

A Sociolinguistic Study of the Speech Act of Apology by Saudi Speakers

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Abstract: The present study examines and investigates apology speech as used by Saudi speakers of the Arabic language. There were 100 participants in this study (50 male and 50 female), who were asked to complete a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) that included ten different situations requiring an apology expression. The aim of this study is to explore the ways in which Saudi speakers use apology speech and to examine the effect of social factors on the selection of an apology strategy. Gender differences between men and women when using this particular speech act were also explored in this study. Results revealed that the Saudi participants used different and varying speech strategies when offering an apology. Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) and explanation or account and offer of repair strategies were the most frequent apology strategies used by Saudi speakers. The strategy of offering a repair was also one of the apology strategies that is used the most by Saudi speakers. Conversely, showing concern for the hearer and making promise of forbearance were among the least frequent apology strategies used by Saudi participants. In conclusion, the findings of this study contribute to the study of speech acts, specifically apologies, in Arabic language.

Key words: Speech act • Arabic language • Apology • Apology strategies

INTRODUCTION

Speech act theory is one of the basic concepts in the study of pragmatics. Different researchers from various disciplines have examined this theory. The main aspect of speech act theory refers to the speakers' use of language to express different actions performed by themselves or others [1]. The philosopher J.L. Austin introduced the theory of speech acts, or performative utterances as he called it in 1962. In the beginning of his lectures collection Austin distinguished two different types of utterances: constatives and performatives. Constative utterance refers to statements that describe or state facts, and can be true or false. In contrast, the term performative utterance is used when the speaker is doing or intending to do something with the words, such as making a promise [1,2].

Austin [1] then focused on illocutionary acts and developed a classification for this kind of speech act that includes five categories: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, expositives and behabitives. This primary classification marked the beginning of a new field in pragmatics, known now as speech acts. However, according to Searle [3], these categories contained several weaknesses and needed to be modified and improved. He stated that Austin's taxonomy is a classification of English illocutionary verbs, not illocutionary acts. For this reason, Searle [3] suggested constructing a categorization based on illocutionary point, direction of fit and expressed psychological state in order to define and differentiate different kinds of speech acts. Following this premise, he listed five categories of speech act: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

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The speech act of apology belongs to the expressive type of illocutionary acts. The expressive category includes other kinds of speech acts, e.g. thanking, complimenting and complaining, which share the same feature of being uttered after the occurrence of an event [3]. The remedial function of apology is the feature that differentiates it from other expressives and it also differs from the expressive act of complaints by apologies convivial nature [4].

Different researchers have offered various definitions for apology[5]. defines it as:A gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that dissociate itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule[6].

Goffman's view of apology as a remedial act, used when the speaker commits an offence, focuses on the primary function of apology as providing a remedy for an offence and restoring social harmony[7]. Olshtain and Cohen [8] define the act of apologizing as an act that is used as a way to respond to the occurrence of an action in which social norms are violated. They introduce apology as a speech act set that involved a number of semantic formulas.

The aim of the current study is to investigate the way in which Saudi speakers use the speech act of apology. It examines the apology strategies in Saudi Arabic and how they are employed in daily interactions. Speech acts in general, and apology in particular, have been the main focus of many studies that examined them in western languages [4,7,9]. However, only a small number of studies have explored this speech act in Arabic languages[10-12]. Moreover, most of these studies compared the use of apology speech acts by native speakers and non-native Arab speakers of English [13,14].

The main focus of the current research is to explore the speech act of apology and the ways in which it is employed in the speech of Saudi speakers. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there has been no research that focuses on the usage of apology speech acts in Saudi Arabic. The reason for conducting this study is to fill the gaps in the literature on apologies and how they are employed by Saudi Arabic speakers. The study will attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

RQ 1: How do Saudi speakers use the speech act of apology in Saudi Arabic?

RQ 2: What are the most frequent apology strategies adopted by Saudi speakers?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Instruments: The DCT is one of the major collection instruments in pragmatic research. It was first adapted by Blum-Kulka [15] and used to examine speech acts. The DCT contain predesigned situations written with a specific scenario and used to elicit the desired speech act. It is used as an instrument for collecting the data for this study. The DCT consists of ten apology situations that represent different social contexts and it was originally created by Bergman and Kasper [3] and was also applied by Nurddeen [16]. However, some slight modifications were made to the test to make it more appropriate for the Saudi context and culture. The researcher used two different samples of the test, one for male and the other for female participants. Due to cultural differences between genders, some of the situations differ from one sample to the other (e.g. a damaged car in the male sample versus a damaged handbag in the female sample). However, most situations remain the same in both samples, except for slight changes to the names and pronouns to make the test suitable for both groups.

