFL learners in Faculty of Arts in South Valley University

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى كشف استراتيجيات ووظائف سلوك الاعتذار في أفعال الكلام من قبل طلاب كلية الآداب جامعة جنوب الوادي وخصوصا دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ثانية الذكور منهم والإناث. يعتذر البشر، عموماً، بأشكال مختلفة، حسب الموقف وجنسهم وخلفيتهم الاجتماعية والثقافية. تحاول هذه الدراسة كشف طرق التعبير عن الاعتذار، من خلال تسليط الضوء على التعبيرات الشائعة المستخدمة بين دارسي اللغة. وإذا ما كان جنسهم- سواء ذكور أو إناث.

لذا فالجزء العملي يتضمن تحليل ردود الطلاب من خلال استبيانات ورقية بها مجموعة من المواقف المختلفة يتوجب عليهم فيها الاعتذار. وقد كانت هناك عدة دوافع وأسباب وراء هذا الموضوع بعينه، منها على سبيل المثال لا الحصر، أن هذه الدراسة تقوم تحديداً على دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية فهي بمثابة تطبيق عملي لأفعال الكلام، وليس من خلال تحليل اجتماعي براغماتي لنصوص مكتوبة أو روايات كما أنها تدرس تأثير الفروق بين الجنسين وهل يمكن بدورها أن تؤثر على ردود الأفعال أم لا.

Abstract:

This study investigates the strategies and functions of speech acts of apology by Egyptian English foreign language (EFL) university students. This study is conducted on male and female undergraduate students of the Faculty of Arts in South Valley University.

Generally, people apologize differently depending on the situation and their gender. This study attempts to discover the methods for expressing apology by highlighting the common expressions that are used by Egyptian undergraduate students in South Valley University. It also examines whether gender can affect the use of apology responses or not. The data will be analyzed based on the responses of the students of Faculty of Arts through a questionnaire, from a pragmatic point of view.

Key words: Speech acts, Apology, EFL, Gender.

Introduction:

Communication Language seems to be substantial in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Language, as the main way of communication among humans, plays a critical role in understanding and expressing the world around us and beyond. Apology appears to be the most commonly used speech act in everyday life. This kind of speech act seems to be culturally influenced, providing several ways for comparing and contrasting different languages on a cultural basis, because every society has its own customs that one should apologize for violating. The target of this study is to explore how Egyptian English learners in South Valley University (both genders) apologize. It aims at finding out how they apologize, whether there are common expressions and strategies of apologies, and whether these strategies differ according to gender. It also investigates the similarities and differences in the realization patterns of the speech acts of apologies, relative to the Egyptian society. Moreover, this study investigates the impact of the mother tongue (Arabic) and the second language (English) on the way learners express and formulate their apologies in different situations. Thus, this paper tries to establish a pattern for the use of apology and aims to find answers for the following questions:

- 1) Are there any differences in the apology strategies between male and female EFL learners?
- 2) If so, what are the patterns of variation between males and females?

- 3) Does the mother language (Arabic) affect their responses in the English language?
- 4) What are the commonly used expressions of apology in South Valley University?

Objective

English is a foreign language (EFL) for Egyptians (males and females) and it is taught in schools as a compulsory subject. Egyptians are often expected to learn English as a foreign language for about sixteen years, starting in primary school and continuing through higher education. The teaching of English grammar and reading is given increased attention in the Egyptian educational system. As a result, Egyptian students may frequently struggle to communicate in real-world settings. In particular, when the speaker and the hearer are from different cultures, understanding the meaning behind the words is crucial to avoiding misunderstandings and achieving the communicative goal.

Review of Literature

Apology, as a speech act, seems to be culturally influenced, providing several ways for comparing and contrasting different languages on a cultural basis. This is because every society has its own customs that one should apologize for violating and its own ways of expressing apologies. For example, in Japan, apologizing is seen as a virtue and is often coupled with a bow; the sorrier you feel, the deeper you bow. In Argentina, Cristian Rennella, CEO and co-founder of elMejorTrato.com, suggests that the best way to apologize in business is by inviting the other person to a one-on-one work lunch. Meanwhile, in Brazil, the best way to apologize is by giving a small gift accompanied by a note of apology. Therefore, it is essential to effectively read social signals not only before but even after an apology. By observing body language and cultural differences, one can determine if your apology has already had a positive or negative effect on the other person.

