

Comparative Study of Apology Strategies between Native English Speakers and Iranian EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study compared the speech acts of apology between American English native speakers and English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners to see whether EFL learners apply apologies appropriately. The investigation was based on 100 Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) from 50 upper- intermediate EFL learners selected based on the Quick Oxford Placement Test and 50 native speakers of American English selected based on their availability. The responses were collected through a research-made discourse completion test (DCT) including 18 scenarios based on social power and distance. The collected data were examined based on the apology strategies classification by Cohen and Olshtain (1981). In order to compare the DCTs quantitatively, frequency, percentage and Chi-square were applied between the groups to make sure that the results were admissible. The results showed difference in the types of apology strategies adopted, and also, the frequency of using these strategies varied. They also indicated that the two most frequent strategies used were apology expressions and an offer of repair. Furthermore, it was revealed that social power and distance have noticeable impacts on both EFL learners and native speakers' production apology strategies. The finding disclosed that the higher the social power of the offended, the more apology strategies he/she seemed to have received. Finally, implications for language teachers and learners are delineated.

KEYWORDS: Apology strategies; discourse Completion test; Social power

INTRODUCTION

Using the appropriate language in different situations is necessary to make communication. In order to achieve this goal, one should acquire pragmatic competence and the grammatical one at the same time. Crystal (1997, as cited in Kasper & Rose, 2001) defined pragmatics as "the study of language from the point of view of the speaker, and especially the speaker's intention, the way the speaker uses language in social interaction and the effects of his or her uses of language on other participants in the act of communication". Mey (1993) has also mentioned that pragmatics is the science of language which people use in their real life for achieving their aims. One of the most fundamental parts of pragmatics is speech act that is defined by Austin (1962) as actions which are performed in saying something (as cited in Cutting, 2002). Being able to employ speech acts appropriately is defined as knowing the knowledge of communicating with others (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986). One of the most commonly used speech acts in everyday interaction is the apology speech act.

Linguists argue that languages function based on some fixed expressions used in some communicative tasks such as refusal formulas, greetings, and apology strategies which are the main concern of the present study. Speakers of any language employ some structures in their speech which are fixed. For instance, *forgive me, I'm sorry, didn't mean it* are some expressions speakers use when apologizing. These fixed expressions are called formulaic sentences (Levine, 2014).

Speech act theory, as introduced by Austin (1962), considers the types of acts that speakers can be said to perform. Speech act theory has turned into an important branch of the contemporary theory of language thanks mainly to the influence of Searle (1969) and Grice (1975) whose ideas on meaning and communication have induced research in philosophy and in human and cognitive sciences. Although it is implied that speech acts operate by universal pragmatic principles (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975; Leech 1983), and also they vary in conceptualization and verbalization across cultures and languages (Green, 1975; Wierzbicka, 1985). Based on the current argument on language universals and the importance of such notions in formation of a language theory in general and second language acquisition theory in particular (Blum-Kulka, 1983), numerous studies have been carried out among different languages to test the idea of the universality of pragmatic principles (Kasper, 2000; Yuan, 2001).

One type of speech act is apologizing. The act of apologizing is named for when the interlocutor's behavior does not obey social norms. When an action or utterance (or the lack of either one) has resulted in offense, the offender requires apologizing. As a result we deal with two parties: an apologizer and a recipient of apology; the act depends on whether the person who caused the fault accepts him/herself as an apologizer. Apologizing act needs an action or an utterance which is used to make things right. Whether a speaker uses a certain utterance such as apology and whether he or she uses a specific discourse situation for an apology both depend on linguistic and socio-cultural norms (Smith, Chen & Harris, 2010). From childhood, people understand that an offender's apology can signal sorrow and can make victims feel better. Apology has often been empirically associated with forgiveness (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010).

The way people apologize relies on the circumstances on the situation. These can include power distance which is the degree of social inequality considered normal by distance between individuals at different levels of a hierarchy scale from equal (small power distance) to extremely unequal (large power distance), social distance which is explained in terms of familiarity or unfamiliarity of the interlocutor, such as two friends or two strangers involved in the act of interaction, and imposition which deals with the degree of burden created via the act of interaction which can engender positive face and negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

Despite knowing a range of vocabulary terms and grammatical structures after studying English, one of the problems that many EFL learners face is their insufficient communicative competence to appropriately communicate in different contexts and with regard to different functions and speech acts. This means that they have developed their grammatical competence, but they need to develop their communicative competence.

