

An Analysis of Apology Strategies of English as Performed by Iraqi Undergraduate EFL Students at the University of Anbar: A Sociolinguistic Study

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Abstract:

This aim of the current study was to identify and analyze the apology strategies used by Iraqi university students. In addition, it focused on how those students apologize appropriately and politely in different situations. This study adopted Holes (1990) apology strategies model which was adopted by Uglu and Abidin (2016). The sample of the study consisted of thirty university students from Anbar University-Department of English- the fourth level. A Discourse Completion Task Questionnaire consisted of ten situations were developed by the researchers and used to analyze data obtained. Results revealed that university students used different strategies according to many variables.

Keywords: Apology, Apology Strategies, and Iraqi EFL Students .

Introduction

Using language appropriately does not mean mere correct phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, but involves pragmatic knowledge or, to be more specific, cultural knowledge to avoid misunderstandings or communication breakdowns (Ibrahim and Maniam, 2020). Sociolinguistic competence works under the umbrella of the communicative competence. This branch of the communicative competence is the knowledge of sociocultural rules of use, i.e. knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately (Koran, 2016). Al-Abdali and Maniam (2020, p. 1015) stated that “communication is an indispensable part of any community life in which people feel the need to interact with each other for certain reasons. It is through the concept of language that people can communicate with a number of interlocutors in a variety of settings”. They added that, while interacting, people need to follow things beyond words. They need to know how to say something as well as when, where and to whom to say it. Therefore, communication is much more than putting some words in a linear order to form a set of items. Language users are supposed to follow some conventions according to which their conversation will be not only meaningful but also appropriate. This analysis of how to say things in appropriate ways and places is basically called pragmatics (Al-Abdali and Maniam, 2020). Additionally, “Being appropriate depends on knowing what the taboos of the other culture are, what politeness indices are used in each case, what the politically correct term would be for some notion, how a specific attitude (authority, friendliness, courtesy, irony, etc.) is expressed” (Koran, 2016, p. 3). This means that different cultures generate different response and reaction towards the many social issues including an apology .

Foreign language learners face difficulties in interacting with others especially with native speakers of English. The researchers think that this might be due to the lack of the cultural competence of the learners. Learners should be familiar with the cultural competence that enables them to interact pragmatically-culturally appropriately. Bataineh&Bataineh (2006) give an excellent example of how different speakers react, behave, and respond differently when they have a different cultural background, and how different leads to a breakdown in communications. They claimed that, in Japanese culture, apologize to others is enough. While in Jordanian culture, apologizing alone is not enough, apologizer must give reasons and justify why he/she offended others. According to them, to accept your apologies, ones have to apologize within the cultural values and context of the offender's culture. Considering the inseparable interface of a culture and a language, Bataineh and Al-Abdali (2015) stated, “It is

difficult to imagine teaching a foreign language without dealing with its culture. The language reflects the culture and is influenced and shaped by it. They also noted that the role of foreign language teachers has gained importance as they serve as a medium to teach both the language and the culture of the foreign language. Therefore, the culture does not need to be taught independently from the language“ (p. 244).

Speech acts are a main mean of pragmatics; thus, many researchers have investigated this field endlessly. The British philosopher J.L. Austin first introduced the term 'speech acts' in his book 'How to do things with words'. Austin (1962) introduced two different speech acts: Constative and Performative. Austin describes constative as those utterances that describe facts and can be either false or true. On the other hand, he describes performatives as utterer's intentions to do things such as (apology, promise, and request) with words .

It is known that apology has an important role in human everyday communication. It serves as an excuse for an act that done wrong. An apology is used to remove the misunderstanding between speakers (Al-Sobh, 2013). Apology, in its board function, is used to resubmit a good act that had been submitted wrongly before. It is, thus, reestablishment of the social relation between the apologizer and the apologies. For Al-Quraishy (2011), "apology strategies are used to reestablish the social relationship and at least reduce the offense to the offended" (p. 18).