Apology can be described as remedial interchanges that aim at restoring social balance after an actual or perceived offence (Goffman 1971). Goffman (1971) elaborates that apology is defined as remedial interchanges which are used to reestablish social harmony following a real or factual offence. He adds that a successful apology has several perfect conditions the most important of which are for the apologizer to admit the offense, to take responsibility for that offense, and, finally, to offer some compensation to repay. Olshtain (1983) defines an apology as speech acts that aim at offering support for the hearer who was actually or possibly

suffered by a violation. Previous research has found that the type of trust violation affects the degree to which an apology is effective (e.g., Kim et al. 2003).

Every society has its socio-cultural and communicative behaviors that relate to face (Goffman, 1967) and politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1978) cognizant of the fact that interlocutors would, under normal circumstances, want to maintain the social face, be friendly and thus be liked (positive politeness). In 1983, Leech labeled this communicative strategy 'The Tact Maxim' and noted that it is a strategy for avoiding conflict, specifying that the goal of an apology as a communicative strategy is the maintenance of harmony between interlocutors. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) perceive apology as a social event when they point out that it is performed when social norms are violated. Bergman and Kasper (1993) emphasize this view as they see that the purpose of apology is to reestablish social relation harmony after the offense is committed. Furthermore, Lakoff (1973) notes that politeness and apologies are devices employed by interactants to help reduce friction in interpersonal communication. Thus, apologies provide a remedy for an offense and help restore harmony as well as social equilibrium (Holmes, 1995; Edmondson, 1981; Leech, 1983).

Apologies are similar to other speech acts in that they are often performed through conventionalized or ritualized utterances. According to Hudson (1980), conventionalizing any linguistic pattern is a matter of historical accident. Once expressions are selected in preference to others to be used to perform certain acts, it becomes a necessity that they be used and interpreted as such. Certain forms are more conventional and are used more often than others, such as (I am sorry) which means "forgiveness" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Blum-Kulka and Kasper (1993) state that speech acts differ in the extent to which conventionalized linguistic forms are used; some speech acts, such as apologizing and thanking, exhibit more conventional usage than others do. Although apologies are classified by Brown and Levinson (1978) as negative politeness strategies, they could be viewed as requests for exoneration (e.g. "please forgive me", "please excuse me").

Gender played a substantial role in using apology strategies. It was revealed that males and females differ in their use of apology strategies. The female respondents tended to be more apologetic than males. Moreover, females used more remorse manifestations than males. Although both males and females used the same primary strategies, females used them more than their counterparts. Furthermore, female respondents used somewhat fewer non-apology strategies than male respondents.

In addition, one of the remarkable studies in the area of

Upon evaluating the data, no statistically significant differences were found between males' and females' responses in terms of apology and apology strategies. The strategy that was most widely used was a combination of IFIDs and EXPLs. With males, EXPLs were higher than IFIDs; the opposite being true for females.

It is important to note that this study only included 20 participants, therefore the results cannot be generalized to all native speakers of Arabic. It is also clear that this study did not examine the age factor despite differences in the ages of the participants that were chosen. Furthermore, the researcher failed to analyze the demographic information and benefit from its value.

Methodology

Thirty English major students (15 males and 15 females) were chosen randomly from The Faculty of Arts in South Valley University, Egypt. To collect ample information and to get reliable data, the study analyzes the data of one questionnaire: Discourse Completion Task Questionnaire (DCTQ). The DCTQ is considered an effective research instrument. In the present study, the DCTQ consists of two parts. The first one contains background information about gender and status while the second part contains 10 open situations adapted from apology speech studies: five scenarios from everyday life situations and five scenarios from academic life. The first step of data transformation includes turning the answers that the participants wrote into a numerical form through coding procedures. The answers of the open-responses (based questions) were 10 scenarios that have also been recoded into matrices by using the coding manual of Cohen and Olshtain (1981) as follows:

- (1) Expression of apology (APOL).
- (2) Acknowledgment of responsibility (RESP):
- (3) Explanation (EXPL):
- (4) Offer of repair (REPR):
- (5) Promise of forbearance (FORB)

The researcher in this study uses Excel program to calculate the frequency of apology strategies and the responses of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Apology Strategies of Female Students

Situation 1: You borrowed a book from your professor which you promised to return in the next day. When meeting your professor in the next day you realized that you forgot to bring it along. What would you say?

Table 1: Apology strategies used in Situation 1 by males from (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	1
APOL/EXPL	4
APOL/EXPL/REPR	8
APOL/REPR	1
No response	1

Table 2: Apology strategies used in Situation 1 by Females from (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	2
APOL/EXPL	4
APOL/EXPL/REPR	8
APOL/REPR	1

Situation 2: Between lectures you met your best friend and you decided to drink coffee together. In the middle of your conversation, you accidentally spilt coffee on his shirt. What would you say?