Language and culture are specific to the community of the speakers of the language. It can be understood that each community has its own special language and culture which are unique (Agyekum, 2002). Different languages and cultures would resort to different words, verbs, strategies, and more specifically in this study, different types of requests. These varieties can be also found in apology strategies. Therefore, Persian and English are probably different in terms of apologizing.

In many EFL classrooms, learners are provided with input from the second language; however, they are not able to perform their real language competence because the learners are probably not familiar with the culture and social beliefs of that society. As a result, they can make correct grammatical statements, but the statements may not be appropriate and applicable in the context. Learning a language is not just learning how to speak and write, but also where to say. Asking or requesting, especially to apology strategies, could be a challenge to EFL learners since they are not taught how to speak in this situation to avoid positive face destruction.

Similarly, apologies can be different across cultures; they arise out of social constraints on the individual behavior where it can cause discomfort, harm, or injury (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Thus, EFL learners try to keep on their faces in a face-threatening situation such as asking to apology.

The speech act of apologies has also been investigated cross-culturally and some similarities and differences have been found between cultures in the use of apologies (e.g. Chamani & Zareipour, 2010; Gold & Davis, 2005; Gonzalez-Cruz, 2012). Apologies have also been investigated in ESL contexts (e.g. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Cohen & Olshtain, 1993; Garcia, 1989; Olshtain, 1983; Suszczynska, 1999) and EFL contexts (Ercetin, 1995; Tuncel, 1999). Nonetheless, considering the importance of learning how to apologize appropriately in a second language, it seems that little attention has been paid to different forms of apologizing and its contextual issues of different usage choices.

Therefore, given the paucity of studies on the realization of the apology speech act through different strategies by EFL learners in general and comparing Iranian EFL learners with native American English speakers in particular, the present study aims to find out if Iranian EFL learners can apologize appropriately in different contexts as native speakers do. In other words, this study attempts to investigate the apology strategies by native speakers and those by EFL learners, and to find out the potential differences and problems that EFL learners might have. This will be conducted through collecting discourse completion tests (DCT) from native speakers and EFL learners. This study intends to investigate the following questions:

1. What apology strategies do native American English speakers use?
2. What apology strategies do Iranian EFL learners use?
3. Do apology strategies used by Iranian EFL learners appropriately conform to those by native American English speakers? What can be the possible similarities and differences?
- 4.

METHOD

Data

The data of this study were selected from the answers that the participants provided to the situations mentioned in a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) on apology. The DCT included 18 situations, and 4034 strategies and 33510 words were collected totally. Table 3.1 shows the number of words and strategies for both groups.

Table 1. *The Number of Strategies and Words Used by Native English Speakers and EFL Learners*

	Words	Strategies
Native English Speakers	20540	2280
EFL learners	12970	1754

One hundred DCTs, which were the main source of the data, were gathered. Some examples of apologies are given below:

Native English speakers:

- (1) I'm sorry! I'll be careful from now on. I'm new at this.
- (2) I'm sorry that I was clumsy and ruined your dress, I didn't mean for it to happen and I will replace it.

EFL learners:

- (4) I'm so sorry I really didn't want to make you sad...are we still friends?
- (5) I DON'T know how to say sorry.
- (6) I knew it was your birthday but I forgot to call you...I was so busy... sorry dear it won't happen again.

PARTICIPANTS

One hundred participants took part in this work in two groups, 50 native English speakers, and 50 Iranian EFL learners, both males and females. All the participants were between 20 to 70 years of age. The only variable controlled for the native group was being a native speaker of American English defined as a lay person, while the variable controlled for the EFL group was language proficiency. Other variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, or educational level were not controlled.

The native English group included of 50 participants in the United States whose ages ranged from 20 to 70. Both males and females responded to the questionnaire. They were selected through snowball sampling since native English speakers in the United States were difficult to locate, the researcher asked her native English speaker friends who lived in the United States and asked them to fill DCTs and requested them to invite their native English speaker friends to participate in this study. After that, the English DCTs were emailed to those who accepted to participate. They were asked to give their answers in roughly 30 minutes.

