

Apology strategies of Jordanian EFL university students

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Received 5 July 2004; received in revised form 21 September 2005; accepted 5 November 2005

Abstract

This study is an investigation of Jordanian EFL university students' apologies, using a 10-item questionnaire based on Sugimoto's (1997). The findings revealed that male and female respondents used the primary strategies of *statement of remorse*, *accounts*, *compensation*, *promise not to repeat offense*, and *reparation*. They also resorted to the use of non-apology strategies such as *blaming victim* and *brushing off the incident as unimportant* to exonerate themselves from blame. The findings further revealed that male and female respondents differed in the order of the primary strategies they used. In addition, female respondents opted for non-apology strategies that veered towards avoiding the discussion of offense while male respondents used those which veered towards blaming the victim.

This research is hoped to have implications for ESL/EFL pedagogy as well as the study of intercultural communication. The researchers put forth a number of relevant recommendations for further research.

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Keywords: Apologies; Apology strategies in Arabic; Discourse completion task (DCT); Gender; EFL/ESL teaching; Jordanian EFL students

1. Introduction and theoretical background

The present study is an investigation of Jordanian undergraduate students' apologies. The researchers tabulate and compare the strategies used by male and female respondents for the purpose of uncovering whether or not sex differences exist. This research is hoped to have implications for target language (henceforth, L2) pedagogy as well as the study of intercultural communication.

There are relatively few studies discussing the use of apologies by speakers of different dialects of Arabic (Al-Hami, 1993; El-Khalil, 1998; Hussein and Hammouri, 1998; Al-Zumor,

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2003; Soliman, 2003). Originally spoken by the Arabs of the Hejaz and Nejd areas, Arabic is now the prevailing speech of a wide region of southwestern Asia and northern Africa (Merriam-Webster Online). Jordanian Arabic is the dialect spoken in all parts of Jordan.

This study aims to bridge this gap in the field of intercultural pragmatics as well as to provide insights not only for researchers but also for Jordanian learners of English. It should be noted from the onset that this study focuses only on the use of the speech act of apology by the speaker/wrongdoer; so, whether or not the hearer/offended accepts the apology is beyond the scope of this study. More specifically, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the primary apology strategies used by Jordanian undergraduate students?
2. What are the secondary apology strategies used by Jordanian undergraduate students?
3. What are the differences, if any, between the apology strategies used by male and female respondents?

Austin (1962) defines speech acts as acts performed by utterances such as giving orders or making promises. They may be a direct or an indirect utterance (viz., a word, phrase, sentence, number of sentences or gesture and body movement) that serves a function in communication such as thanking and apologizing (Hatch, 1992). Speech acts include real-life interactions and require not only the knowledge of the language but also the appropriate use of that language within a given culture to minimize misunderstandings (Hatch, 1992; Cohen and Olshtain, 1981; Fromkin and Rodman, 1988; Lindfors, 1999); this is in line with Celce-Murcia and Olshtain's (2000) claim that learners need to be aware of discourse differences between an L1 and an L2 to insure the proper acquisition of pragmatic competence.

Speech Act theory, developed by Searle (1969) following Austin's work, is based on the premise that language is a form of rule-governed behavior. In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin (1962) introduces *performative utterances*, that is, utterances which require the performance of an action and whose utterance brings about some result. Austin used *felicity conditions* to refer to the conditions of success for performatives that range from the highly formal (e.g. *I now pronounce you husband and wife*), to the informal conventions governing expressions of gratitude or sympathy in the circumstances of everyday life.

Searle (1969) hypothesized that speech acts are characteristically performed by uttering expressions in accordance with certain constitutive rules. He moved beyond Austin's 'cataloguing stage' and provided a theoretical framework within which the three dimensions of utterance, meaning, and action involved in speech acts could be seen as a unified whole. He distinguished between *regulative* rules (which regulate existing forms of behavior) and *constitutive* rules (which not only merely regulate but also create or define new forms of behavior).

Searle identifies four basic categories of speech acts: utterances, propositional utterances, illocutionary utterances, and perlocutionary utterances. He (1975:64) maintains that ordinary conversational requirements of politeness normally make it awkward to issue flat *imperative sentences* (e.g. *leave the room*) or *explicit performatives* (e.g. *I order you to leave the room*), so people resort to *indirect means* to their *illocutionary ends* (e.g. *I wonder if you would mind leaving the room*). Searle (1979) further claims that speech acts perform five general functions: *declarations* (e.g. *I now pronounce you husband and wife*), *representatives* (e.g. *it was a warm sunny day*), *expressives* (e.g. *I'm really sorry*), *directives* (e.g. *don't leave anything behind*), and *commissives* (e.g. *we'll not disturb you*).

Goffman (1971) defines apologies as remedial interchanges used to reestablish social harmony after a real or virtual offense. He further claims that a successful apology has several

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