Table 3: Apology strategies used in Situation 2 by all males (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	7
APOL/EXPL	1
APOL/REPR	1
APOL/RESP	3
APOL/FORB	1
APOL/EXPL/RESP	1
Not apologize	1

Table 4: Apology strategies used in Situation 2 by all Females (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL/REPR	4
APOL/RESP	3
APOL/EXPL/REPR	1

Situation 3: You lent a book from the library and you lost it. What would you say?

Table 5: Apology strategies used in Situation 3 by all males (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	2
APOL/EXPL	3
APOL/RESP	1
APOL/REPR	6
APOL/EXPL/REPR	3

Table 6: Apology strategies used in Situation 3 by all Females (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
REPR	1
APOL/EXPL	1
APOL/REPR	6
APOL/RESP	1
APOL/EXPL/REPR	2

Situation 4: You were working on your friend's laptop and accidentally some files were removed s/he had been working on for the past two weeks. How do you apologize?

Table 7: Apology strategies used in Situation 4 by all males (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	4
APOL/EXPL	2
APOL/RESP	2
APOL/REPR	4
APOL/REPR/RESP	1
EXPL/REPR	1
No response	1

Table 8: Apology strategies used in Situation 4 by all Females (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	4
APOL/REPR	7
APOL/RESP	3
APOL/REPR/RESP	1

Situation 5: You borrowed a CD from your roommate and did not return it for 3 weeks. How would you apologize?

Table 9: Apology strategies used in Situation 5 by all males (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	4
APOL/EXPL	3
APOL/REPR	7
No response	1

Table 10: Apology strategies used in Situation 5 by all Females (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	4
EXPL/APOL	1
REPR/APOL	6
RESP/APOL	1
REPR/EXPL/APOL	3

Situation 6: You borrowed your class fellow's book and a child at your home tore some of its pages. What would you say when you return the book?

Table 11: Apology strategies used in Situation 6 by all males (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	4
APOL/EXPL	3
APOL/REPR	5
APOL/EXPL/REPR	3

Table 12: Apology strategies used in Situation 6 by all Females (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	4
APOL/EXPL	2
APOL/REPR	6
APOL/RESP	1
APOL/EXPL/REPR	2

Situation 7: You were to submit an assignment to the professor but due to health problems, you have not been able to even attend the class. What would you say to your professor the next session you attend?

Table 13: Apology strategies used in Situation 7 by all males (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	2
APOL/EXPL	9
APOL/EXPL/REPR	3
No response	1

Table 14: Apology strategies used in Situation 7 by all Females (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	4
APOL/EXPL	7
APOL/REPR	1
APOL/RESP	1
APOL/EXPL/REPR	2

Situation 8: You were running late to the lecture and hurriedly ran towards the class. While going upstairs you dashed with your professor. How would you react?

Table 15: Apology strategies used in Situation 8 by all males (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	6
APOL/EXPL	4
APOL/RESP	1
APOL/FORB	1
No response	3

Table 16: Apology strategies used in Situation 8 by all Females (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	6
APOL/EXPL	4
APOL/RESP	3
APOL/ EXPL RESP	1
No response	1

Situation 9: You had an appointment at 10:30am with your professor to discuss the topic for your final paper. Because of a traffic jam (caused by an accident on the interstate), you were 25 minutes late. What would say?

Table 17: Apology strategies used in Situation 9 by all males (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	5
APOL/EXPL	9
No response	1

Table 18: Apology strategies used in Situation 9 by all Females (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	5
EXPL	1
APOL/EXPL	7
APOL/RESP	1
No response	1

Situation 10: You were in a lecture, and you suddenly need to receive an important call. What would say?

Table 19: Apology strategies used in Situation 10 by all males (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	4
EXPL	1
APOL/EXPL	8
No response	2

Table 20: Apology strategies used in Situation 10 by all Females (15 DST)

Apology strategy	Frequency
APOL	2
EXPL	5
APOL/EXPL	7
No response	1

Discussion and Findings

Sociolinguistics is a method of understanding the world around you rather than a collection of facts. It allows you to draw conclusions regarding language in

society. This study aims to answer the research questions that were part of an exploratory study of the language of apology of English foreign language learners. The questions are about the commonly used expressions of apology and gender similarities and differences.

Males and females here had equal opportunities to express themselves in different situations and the topics used in the questionnaire were all familiar. In this section, I will compare the findings of the DCTQ in an attempt to answer the research questions. It is worth noting that the gathered data was analyzed by Microsoft Excel 2010, which was used to make tables, while Microsoft Word 2010 was used to organize the data in several tables.