The EFL learners group, similarly, included 50 male and female students of English Language Teaching at Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz Branch. Their ages ranged from 23 to 38. To select a homogeneous group of participants in terms of language proficiency, I administered the Quick Oxford Placement test to approximately 150 EFL learners. The test consisted of two parts; the first 40 questions must be answered in 30 minutes, and if an individual finished them in the limited time, they were allowed answering the 20 more questions left. From the test takers, 72 of them could answer the first part of the test in less than 30 minutes were chosen. Among those 72 EFL learners, 50 participants, who gained the highest scores, were selected as the participants of the study. These participants had studied English for about 6 years at the university. The DCTs were given to the EFL participants, and they were requested to answer the questions in a limited time of 30 minutes.

INSTRUMENTS

Three instruments were employed in this study. At the beginning, to select a homogeneous group of EFL learners, the Quick Oxford Placement Test was administered. This test is a language placement test which contains two parts. The first part includes 40 tests, which all the students need to answer them in less than 30 minutes. The second part of the test contains 20 more questions. Anyone who can answer the first part of the test in less than 30 minutes would be allowed to answer the rest of the test; otherwise, they are not allowed to answer them. This test was taken to select the EFL learners of the study.

The second instrument applied in the study was a discourse completion test (DCT). Two variables were considered in developing the DCT, power (P) and distance (D). Social distance means the distance between different groups of society because of their race, ethnicity, or social class, and power here refers to the ability of some social groups to control the behavior of others. Thus, some social groups have the authority to influence people's behavior; for instance, in the relationship between a teacher and a student, there is a social distance between them because of their different social classes and also because the teacher is seen as more powerful than the student (Brown & Levinson, 1987). From the two variables incorporated, six situations were prepared including +P-D, +P+D, =P+D, =P-D, -P+D, and -P-D. Each situation consisted of 3 questions, so the DCT contained a total of 18 questions. Each question required the participants to write what they say when they want to apologize in a specific situation incorporating social power and social distance.

In order to develop the DCT, I piloted it prior to its administration. Firstly, 6 questions were designed for each of the six situations. Then the DCTs were emailed to 5 native English speakers and 5 EFL learners. They were asked to answer all the questions in 30 minutes. After the participants emailed their responds to the researcher, three questions which were more easily understandable to the respondents were selected among the 6 questions of each situation. The questions which were somehow vague for the participants were excluded from the DCT.

The third instrument applied in the study, was the framework of apology strategies. Different taxonomies have been devised for classification of apology strategies (e.g. Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1987). There are overlaps between these taxonomies, and while some of them are detailed, some others are broad. In this study, the apology strategies were coded according to Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) framework because it is the most detailed and thorough taxonomy which includes different apology strategies. Accordingly, if the offender accepts the responsibility for the offense committed, s/he may select five possible strategies to apologize, which are as follows:

1. An expression of apology.
 - A. An expression of regret, e.g., I'm sorry.
 - B. An offer of apology, e.g., I apologize.
 - C. A request for forgiveness, e.g., forgive me.
2. An explanation or account of the situation, e.g., the bus was late.
3. An acknowledgement of responsibility
 - A. Accepting the blame, e.g., It was my fault.
 - B. Expressing self-deficiency, e.g., I was confused.
 - C. Recognizing the other person as deserving apology, e.g., you are right.
 - D. Expressing lack of intent, e.g., I didn't mean to.
4. An offer of repair, e.g., I'll help you get up.
5. A promise of forbearance, e.g., It won't happen again.

However, if the offender rejects the need to apologize, s/he may not react at all; yet where s/he has a verbal reaction, it can be:

6. A denial of the need to apologize, e.g., There was no need for you to get insulted.
7. A denial of responsibility
 - A. Not accepting the blame, e.g., it wasn't my fault.
 - B. Blaming the other participant, e.g., it's your own fault.
8. Others, e.g., oh my God.

Procedure

This study began with the composing of DCTs based on power and distance. There were 6 situations based on power and distance. Each situation had just 3 questions, so there were eighteen questions to answer. There were two groups of participants. The first group was included 50 native English speakers and the second group was included the EFL learners who were administered the Quick Oxford Placement Test. 50 of those participants who were passed the second part of the placement test with highest score were selected. Further, the English native speakers were selected based on availability. The researcher emailed the DCTs to them to fill the DCTs in 30 minutes. After that, all DCTs were emailed to the researcher. Then, those DCTs which were in written form were typed in Microsoft Word Office so that the researcher could calculate the number of words used by all the participants. Then, the final phase was carrying out the analysis of the data based on the Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) framework.

