

An Analysis of Apology as a Politeness Strategy Expressed by Jordanian University Students

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Abstract

This study aimed at finding and analyzing the apology expressions used by Jordanian university students. It also aimed at exploring the apology strategies Arabic native speakers used in different situations. The participants of the study were eight university English majors at Irbid National University. Six Situations were prepared, distributed, then collected and analyzed. The findings showed that the apology strategies used were apology and regret, explanation, offer of repair, equal – equal, low high and responsibility. The researcher recommended teachers to train students to use apology expressions and strategies at school.

Key words: apology, speech acts, regret, politeness strategy

Introduction

Second and foreign language learners are often surprised to find that they have difficulty at the interpersonal level when interacting with native speakers. So these learners must be familiar with the cultural values that underlie speech acts. An Arab learner as an example face problems when he finds himself in a situation where he can't communicate properly with foreigners as researchers say. Kramsch (1993) says that all languages have vocabulary items and expressions that carry connotations other than the meanings they have as isolated words.

People satisfy their needs in different ways. For example, English has many ways of expressing the request. While Arabic does not. Therefore Arab speakers may face difficulty in requesting, using one way to express requests Selo (2004). When a talk goes wrong between two speakers of different languages, they may see one another as unfriendly (Bems, 1990). It is known that apology plays a very important role in everyday communication between speakers. It is a justification or defense of an act or idea. It can also be for some thing done wrong. The speaker who has uttered a statement which causes offence to others has a number of rhetorical strategies in response to subsequent calls for apology. He can't remain silent or express regret for making the initial statement. The most important word is the word "Sorry" which is used in different ways.

Apology is a means used to remove the misunderstanding between speakers. Holmes (1990:159) defines apology as a speech act addressed to B's face needs to remedy an offence for which he takes responsibility\, and thus to restore the equilibrium between A and B (A is the apologizer, and B is the person offended) in (Selo, 2004).

For Olshtain and Cohen (1983:20)" the act of apologizing require an action or an utterance which is intended to set things right"

There is a shift from linguistic competence to communicative competence. Therefore, there is a need for conducting studies on speech acts, such as apology. "The acts we perform through speaking. all the things we do when we speak" (Schmidt and Richards, 1 980). There are few studies conducted on Arabic speech acts, such as apology. So this study comes to bridge the gap and help foreign learners and speakers of Arabic understand this speech act so that they can behave. Accordingly in situations.

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Speech Act theory and Cross- Cultural Studies of Apology

Austin (1962), the British philosopher started the era of speech act theory. He defines a speech act as an utterance that performs a certain act. According to Searle (1969) can be classified into certain groups according to the function of the act.

Apologies can be seen as remedial action between the speaker and the hearer after an offence (Schmidt and Richards, 1980).

The case of apology seems to provide a type of speech act for the study of language transfer, since it has been the focus of several earlier studies (Brokin and Reinhart 1978, Frazer, 1980, Walters 1979. Cohen and Olshtain, 1981, cited in Elite Olshtain). Cohen- Olshtain (1981) conducted a study which is concerned with the development of a measure of socio cultural competence, focusing on the act of apologizing. The earlier study was carried out with three groups of subjects: native speakers of English, native speakers of Hebrew and Hebrew speakers / learners of English. Eight apology situations were used to collect data to set a norm. For each group of the two languages. In the present study, the target language is Hebrew. The results of experiments on two groups (native speakers of English and native speakers of Russian) both learners of Hebrew are investigated to establish their communicative competence. Nonnative responses in Hebrew were compared with native responses of Israeli speakers of Hebrew. Deviations then were compared with L1 native norms in Russian and English to evaluate the degree of transfer that has occurred.

Apology differs intra culturally for example Australians and Iraqis apologize when someone touches someone's body, while the Japanese rarely apologize in such situations. Likewise, Tanaka (1991) shows that the Japanese use apologetic expressions, such as 'I'm sorry' to interrupt you when paying a visit.

Selo (2004) conducted a study on apology in Iraqi Arabic to find out the apology strategies Iraqis use. He investigated also the influence of sex, age and status on apology choice, the findings show that the main strategies for expressing apology were: apology and regret, responsibility, explanation, offer of repair, promise of for balance, low-high and high- low strategies for nonnative speakers of Arabic who may not be able to understand and express apology well in Arabic.

Purpose of the study

This study aims at finding the common apology expression used by Arabic native speakers used in different situations. Such studies are useful for Arab EFL learners and Arabic learners who have learnt certain vocabulary items and structures in the target language and haven't developed sociolinguistic competence. Also, this study will be helpful for curriculum designers and textbook writers. It also aimed at finding the apology strategies Arabic native speakers use in different situations.

Questions of the study

The study aimed at answering the following question:

1. What are the apology expressions used in the given situations by students in Irbid National University?
2. How do students in Irbid National University respond apologetically in the given situations?
3. What apology strategies do they use?

Limitation of the study

The results of this study are limited to apology phenomenon at Irbid national university.

Limitation of the study

This study is restricted to the available sample at Irbid National University.

Participants of the study

The Participants of the study consists of 8 students registered and study in the Department of English language and literature at Irbid National University.