After designing and preparing the DCT, the test was piloted on 6 subjects: 3 men and 3 women. They were asked to complete the survey and to write any comments they had on the clarity of the test. Some adjustments were made to the original DCT, such as reminding the participants to reply with non-standard Arabic before each situation.

Participants: In order to examine the apology strategy preferences of Saudi speakers in these prescribed situations, 100 Saudi speakers (50 male and 50 female) were recruited as participants for this study. Participants were from different parts of Saudi Arabia.

Procedure: An electronic survey was created for both samples and distributed online to collect a large number of data in short time. The first page of the survey contained the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, which included all the details that participants needed to know about the research and asked for their approval to take part in the study. The participants were then asked to read each situation carefully and try to imagine themselves in that situation to complete the task. The last part of the survey included a number of questions about the demographic information for participant, such as age.

Data Analysis: The quantitative analysis was done in two stages. The first one starts with identifying participants' responses to each situation and then coding them following the strategies presented in the model that is based on Cohen and Olshtain [8] and CCSARP coding manual [17]. The second stage of the quantitative analysis was done with the help of SPSS software (version 19). The researchers first calculated the frequencies of the types of apology strategies that occurred in the Saudi participants' responses. The results are presented in two parts in the next section: the first part deals with the results according to the different situations, and the second part focuses on participant responses based on the different strategies of apology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Apology Data Analysis by Strategy: In this section, we will discuss the results of this study according to the different strategies of apology that were used by the participants. The discussion of these findings follows the taxonomy of apology strategies presented in the model that is based on Cohen and Olshtain [14] and CCSARP coding manual [15]. "No apology" was added to the strategies listed to refer to the situations where the participants did not offer any apology. It is worth mentioning that one of the sub-categories for taking responsibility, blame the hearer, was not used by the Saudi participants. Table 1 below shows the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation for all apology strategies used by the Saudi respondents. The following section will discuss these strategies in detail.

Table 1: Total apology strategies

Strategy	N	% of Total N	Mean	Std. Deviation
No apology	33	2%	4.48	2.224
All IFIDs	770	41%	5.57	2.792
An expression of regret	433	23%	5.59	2.864
An offer of apology	250	13%	5.59	2.705
A request for forgiveness	87	5%	5.41	2.696
Explanation or account	490	26%	5.9	2.689
All taking on responsibility	241	13%	5.61	3.497
Explicit self-blame	26	1%	3.85	2.796
Lack of intent	120	6%	6.33	3.727
An expression of self-deficiency	42	2%	5.9	2.093
An expression of embarrassment	28	2%	3.21	3.19
Admission of facts but not responsibility	10	1%	6	3.742
Justifying the hearer	3	0%	4.67	4.726
Denial of responsibility	11	1%	7	3.493
Pretending to be offended	1	0%	3	.
Concern for the hearer	47	3%	6.64	1.374
Offer of repair	308	16%	4.03	2.993
Promise of forbearance	6	0%	3	2.098
Total	1895	100%	5.41	2.938

Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs): In the analysis of the data presented in Table 1 above, we found that IFIDs were the most frequent apology strategies used by the Saudi participants, with 770 (42%) of the total number of apology responses collected in this study. Three sub-strategies are included under this strategy: expression of regret, offers of apology, and requests for forgiveness. As shown in Table 2 below, the expression of regret is the most common sub-strategy of IFID for Saudi participants. The other two sub-strategies were used at 250 (32%) and 87 (11%), respectively.

Table 2: IFID apology strategies

IFIDs	N	% of Total N
An expression of regret	433	56%
An offer of apology	250	32%
A request for forgiveness	87	11%
Total	770	100%

Explanation or Account: This strategy includes the use of any expression that contains an explanation or account of the reasons behind the offensive action. The apologizer may use it to lessen the blame for doing the offensive act by referring to the reasons that caused it, which can help minimize the severity of the offence. It is non-language specific, as there is no linguistic convention or expression for giving explanations in English or in Arabic.

This means that some speakers may not intend to apologize when they offer an explanation or account of a certain event, and they only intend to report on the occurring action [16]. Taking this into consideration, we only used and analyzed the expressions of accounts that were conveyed with an apologetic expression. Examining the results, we found that it was the second most common strategy utilized by Saudi participants, with 490 (26%) of the total apology responses, reported in Table 1 above.