After all the 100 DCTs were collected, those DCTs, which were in written form, were typed in Microsoft Word Office so that the researcher could calculate the number of words used by all the participants. Since the analysis could be problematic, ten percent of the corpus (both EFL learners and native English speakers) was separated to be analyzed. Prior to the main analysis, to ensure the feasibility of the study, I discussed the selected corpus with my

supervisor about how the analysis must have been executed. We attended to find examples of these instances and finally reached acceptable agreement over how to conduct the main phase of the study. To check the reliability of the analysis method, inter-rater reliability was calculated via Cohen's Kappa and the coefficient obtained was 0.93 which was indicative of a high reliability index.

After the DCTs were collected back from the participants, the same procedure used in the pilot study in identifying the apology strategy types was applied to the whole dataset. At this point, each DCT was worked through searching different strategies based on the Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) framework, and then coded and classified in relation to categories of apology model. As a result, the focus of the study was only on apology strategies and the different use of strategies based on power and distance. To guarantee a more careful and comprehensive analysis as well as to reduce the risk of error, the textual information within each DCT was scrutinized three times, each time looking for realizations of one of the eight possible apology strategy type of the Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) framework.

By the time the data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, the analyst made a list of those strategies over the coding of which she was dubious about, and they were finally identified and coded through consulting with the supervisor of the thesis. It is also worth to note that the required rectifications were carried out on those parts which were considered to be problematic.

In the present study, the data analysis was carried out on two levels: First, the data were coded, computed, and analyzed quantitatively. According to the respective objective of the study, the percentages and frequencies of the apology strategy items within each apology strategy type as well as their associated subtypes detected in the data were calculated. The second part of the analysis approached the data qualitatively where each strategy was placed in its category.

In order to compare the DCTs quantitatively, frequency, percentage and Chi-square were applied between the groups to make sure that the results were admissible. Subsequently, the differences and similarities between native English speakers and EFL learners were investigated qualitatively.

RESULTS

At first, we asked participants to answer to DCTs; afterward, the answers of EFL learners and English native speakers were examined based on Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) framework of apology strategies. There were two groups of answers to the DCT situations. The first group refers to those accepted their mistakes which had five possible answers: 1. An expression of apology (*A. An expression of regret, B. An offer of apology, and C. A request for forgiveness*), 2. An explanation or account of the situation, 3. An acknowledgement of responsibility (*A. Accepting the blame, B. Expressing self-deficiency, C. Recognizing the other person as deserving apology, and D. Expressing lack of intent.*), 4. An offer of repair, and 5. A promise of forbearance. The second group refers to those who rejected the need to apologize, which had two possible answers: 6. A denial of the need to apologize, and 7. A denial of responsibility (*A. Not accepting the blame, B. Blaming the other participant.*). It is worth pointing out that there were some answers which did not belong to any of the seven strategies. For these answers, such as '*Oh my God, were you able to celebrate*', I added another group named others and I put all answers which were not belong to the other groups in this group.

The number of strategies used by EFL learners was 1754 and the number of words used by them was 12970, On the other hand, the total number of strategies employed by native speakers was 2280 and the number of words used by them was 20540. The result of raw frequencies, percentages and Chi-Square for EFL learners and native English speakers are presented in the table below.

Table 2. *The Result of Saying Apologies for EFL learners and Native English Speakers*

Strategies	EFL learners		Native English Speakers		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
1. An expression of apology	a. An expression of regret	598	34%	450	20%
	b. An offer of apology	51	3%	215	9%
	c. A request for forgiveness	179	10%	40	2%
2. An explanation or account of the situation	102	6%	85	4%	
3. An acknowledgement of responsibility	a. Accepting the blame	180	10%	165	7%
	b. Expressing self-deficiency	51	3%	55	2.4%
	c. Recognizing the other person as deserving apology	10	0.8%	0	0.0%
	d. Expressing lack of intent	55	30%	40	2%
56 An offer of repair	194	11%	565	25%	
57 A promise of forbearance	44	2.6%	100	4%	
58 A denial of the need to apologize	74	4%	205	9%	
59 A denial of responsibility	a. Not accepting the blame	31	2%	45	2%
	b. Blaming the other participant	7	0.6%	15	0.6%
60 Others	178	10%	300	13%	
Total	1754	100%	2280	100%	
Chi-Square between EFL learners and Native English Speakers	0.0				

