

A cross-cultural comparison of apologies by native speakers of American English and Jordanian Arabic

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Abstract

This study investigates the apology strategies used by the speakers of American English and Jordanian Arabic. The various strategies used by the two groups, in addition to the causes of any potential differences, constitute the crux of the analysis.

American and Jordanian respondents have been found to differ in their use of apology strategies. Differences involve using several manifestations of explicit apology among other less explicit apology strategies. The authors further examined the differences between male and female respondents in both groups and found that there were more differences between Jordanian male and female respondents than between American male and female respondents, which may be attributed to the fact that there is a greater similarity between how boys and girls are raised in the U.S. than between how they are raised in Jordan.

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1. Introduction and background

This study investigates the potential differences between American and Jordanian undergraduate students' apology strategies. It attempts to bridge the existing gap in the literature since there are only few studies which discuss Jordanian apology strategies and fewer that compare them to their American counterparts. Not only do the authors tabulate and compare the strategies used by the two groups, as well as the male and female respondents in each group, but they also examine the potential differences in the use of these strategies.

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1.1. Statement of the problem

This study is an investigation of the way American and Jordanian undergraduate students use the speech act of apology. It sheds light on the cultural differences that affect language users' attempt to express themselves. This research is further hoped to have applications not only in ESL/EFL pedagogy but also in the study of intercultural communication.

There is relatively little information available about cultural differences between apologies in Jordanian Arabic and American English. The authors have only found a few studies that present cultural differences in the use of apologies between speakers of American English, Japanese and Chinese (cf., for example, Sugimoto, 1997; Takaku et al., 2001; Gries and Peng, 2002), but not of Arabic in general, and Jordanian Arabic in particular, although they have come upon few discussing the use of apologies by speakers of different dialects of Arabic such as Egyptian and Jordanian dialects (Al-Hami, 1993; El-Khalil, 1998; Hussein and Hammouri, 1998; Al-Zumor, 2003; Soliman, 2003).

It is worth noting that this study is only concerned with the use of apologies by the speaker/wrongdoer. The victim's potential reaction to this apology is beyond the scope of the study although it is a potential area for further investigation in future research.

1.2. Purpose and significance of the study

This study is concerned with the potential differences in the expression of apology by American and Jordanian undergraduate students. It is potentially significant because it explores an area of intercultural pragmatics that has not, to the best of the authors' knowledge, been sufficiently explored. It bridges an existing gap in research and, thus, enriches the field of intercultural pragmatics. Moreover, the significance of this research stems partly from the fact that it examines non-apology strategies, which, to the authors' best knowledge, has not been done in previous research. This could constitute the true contribution of this research.

1.3. Definition of significant terms

A speech act is an utterance that serves a function in communication (e.g., apology, request or greeting), while apology is the speech act through which the wrongdoer acknowledges responsibility and seeks forgiveness for what he/she has done. The wrongdoer is the person who has committed the act warranting apology and who is supposed to apologize for what he/she has done, while the victim is the person who was harmed, whether psychologically, physically, or materially, by the act warranting apology.

Apology strategies are the methods individuals use to perform the speech act of apology (e.g., *explicit apology* and *reparation*). *Explicit apology* is the strategy in which the wrongdoer shows that he/she is sorry, while *accounts* are a strategy in which the wrongdoer tells of the offense. *Description of damage* is the strategy in which the wrongdoer describes what changes have been inflicted on the object in discussion or the repercussions of a certain deed on others, while *reparation* is the strategy in which the wrongdoer attempts to repair the damage he/she has inflicted on others and offers words that may cause the harm done to be forgotten.

Compensation is the strategy in which the wrongdoer offers to compensate for the physical or material damage for which he/she is apologizing, while *promise not to repeat offense* is the strategy in which the wrongdoer does his/her utmost to assure the victim that what has taken place will not occur again. In *explicit assessment of responsibility*, the wrongdoer attempts to describe

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