The Previous Studies

Altayari (2017) examines the apology speech performed by Saudi speakers. The sample of the study consisted of 100 males and females. A discourse completion task questionnaire consists of ten seniors was used. Gender and social factors were also examined in this study. Results revealed that the Saudi participants used different strategies .

Similarly, Al-Sobh (2013) examined the apology expressions of Jordanian university students. The participants of the study consisted of eight university English majors at Irbid National University. A discourse completion task questionnaire consisted of six Situations was used. Results suggest that the Jordanian university students used different apology strategies i.e., regret, explanation, an offer of repair, equal-equal, low high and responsibility. The researcher ends the study with a recommendation to the teachers to train students to use apology expressions and strategies at school .

Likewise, Ahmed (2017) examined the speech act of apology by Iraqi Arabic native speakers and Iraqi English foreign language learners. It examines the productions and perceptions of both groups. Results showed that choosing strategies influenced by the collectivistic nature of Iraqi culture as well as the socio-religious conceptualization of apology .

Furthermore, Farashaiyan and Amirkhiz (2011) compared the apology strategies used by Iranian EFL and Malaysian ESL learners. Discourse completion tasks questionnaire was used to collect data. Results revealed that certain similarities and differences in terms of frequency and typology of strategies used by Iranian and Malaysian students .

In the same vein, Al-Quraishy (2011) conducted a study that aims at Categorizing the types and percentages of the strategies used in performing the speech act of 'apologizing' by Iraqi EFL learners and pointing out the breakdowns committed to using these strategies. The discourse completion test was applied to twenty-five participants of Iraqi EFL. Findings showed that Iraqi EFL learners lack knowledge for most of the apology strategies.

Purpose of the Study

This aim of the current study was to identify and analyze the apology strategies used by Iraqi university students.

The significance of the Study

The results of the study are important and useful for curriculum designers, supervisors and book authors to take into account the importance of elements of culture and pragmatics in the development of English as a second language and as a foreign language when preparing the contents of the curriculum. The results of this study help to uncover the most important theories and teaching methods (intercultural pragmatics, sociolinguistics, cross-cultural pragmatics) that must be followed and included in the official curriculum of the Iraqi universities and with the official approval of the Ministries of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research .

Questions of the study

This study was an attempt to answer the following study questions :

1. Do Iraqi university students apologize to others when they involved in wrong situations? If yes, do they use certain apology strategies? What apology strategies do they use ?
2. How do students in the University of Anbar respond and produce apologies?

Limitation of the study

This study is limited to the following available:

1. The sample of the study is restricted to the fourth level both males and females at the University of Anbar .
2. The results of this study are limited to the speech acts of apology strategies .

Population and Participants of the study

The population of the study consists of about 45 English major students in the fourth level. The participants of the study consist of only 30 students in the first semester of the academic year 2020/2021.

Instrument and Procedures

A Discourse Completion Task Questionnaire consisted of 12 situations were developed by the researchers and used to analyze data obtained. The instrument was well-written and well-prepared copy with clear and simple language. It was given to the participants, then, it was returned to the researcher. The instrument was collected by the researcher and it was sent to the special analysts to analyze the results.

Validity

The instrument was judged and evaluated by many professors and experts, who are specialized in TESL, TEFL, linguistics, applied linguistics, the psychology of education. Those professors and doctors are from different universities and from different countries. They evaluated the instrument regarding the language, spelling, grammar, content, time, clearness, mistakes, and strategic suggestions. Their opinions, suggestions, the point of views, editions, omitting, and corrections were taken into consideration when finalizing the situations .

Reliability

To achieve and ensure the reliability of the instrument, it was applied to 10 students from the same department but who were excluded from the actual number of the sample of the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

A Discourse Completion Task Questionnaire (Appendix A) consisted of 12 situations were developed by the researchers and used to analyze results. Different apology strategies were used. Twelve situations were prepared, typed and prepared according to the apology strategies and then given to students who were asked to respond apologetically. Their responses were collected and analyzed to find out the most common expressions and strategies they use.