As can be seen in table 2, both EFL learners and native English speakers used *an expression of regret* a lot. EFL learners used this strategy more than other strategies (598 times) and native English speakers used this strategy 450 times. *An offer of apology* occurred 51 times (3%) in the EFL corpus; however, native English speakers employed it 215 times (9%). By contrast, EFL learners used *a request for forgiveness* more than native English speakers (179 times). *An explanation or account of the situation* and *accepting the blame* were used by EFL learners' more than native English speakers (102- 180 times). Also, *expressing self-deficiency* was almost the same in both groups (EFL learners 3%, native English speakers 2.4%). It is interesting to note that none of the native English speakers used *recognizing the other person as deserving apology*, but EFL learners used it ten times (8%). *Expressing lack of intent* was used by EFL learners more than the other group (55 times). *An offer of repair*, *a promise of forbearance* and *a denial of the need to apologize* were mostly used by native English speakers more than EFL learners (565- 100- 205 times). Table 4.1 illustrates that *an offer of repair* was the most frequently used strategy by native English speakers. EFL learners applied *not accepting the blame* less than native English speakers (31 times). On the other hand, native English speakers utilized *blaming the other participant* more than EFL learners (15 times). *Blaming the other participant* had the least frequency in EFL learners' answers (7 times- 7%). Another notable difference is that native English speakers used other phrases which are not in the Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) framework almost twice more than EFL learners (300 times).

The table 4.1 represents *an expression of regret* and *blaming the other participant* were the most and the least phrases used by EFL learners (598-7 times) (34% - 0.6%). On the other hand, native English speakers resorted to *an offer of repair* and *recognizing the other person as deserving apology* as the most and the least phrases (565- 0 times) (25% - 0.0%) respectively.

DISCUSSION

To illustrate the findings and show how these resources are used to describe the perspective of our study, this section discusses the possible reasons behind the findings of the study. Also, this section involves the results and findings presented in Chapter Four through providing answers to the questions of Chapter One. The results of the study would lead us to the realization of using apology speech act by native English speakers and EFL learners, along with their differences and similarities.

The first research question attempted to find out what kind of apology strategies native American English speakers use in their speech. The second question attempted to see the apology strategies which Iranian EFL learners use in their speech. The last research question explored whether there are any differences between native American English speakers and Iranian EFL learners in using apology strategies.

Question One

Concerning the first question of the study (What apology strategies do Native American English speakers use?), the results of the study showed that among the eight recognized strategies in this work, the most common strategies of apology used by American English speakers is *an offer of repair*. One reason could be found in the nature of the study and the format of the DCTs. In this study, the participants were asked to write what they would say if they want to apologize; probably, the first thing that came to their mind was *an offer of repair* as it seems to be more polite, especially when there is power and social distance between interlocutors. Since it is believed that they can show their shame, by repairing the shortcoming, and they can also express their sorrow, so by repairing the fault they felt a lot more comfortable. To put it another way, they remove the negative face that they may confront by their fault. Examples below show native English speakers try to repair their fault, they use this expression more that '*I'm sorry*' which is the second more usable strategies by them. It seems it relates to their culture and they accept their fault and try to repair it.

- (1) I will try to replace it immediately.
- (2) I make this up to you.
- (3) Can I replace your cup?
- (4) I will make a fresh new dish of your choice.
- (5) I will pay for it.

The high frequency of '*offer of repair*' of the apologies would suggest that the native English speakers in the survey were very concerned about saving face. They would give an explicit apology, as shown above, try to justify their act, or offer to make up for it in order to maintain their image in front of the others. This attention given to one's face is consistent with Márquez-Reiter's (2000) findings about British speakers of English.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), any verbal strategies which lead to taking into account the addressee's feelings by showing respect to his or her "face", is polite speech (p. 61). The notion of face, as it was mentioned before, has two sides: the need to be approved or affirmed (positive face) and the desire not to be imposed upon (negative face). There were *an offer of repair* in all situations, but by decreasing the power and distance the number of time that native speakers used expressions such as '*I will try to replace it, I make this up to you as soon as possible, i will fix it with new style and it will look great*' increasing. When participants imagined themselves such as a driver of a company who had an accident by company's car, or when they had lost their parents credit card and being a hairdresser who didn't do his job well, they tried to repair their fault more than the time they have more power and distance which had the least amount of *an offer of repair*.