Taking on Responsibility: This strategy involves the recognition of the responsibility for the offensive act by the offender. The apologizer explicitly or implicitly declares this responsibility by using one of the seven sub-strategies: explicit self-blame, lack of intent, expression of self-deficiency, expression of embarrassment, admission of facts but not responsibility, justifying the hearer and refusal to acknowledge guilt, which is also composed of three sub-strategies: denial of responsibility, blaming the hearer and pretending to be offended. The total number of answers using this strategy in the data is 241 (13%). Based on the data presented in Table 3 below, we found that the most frequent sub-strategies employed by the participants were lack of intent and expression of self-deficiency, with 120 (50%) and 42 (17%), respectively. The sub-strategies of expression of embarrassment and explicit self-blame were also found in the Saudi data, with 28 (12%) and 26 (11%) respectively. On the other hand, two of the sub-strategies were rarely found in the data: justifying the hearer and pretending to be offended. Finally, Saudi participants did not use the blame the hearer sub-strategy in their apology responses.

Table 3: Taking on responsibility apology strategies

Taking on responsibility	N	% of Total N
Explicit self-blame	26	11%
Lack of intent	120	50%
Expression of self-deficiency	42	17%
Expression of embarrassment	28	12%
Admission of facts but not responsibility	10	4%
Justifying the hearer	3	1%
Denial of responsibility	11	5%
Pretending to be offended	1	0%
All taking on responsibility	241	100%

Concern for the Hearer: The strategy of showing the speaker’s concern for the hearer is among the least used strategies in the data, with only 74 (3%) as shown in Table 1 above.

Offer of Repair: This strategy involves an offer by the apologizer to compensate the hearer for the damaged object. [17] argue that this strategy is situation-specific, and often is used when physical damage is involved. As shown in Table 1 above, one of the most frequent apology strategy employed by Saudi participants is the strategy of offering repair, with 308 (16%).

Promise of Forbearance: Saudi participants used the strategy of promise of forbearance with a frequency of only 6 times, which makes it the least-used strategy in the data.

No Apology: Some participants chose not to apologize for certain situation in the DCT. Therefore, the researcher added “No apology” to refer to these cases. Out of the 1,895 total responses collected in this study, responses that lacked apology expressions or strategies occurred 33 times (2%).

Intensifying the Apology: In the analysis of the data collected in this study, we found that some participants tended to intensify their apology expressions. Saudi speakers intensify the apology expressions they produce by either repeating the apology words, such as *asif* ‘sorry’ or *a’tdhr* ‘apologize’, or by using adverbs, such as *jidan* ‘very’, *marah* ‘really’ or *kather* ‘very much’.

The majority of the intensifiers were used with one kind of apology strategy, which is IFIDs. Table 4 below shows the use of intensifiers with this strategy in the data. The distribution of the use of intensifiers across the situations shows that it was used extensively in the 10th (22%), 6th (21%) and the 1st (15%) situations, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Table 4: The use of intensifiers with IFIDs

Intensifiers	N	% of Total N
No	689	89.50%
Yes	81	10.50%
Total	770	100.00%

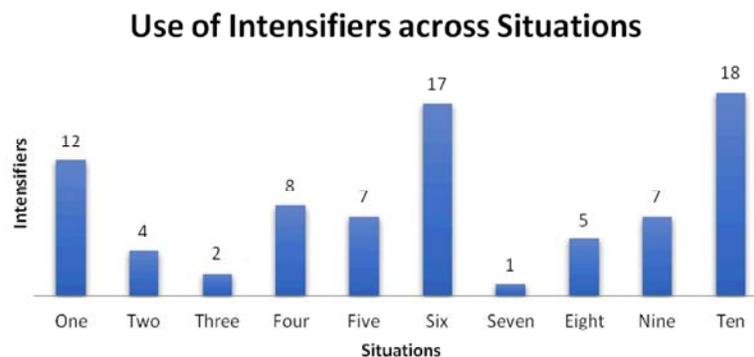


Fig. 1: The use of intensifiers across situations

Overall Findings: The present research examined the speech act of apology as used by Saudi Arabic speakers. The findings of this study reveal that the Saudi participants employed six main strategies in their apology responses, either alone or in a combination with other strategies. These main strategies include: Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), which contains three sub-strategies (expression of regret, offer of apology, request for forgiveness); explanation

or account; taking on responsibility, which also includes sub-strategies (explicit self-blame, lack of intent, expression of self-deficiency, expression of embarrassment, admission of facts but not responsibility, justifying the hearer, denial of responsibility and pretending to be offended); concern for the hearer; offer of repair; and promise of forbearance. It is worth mentioning that one of the sub-strategies of taking on responsibility (blame the hearer) did not occur in the responses of Saudi participants at all. This could be a normal consequence of the nature of the situations used in the DCT, which did not include situations that would prompt the participants to use this strategy, and may suggest that it is a situation-specific strategy. The findings also show that the most favoured strategy for Saudi speakers was IFIDs, with 41% of the total apology responses. This is supported by the findings of previous literature [8,16, 11].