Holmes's (1990) Apology Strategies Classification

Holmes's (1990) Apology Strategies Classification

No.	The situations
1	An Explicit expression of apology
a)	An offer of apology/ IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device)
b)	An expression of regret
c)	A request for forgiveness
2	An explanation or account
3	An acknowledgement of responsibility
a)	Accepting the blame
b)	Express self-deficiency
c)	Recognize H (hearer) as entitled to an apology
d)	Express lack of intent
e)	Offer repair/ redress
4	A promise of forbearance

Table 1: The situations

No.	The situations
1	You forgot to call your friend.
2	You gave wrong directions to a visitor.
3	You borrowed your friend's car; he called you that he dismissed his job because he did not arrive at time.
4	You forgot to buy your daughter a gift in her birthday.
5	You arrived late at the professor's office. The traffic was crowded.
6	You drop tea on your friend's white shirt.
7	Your father blamed you for being late for the dinner.
8	You lied on your mother by giving wrong exam marks.
9	By mistake, when you were trying to put your car in the garage, you shocked a man's car. He asked you to apologize to him.
10	You friend asked you to adjust his mobile screen without shutting down out but unintentionally the mobile signed out.
11	You are a professor; you unintentionally missed the student's final exam paper, a student asked you for his marks.
12	You cheated in the exam. The teacher asked you not to repeat this again.

Findings and Discussion

The current study was an attempt to answer the two study questions. Thirty university students were used as a sample of the study. A DCT contains twelve situations was used to find out what apology strategies do Iraqi students use and how do they respond and produce apologies. This section deals with the findings and the discussions of the findings .

The first question was: Do Iraqi university students apologize to others when they involved in wrong situations? If yes, do they use certain apology strategies? What apology strategies do they use? Whereas the second question was: How do students in the University of Anbar respond and produce apologies.

Table 2: Apology Expression

Situ.	Apology Expressions
1	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, Sorry, I am sorry, I forgot to call you.
2	I am sorry, I am very sorry, verysorry, Sorry, and Sorry for giving wrong directions, I apologize for you, Forgive me.
3	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, Sorry, I am sorry to hear that, I apologize, I did not mean it, I cannot forgive myself.
4	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, Sorry, forgive me, I apologize, forgave me.
5	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, And Sorry, I did not know how it happened, and the traffic today is unnatural.
6	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, And Sorry, it is my fault, I apologize to you.
7	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, Sorry, please accept my apology, Forgive me.
8	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, Sorry, I blame myself for doing this, Forgave me.
9	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, Sorry, I am sorry, Forgive me.
10	I am sorry, I am very sorry, verysorry, Sorry, I did not mean to do that, Sorry, I did not know how this happen
11	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, Sorry, Really, I am sorry. I am sorry I will examine you again.
12	I am sorry, I am very sorry, very sorry, Sorry, I promise not to do this again, Forgive me.

Findings of the Study

Table 2 shows the expressions used to apologize to others. Regarding situation one forgetting to call a friend, students use the expression: (sorry) more than other expressions. The second situation was about giving wrong directions to a visitor, the most expression that testers used were (sorry). In the third situation, it was about borrowing your friend's car; who dismissed his job because of you, students used the following expressions (I did not mean it and I apologize) more than other expressions .

Regarding the fourth situation, this was about forgetting to buy your daughter a gift in her birthday, testers prefer to use expressions like (forgive me) than expressions (Very sorry, I apologize, forgive me). In the fifth situation when you arrived late at the professor's office because the traffic was crowded and heavy, the contributors used the expressions (I am very sorry). For the sixth situation which was about dropping tea on your friend's white shirt, the sample used expressions (Sorry and I apologize to you), more than other expressions .