Native English speakers employed asking for repair perhaps because they thought they behave more politely and save their face in the situations. When the researcher asked the native English participants to answer the DCT, they mentioned that it is not a big deal, and mostly they simply preferred to repair their fault.

Another possible reason can be sought in the nature of the present study. The DCTs of the study were presented to the participants in whom the imaginary situations were explained through power and social distance parameters. Thus, the situations needed them to say whatever they would say in those situations, and it was not in the middle of a conversation. However, the situation was set so that the speaker had to start speech in order to say the main intention of '*trying to correct their fault*'. In such situations, one of the most convenient choices available in front of the interlocutor to achieve his/her purpose would be asking for repair.

Question Two

Concerning the second question (What apology strategies do Iranian EFL learners use?), the findings of the study revealed that EFL learners did not follow the native English speakers in all structures appropriately. Analysis of the 50 DCTs emailed by the EFL learners to the researcher has shown that the learners used different strategies for

apologizing. The most frequent apology strategy used was *expression of apology* 'An expression of regret'. This shows that EFL learners use the expression 'I am sorry' for their apology in L2. This, the researcher believes, could be attributed to fact that the learners transferred it from L1. In other words, it is a translation of the Persian utterances: 'bebakhshid' (I am sorry). This is due to the fact that the learners could be afraid of speaking English and saying 'I am sorry' is the easiest way to apologize and save their face. Saying 'I am sorry' is the easiest way, when a person does not have enough ability and knowledge to bring good excuse and apology for a situation. It is a simple apology and a promise not to repeat that activity again. This, identically in opting for the same typologies of strategies among the majority of the participants could be attributed to the more or less same comparable language proficiency of participants. The negligible typological differences in using apology strategies might be ascribed to the individual differences, especially personality-related style preferences, and also language-learner strategies in pragmatic performance. Cohen (2008), in this respect, asserts that there exist factors on the learners' side which may uphold or impede their ability to perform speech acts in ways that are appropriate for the given situations in which they find themselves (e.g., their language proficiency, learning style preferences, and personality).

In terms of an expression of apology usage which is the most frequent expression for EFL learners, it was also found to be prevalent among native English speakers and the overwhelming expression was 'I'm sorry' which expresses regret (Holmes 1990). As Owen (1983, cited in Suszczynska, 1999, p.1059) states that expressions of apology are the strategies which are the most conventionalized and routinized, being as it were in the center of the speech act category of apologizing and representing verbal routines or syntactic-semantic formulae.

(6) I'm sorry.

(7) I'm so sorry.

(8) I'm very sorry.

Analysis of the data also shows that the next frequent strategy used by the EFL learners in this study is 'An offer of repair'. The learners admitted that they had committed an offence and they took the responsibility for that offence.

(9) Let me buy you another one.

(10) Let me help you to clean it.

(11) I will buy you a new suit if you don't mind.

(12) I will compensate it.

(13) I will promise to remove the problem.

EFL learners 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 EFL learners acknowledge their responsibility to the offence committed. They prefer to agree and accept the damage that they have caused.

(14) I didn't really mean it.

(15) I was so angry.

(16) It wasn't intentional.

(17) I was too busy to call you.

(18) I'm in a hurry.

The use of 'an expression of regret' and 'an offer of repair' as the first and second most frequently used strategies respectively by Iranian learners can be attributed to respondents' L2 apology development which commences with the formulaic stage. The emergence of other strategies in the later development stage may indicate that in addition to linguistic features of apology strategies, other factors such as the saliency of the strategy in performing the apology or instruction also determine the choice of the strategy. The expression 'I'm sorry/sorry' is the most essential strategy in the apology speech act, which was evidenced by the findings of the present study and several other studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2008; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Trosborg, 1995) showing that it is the most commonly used apology strategy, and therefore is acquired earlier.