Instrument and Procedures.

The apology instrument used consisted of six situations which the subjects responded to apologetically. The situations were Prepared, typed and given to the subjects in a session, then collected. The researcher got benefit from the situations used by Selo (2004).

Data Collection and Analysis

Six situations were prepared, typed and given to students who were asked to respond apologetically. Their responses were collected, tabulated and analyzed to find out the most common expressions and strategies they use.

The situations translated into English

How do you behave in the following situations?

1. Being late for the lecture.
2. Keeping a friend waiting for along time.
3. Refusing a gift given to you by some body.
4. Spilling tea or coffee on a guest's clothes.
5. Breaking a dish at home.
6. Returning a book to the library not on due date.

Findings and Discussion

The results presented in Table (1) refer to the six situations and apology expressions used by the eight subjects. This section presents the findings and discussion according to the three questions of the study. Table (1) shows the six situations and apology expressions used.

Table 1 :Situations and Apology Expression used Translated into English

situation	Apology Expressions
1	Very sorry, Sorry, Can I enter? Sorry for being late, I'm sorry for being late. Sorry, I had a bad situation Accept my apology.
2	Very sorry, I'm very sorry, Sorry for being late. I was late for you, So sorry, I apologize, I was unable to come early.
3	It's personal freedom, I'm sorry to take it, I can't accept it. Thanks, I apologize, Sorry, Thanks, I can't accept it, Verysorry.
4	I'm very sorry, I didn't mean it, Very sorry' I'll clean it. So sorry, I apologize, Pardon I'm so sorry.
5	Some thing ordinary, I'm sorry I didn't know how it happened I'm very sorry mother Ordinary, its life came to an end. I'm sorry I'll buy a new one.
6	Sorry, was unable to return it on time. Sorry, I forgot to return it. Sorry, I lost it. Sorry, I'll buy a new one Sorry, I'll bring another book. Very sorry, I'll not borrow another book. Sorry, I'll bring you a new book. Very sorry.

Table 1 shows that the most common expressions used to apologize in the case of being late are: ?a: sif Jiddan, ?a: sif litakheer. .a: sif ujad dhurf.

In the second situation where some body keeps someone waiting for a long time, the most common expressions are:

?a: sif, ?a: sifJiddan, ?a: sif ala ata'kheer, ?a: ta'dher, iqbal odri.

The most common apology expressions used when some one refuses a gift which is the third situation are: Hathehi Hurreya Shakhseyya, ?a: sif Lan Akhudhha, /asif la asta'tee'.

The forth situation is spilling tea or coffee on someone's clothes.

The most common apology expressions used are: ?a:sif'jiddan. ?a: sif Sawfa onadhef thalik, ?a: sif laa qsud, ana a:sif Jidden.

For the fifth situation which is breaking a dish at home, the most common apology expressions used were: Sha'y adi, intaha omroh, ?a: sif saastari wahad Jadeed.

For the sixth situation which is not returning the book on time, the most common apology expressions were: ?a: sif naseet, ?a:sif dhaa' ?a: sif Jiddan saashatari kitab jadeed.

Table 1 also shown that the subjects responded in one or two words to some situations, such as the first situation which is being late for the lecture or the second situation which is keeping some one waiting for along time as the subjects find it enough to use one or two words because the situation doesn't need more than that to convince the apologizee, for example ?asif or ?a: sif Jiddan.

Moreover, the subjects use intensifiers in situations in which they speak to higher people, such as speaking with a lecturer for being late. They use "Jiddan" (very) or (so). This means they use strong ways of apology in formal situations, but with situations that are not formal and with equal persons or with relatives, they use less formal ways of apology. For example. when some one breaks a dish at home, he says to his mother or brother or relative: aadi (ordinary) or Intaha omruh (its life came to an end). He thinks that he didn't do something awful or dangerous. Therefore, he does not add explanation to his apology expressions.

The subjects felt that it was not satisfactory to use an apology expression only with situations that they think are more serious. So they added explanations. For example, when returning a book late for sometime, they didn't say "sorry" only but they added an explanation. such as " sa ohdher kitab akhar" or" lem a tamaken min ih dharuh fi al wakt al munaseb"

The apology strategies students used were apolog and regret. explanation, offer of repair. Equal- Equal, low high and responsibility. When a student responded saying that he will bring a new book. this means that he bears responsibility. Also when another students said that he would repair the broken dish, this means that he gave an offer of repair. At the same time, when a student explains the reason being late, this means that he used the explanation strategy.

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, it can be concluded the following:

- There are many apology expressions to use in different situations.
- Some situations require one of two words of apology, others require more and explanation to convince the apologizee so that he may accept your apology.
- Apologizers use intensifiers and story and formal of apology when speaking to higher people and ordinary words and expressions when speak with equal persons or relatives.
- Language is a means of establishing relationships with others. So textbook writers should include apology expressions and strategies in textbook, so that learners can use them appropriately.
- Teachers should train students to use apology expressions and strategies at school. Subjects didn't use clear strategies of apology in the situations given as they might not study them in school textbooks clearly. So they used different apology expressions, some colloquial ones for the same situations.

Researchers are recommended to conduct other studies at other Jordanian universities.

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