For the seventh situation, you are blamed for being late for the dinner, the users chose the expressions (I am very sorry and forgive me). Regarding, the eight situations that were about lying on your mother by telling her the wrong exam marks, the students use (I am very sorry and forgave me) expressions. In the ninth situation (shocking a man's car who asked you to apologize to him, (I am so sorry) expression was the only choice they used .

For situation ten concerning adjusting friend's mobile screen without shutting down but the mobile shutdown unintentionally the mobile signed out, in such a situation, students claim that they use (I did not mean to do that and I did not know how this happen) expressions to apologize in this embarrassing situation. In the eleventh situation that tackled situation about missing your student's final exam paper who asked for his marks, the undergraduates sample students use the expressions (Sorry). In the final situation, that is the twelfth situation regarding cheating in the exam and the teacher asked you not to repeat this again, the students use expressions (I am very sorry, and forgive me).

Discussions of the Findings

After analyzing the results, the researchers found that in some situations, the students rejoined one word only, as in situation (1) about forgetting to call a friend, in the situation (2) about giving wrong directions to a visitor, and in situation (11) when missing student's final exam

paper. The testers think that it is enough to apologize for apologizes who are from the equal level. Furthermore, the undergraduates use intensifiers (very) in some situations as in situations (5, 7, 8, and 12). Students tend to use strong expressions of apology in the formal situations as with a higher-level people (professor, father, and mother), whereas, they use ordinary expressions of apology in the informal situations especially with equal-to-equal people (a visitor and a friend). Because students think that forgetting to call a friend, giving wrong directions to a visitor, and dropping tea on a friend's white shirt are not awful actions that need more apology, it is enough to explain regret for them .

In some different situations when the students feel that there is a need to extend the expression of apology to be convincing for the apologies, students add one or more words as a justification when they apologize. For example (I did not mean it and I apologize) in situation (3); (forgive me) in situation (4); (Sorry and I apologize to you) as in situation (6); (I am so sorry) in situation (9); and (I did not mean to do that and I did not know how this happens) as in situation (10).

Conclusion

The researchers concluded that:

1. Apology strategies vary and it can be used according to the situation .
2. In some situations, students use one or two words apology expressions. In contrast, they expand the expression .
3. The apologizers use strategies according to the level of the apologies. For example, they use one word only with informal situations, especially with equal-equal people. In addition, they use intensifiers to apologize for people from a high level. Moreover, use a set of words to apologize for people from equal-equal level but with a serious situation .
4. Undergraduate EFL learners at the University of Anbar use different apology strategies according to the seriousness of the situation and to the person's level to which they apologize .

Recommendations

The researchers recommend Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, supervisors, textbook writers, researchers, teachers, curricula developers and designers to take the following points into considerations:

1. To conduct more studies not only about the apology but also about other aspects of speech acts i.e., labeling, repeating, answering, requesting (action), requesting (answer), calling, greeting, protesting, and practicing (Dore,1975).
2. Teachers should explain the importance of learning apology strategies as a part of our daily life. Thus, they should train students using these strategies in a like-life and real-life situations .
3. Learners should try to learn apology strategies in accordance with to the culture of the target language .
4. The syllabus should be containing apology strategies through many exercises and activities .

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Appendix A
Discourse Completion Task Questionnaire

No.	The situations
1	You forgot to call your friend.
2	You gave wrong directions to a visitor.
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4	You forgot to buy your daughter a gift in her birthday.
5	You arrived late at the professor's office. The traffic was crowded.
6	You drop tea on your friend's white shirt.
7	Your father blamed you for being late for the dinner.
8	You lied on your mother by giving wrong exam marks.
9	By mistake, when you were trying to put your car in the garage, you shocked a man's car. He asked you to apologize to him.
10	Your friend asked you to adjust his mobile screen without shutting down out but unintentionally the mobile signed out.
11	You are a professor; you unintentionally missed the student's final exam paper, a student asked you for his marks.
12	You cheated in the exam. The teacher asked you not to repeat this again.