Question Three

Considering the third question of the study (Do apology strategies used by Iranian EFL learners appropriately conform to those by native American English speakers? What can be the possible similarities and differences?), regarding research question one, the present study aimed to provide a descriptive picture of the typology of apology strategies that Iranian EFL learners and native English speakers display in dealing within different apology situations. Exploring these strategies revealed some similarities and differences between EFL learners and native English speakers' tendencies toward utilization of apology strategies. These similarities and differences are indicated very clearly in the table and it was mentioned in the previous section. From eighteen types of strategies on the DCT, EFL learners' subjects and native English speakers' respondents used fourteen and thirteen types of strategies, respectively. In other

words, Iranians and native English speaker used similar types of strategies in many of the situations (thirteen), but with different percentages.

One of the points that the data revealed is that while use of *an expression of regret* and *an offer of repair* are the most commons between two groups, the general trend is that as a situation becomes more formal, participants decide to use other strategies, such as *expression of self-deficiency, justify hearer, and explanation/accounts*).

EFL learners tend to transfer their sociopragmatic strategies of intensifiers from their first language to make exaggeration in the context of second language use. This is a usual practice especially for Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, EFL learners tend to apologize differently in their target languages. In Iran people wish to present a positive self-image of themselves through an overuse of intensifiers in their apology. In other words, they apologize strongly in contexts where there is little need to apologize. Finally, to conclude the discussion part we can say that given the same level of offence or mistake in the same social context Iranian people tend to apologize with using more intensifiers in their speech. By decreasing the power of the offender, he or she used more intensifiers to apologize when they imagined themselves as a driver in a company, and they had to apologize form their boss via *'I am really really sorry boss, I'll promise to repair it, I'm so sorry, Please forgive me, sir, Please.'* Or when they imagined themselves as a waiter or waitress and had to apologize from a customer, they said *'I'm so sorry ma'am; I will inform the manager of your complaints I wish it won't happen again, we do our best to make you satisfied. Again I'm really really sorry.'* Other examples are such as:

(19) I'm really really really sorry.

(20) I was very busy this week.

(21) I'm terribly sorry.

The discrepancies observed between the two groups may partly be attributed to the methodology applied in this study; the present study was based on the data collected through DCT. This way is claimed to be the best approach to collecting pragmatic data because, as addressed by Cohen and Olshtain (1985), no two situations are ever really identical in natural settings, consequently determining the realization of a given speech act in specific situations entails investigating that speech act in identical situations. Thus, if the two groups were observed in exactly the same situations, perhaps they would act in relatively similar ways.

The differences in the frequency of apology can be attributed to respondents' different cultural values and norms because language is so much associated with its culture, and naturally there would be some difficulties in acquiring the nuances in language that are so culture-bounded. Therefore, this may result in different frequency of the use of pragmatic strategies; especially speech acts strategies among various cultures.

Therefore, the findings of this study are regarded as an exclusive description of apologies, as it just provides a general account of this communicative act in the two languages and no correlations with social and situational variables have been shown; still, it does demonstrate certain preferences which seem to support Wierzbicka's (1985, 1991) position that speech acts are not language-independent natural types but culture-specific communicative routines.

In terms of differences, Iranian society, as a non-western country, is reported to be traditionally a non-egalitarian society as opposed to American as a super-egalitarian society (Beeman, 1988). Thus, a speaker chooses his/her strategy based on the hierarchical differences (e.g. social status, social distance) between the speaker and his/her hearer. In other words, their choice of strategy depends on whether they are apologizing to a professor, a classmate, a teacher, a close friend, or a stranger. Observing the hierarchy factor, they made use of similar strategies in a variety of social contexts.

The most often-used category was the *'an expression of apology'* which contained explicit expressions of apology, as Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and Holmes (1990) classified them. This suggests the fact that EFL learners feel the need to be explicit; they do not want to risk the hearer not interpreting their response as an apology. And this is so even in interactions among friends, as is the case with the situations in the survey, for example:

(22) Well I gotta tell you that something bad happened and I'm really sorry... I had an accident with your car... I promise I make it fix for you sorry again... it was not my fault ☺

(23) I knew you've trusted me But I'm so sorry.... You don't need to pay anything...

(24) I try to relax her with good words and say I'm very very sorry and say don't worry, It was my fault, now if you have the other work I compensate it for you.

These findings are consistent with most of the previous studies, which found that an explicit expression of apology was present in most of the combinations (Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Holmes, 1990), or that apologies given were direct (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Nagano, 1985; Taguchi, 1991).