The most common sub-strategy among IFIDs for Saudi speakers was the expression of regret, with 56% of the total IFID apology strategy responses. This can be seen as an indication of the universality of this strategy, as shown by the high rates of the word "sorry" as the first method of offering apology in the Saudi community. This is consistent with the findings of previous research such as Holmes (7) , which found that expression of regret is the most used apology expression in English. This also coincides with Al-Ali [14], who found that expression of regret is the most used IFID sub-strategy among female Saudi and Australian participants. On the other hand, the request for forgiveness is the least common sub-strategy among IFIDs for Saudi speakers, which is counter to the results of Shariati and Chamani [18], who revealed that the request for forgiveness is the most used IFIDs sub-strategy among Persian speakers. This could indicate that Saudi speakers do not recognize the request for forgiveness to be as a useful apology strategy as expression of regret and offer of apology.

Offering an explanation or account for the reason behind doing the offensive act was the second most used apology strategy among Saudi speakers, with 26% of the total apology responses. This coincides with the findings of a study conducted by Jebahi [19] which found that the strategy of explanation or account was the second most used apology strategy among Tunisian university students. This implies that Saudi speakers tend to explain to the hearer the reason behind the offensive act to minimize the responsibility assigned to the apologizer.

The third most frequent apology strategy among Saudi speakers was the offer to repair at 16%. This prevalence occurs despite the argument of Blum-Kulka [17], which states that offer of repair is a situation-specific strategy most regularly employed in situations that involve physical offences or damages. In contrast to this, it was found in the results that this strategy was used by Saudi speakers in nearly all the situations, excepting 8 and 9. This agrees with the findings of Al-Adaileh [13], in which he suggests that 'damage' could refer to both physical and emotional offences. This indicates that Saudi speakers share this broad definition of damage as including physical and emotional offences.

The strategy of taking responsibility was among the most frequent apology strategies occurring in the data, which suggests that Saudi speakers are willing to admit their responsibility for causing damage or offence. This can also be seen when noting that the most frequent sub-strategy of taking responsibility is lack of intent, which is explicitly used by the speaker to accept responsibility for doing such an action.

Conversely, the results show that both concern for the hearer and promise of forbearance were among the least frequent apology strategies. Concern for the hearer strategy was triggered most in Situation 6, which involved hitting an old man/woman with a trolley. The same results were also found in Al-Adaileh [13], in which it was asserted that concern for the hearer is a situation-specific strategy to be used in settings involving space offences.

Regarding promise of forbearance apology strategy, Saudi female speakers only use it in the data with a frequency of 6 times only. This may be seen as a result of the kind of situations used in the DCT, which Saudi speakers think they do not need to offer a promise to the hearer for not doing such an action in the future. The small scale of the participants of this study may be considered a reason for the low instances of using this strategy. The small rates of using this strategy suggest the situation-specific nature of this strategy.

Limitation of the Study: This study has several limitations that should be discussed and examined. Due to the small-scale nature of the study, we cannot generalize its results across the population. To overcome this limitation in future research, we need to consider the inclusion of more participants to represent wider range of the population. The second limitation

of this study is related to the method of collecting data, which recruited participants using online resources. This may lead to limited sampling for this study as certain people can be reached and found more easily on the Internet. Moreover, the use of only one method for collecting the data, the DCT, may be considered another limitation as it was used to elicit real performances. These limitations can be avoided in future research by using more naturally occurring data such as real-person interaction, group interviews and observation; this would lead to the collection of increased and more authentic data, as well as using different ways of reaching the needed participants.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the speech act of apology as employed by Saudi speakers in the Arabic language. The study found that Saudi speakers express their apology using a wide range of apology strategies, except for one strategy that was not found in the Saudi data: blame the hearer. The most frequent apology strategies used by Saudi speakers are IFIDs and explanation or account. Finally, even though the findings of this study do not allow for generalization due to its small scale, we still can draw some implications from them. First it enables us to have more insights on the use of the speech act of apology in the Saudi community and by Saudi Arabic speakers. Moreover, the findings of this study contribute to the study of speech acts, specifically apologies, in Arabic language.

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