In open questions, or DCT situations, the participants were not forced to respond in a certain manner. Actually, they used standard English with polite language without any intensifiers or humorous language. However, there was one exception among the responses which stated: "I will not apologize". But in general, the participants used formal language. Based on their responses, their sentences are stilted and lack sincerity because they cannot feel the English language which they use and they are not skillful enough in using it. This is due to the fact that EFL learners cannot express themselves in English effectively and this is also related to the context of learning and their lack of pragmatic competence.

The researcher initially hypothesized that there would be more differences than similarities between males and females in their use of apology strategies due to gender-related issues and in the light of previously conducted research that claimed more differences than similarities. In any case, some strategies were used more frequently than others, such as IFID, REPR, RESP (*?ana? asef* (I am sorry); *? al-ħaq? ali* (it was my fault); and *lanaf? aluhamarat-an uxra* (I will not do it again). Moreover, combination of apology strategies was employed frequently. The most used combined versions of apology formulas are the following: APOL, APOL/EXPL, APOL/REPR and APOL/EXPL/REPR.

Although we have so many stereotypes that are embedded in our culture, one of which assumes that women are inferior to men and therefore apologize more often, in this study, males used many complicated strategies, most of them do not rely on IFID strategy alone. But if one compares between males and females in using IFID only, it will be found that males used it more often than females. Indeed, females used many complex strategies in their responses (APOL/EXPL/REPR/FORB).

Thus, the findings of this study lead us to adopt the view that differences were more prevalent than similarities among all participants but they were illustrated more clearly between males. The similarities and differences can be summarized here as follows:

- Males and females employ a wide array of apology strategies such as IFIDs, EXPLs, REPR, etc.;
- Males and females tend to combine several apology strategies when expressing their apologies;
- The most frequently used strategy is a combination of IFIDs and EXPLs, with males ranking IFIDs higher than EXPLs and the opposite being true for females;
- Males tend to offer less explanation than females in situations that have already taken place and therefore seek other apology strategies (e.g., EXPLs);
- Females tend to offer more repair and responsibility than males (REPR/RESP);
- Females tend to offer more forbearance than males (FORB);
- Males tend to use “I will not apologies” more than females;
- Females to use “please” expressions in their apology statement more than males.

Apologies, although classified by Brown and Levinson (1978) as negative politeness strategies, could be viewed as requests for exoneration (e.g. please forgive me, please excuse me) and as requests that would be threats to someone’s face, which would bring their status as a politeness strategy into question.

Appendix

A Questionnaire on Apology Strategies

In this section, you are asked to provide some personal information about yourself.
In some questions, you can choose more than one option:

Section (1) Personal Information

(1) Name (optional): -----

(2)

(3) Gender: Male () Female ()

(4) Languages

Your Mother Language -----

Your Second Language -----

(5) Have you ever visited any English-speaking country??

Yes ()

No ()

If your answer is yes, please specify which country and how long have you lived there?

6) How would you rate your knowledge of English?

Very good ()

Good ()

Fair ()

No knowledge ()

Students will be asked to read some brief situations in which there are two participants. Students will have to act the situation and interact with the other person, and then write their utterances (apologizing) as they would act in an actual situation. Such as the following:

- 1- You borrowed a book from your professor which you promised to return in the next day. When meeting your professor in the next day you realized that you forgot to bring it along. What would you say?

You: -----

- 2- Between lectures you met your best friend and you decided to drink coffee together. In the middle of your conversation you accidentally spilt coffee on his shirt. What would you say?

You: -----

- 3- You lent a book from the library and you lost it. What would you say?

You: -----

- 4- You were working on your friend's laptop and accidently some files were removed s/he had been working on for the past two weeks. How do you apologize?

You: -----

- 5- You borrowed a CD from your roommate and did not return it for 3 weeks. How would you apologize ?

6- You borrowed your class fellow's book and any child at your home tore some of its pages. What would you say when you return the book?

You: -----

7- You were to submit an assignment to the professor but due to health problems, you have not been able to even attend the class. What would you say to your professor the next session you attend the class?

You: -----

8- You were getting late from the lecture and hurriedly ran towards the class. While going upstairs you dashed with your professor. How would you react?

You: -----

9- You had an appointment at 10:30am with your professor to discuss the topic for your final paper. Because of a traffic jam (caused by an accident on the interstate), you were 25minutes late.

You: -----

10- You were in a lecture, and you suddenly need to receive an important call. What would say?

You: -----

انتهى الاستبيان

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