However, it is not only one's own image that seems to be at stake here. The use of these categories seems to be an attempt at assuring that the relationship with the friend is not compromised. This is demonstrated by some of the apologies that make this explicit, such as in this example: *'I'm so sorry I really didn't want to make you sad...are*

we still friends?'. This is similar to what Nwoye (1992) called 'group face' though it does not go as far as the desire of the Akan speakers to save the face of the entire ethnic group as Obeng (1999) has shown.

Finally, there is the length of the apologies. Most of the responses used up as much of the provided space as possible, if not all the space. Even though it might seem like that, this is not related to the size of the respondents' writing, not to the fact that the apologies have combinations of up to five categories. Even the responses that contained only one or two categories were long, as can be seen in the example below:

Native Speaker's Example:

(25) Please forgive me, my hand slipped. If you let me I can cut your hair a little shorter and fix this. Also, the haircut is on me, please, you don't owe me anything. I'm so sorry.

As you can see in example 25, the participant used different strategies to show her or his sorrow which contains 'a request for forgiveness' followed by 'an acknowledgment of responsibility', 'an offer of repair' and 'an expression of regret', filling in all the space provided for the response.

EFL learner's example:

(26) Oh, no. I'm really sorry... I damage your hair by mistake. It's my fault, but I can do it by extension for free. May I?

In example 26, the participant, who imagined herself or himself as a hairdresser, tried to show her or his sorrow by using different apology strategies such as; 'an expression of regret', 'an acknowledgment of responsibility' which is 'accepting the blame' in two ways and at the last by 'an offer of repair'. However, not all the responses were so long. There were also short verbal responses, especially the ones that had only one category.

(27) Forgive me.

(28) It was my fault.

In most of these situations, the participants had the higher power, and there was social distance too (P+ D+), so he or she thought it was not necessary to use different strategies to apologize. Short verbal replies, which can be a sub-category of 'an expression of apology', mostly transpired within native EFL learners. Again, due to their not acceptable English proficiency, EFL learners gave short responses in order to avoid making wrong structures.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that there are many instances in which L1 cultural norms affect the subjects' realization of apology speech acts. As Olshtain and Cohen (1983) suggest formal instruction on the use of speech acts by L2 learners speed up the process of learning the target language although acquisition of nativelike production by nonnative speakers may take many years. Teachers can develop students' metapragmatic ability by exposing them with real life situations through watching videos, role-playing and simulations, i. e. by engaging them in consciousness-raising tasks.

The findings of this study, though small in scale, suggest that the pragmatic performance of students hinges on certain factors other than language proficiency. The participants were of more or less the same level of proficiency; however, in certain cases they dealt with identical apology situations quite differently. For example, EFL learners resorted to fewer strategies in apologizing in comparison with native English speakers. Such discrepancies might be attributed to a host of factors such as socio-economic and sociocultural backgrounds of the learners and/or negative transfer of pragmatic norms from their L1.

Even though, as already mentioned above, there were many different combinations used, there are two combinations, however, that seem to have been favored by the respondents: the combinations of *an expression of apology* and *an offer of repair* which used more than other strategies by both groups. Therefore, these findings are different than the ones reported by some of the studies presented in the literature review section of this paper, which stated that in the case of English speakers from New Zealand, the proportion of apologies that had single categories was almost the same as that of apologies using combinations (Holmes, 1990). They are also different from the ones on Lombok, where combinations were rarely used (Wouk, In Press). However, the findings are consistent with the ones on German that used mostly combinations of categories (Olshtain, 1989; Vollmer & Olshtain, 1989).

Findings from this review suggest that apologies seem to facilitate forgiveness (Davis & Gold, 2011; Eaton & Struthers, 2006; Fehr & Gelfand, 2010; Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008; McCullough, 1998) and reduce negative emotions following an interpersonal transgression (Eaton & Struthers, 2006). Empathy seems to be related to the effectiveness of apologies. Specifically, the transgressor's delivery of an apology may increase the victim's willingness to empathize with the transgressor to ensure the victim's reception and acceptance of the apology (Davis & Gold, 2011; Fehr & Gelfand, 2010; McCullough et al., 1998). Finally, victims want to feel assured that the wrongful behavior will not occur again in the future (Davis & Gold, 2011; Scher & Darley, 1997).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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