

A Contrastive Study of the Use of Apology Strategies by Saudi EFL Teachers and British Native Speakers of English: A Pragmatic Approach

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Abstract

This study examines the apology strategies used by 30 British native speakers of English and compares them with those employed by 30 Saudi EFL teachers, using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The study considers expressions of regret based on gender, cultural differences and severity of the offence. It is a quantitative, descriptive research study; it relies in its data collection process on a DCT whose reliability and internal and external validity are verified. It investigates three categories of variables types: binary, nominal and ordinal. The binary variables refer to gender, i.e., male and female, the nominal category is concerned with Arabic and English languages, and ordinal variables refer to the most frequent apology strategies employed by the respondents. The present study uses a quantitative method of data analysis which employs descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency analysis and percentages) in order to address the research questions and indicate the types of apology strategies that are frequently used by the speakers of the two investigated groups. The findings show different ways of using apology strategies by the two investigated groups based on the variables considered. Finally, the study concludes with some pedagogical implications for EFL teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

Keywords: apology strategies, speech acts, British native speakers of English, Saudi EFL teachers

1. Introduction

In the Arab world, in general, and in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in particular, mastery of English language is regarded as one of the most important skills that should be acquired in order to facilitate intercultural communication. However, communicating properly and effectively in English requires years of practice and knowledge of the appropriate expressions to be used with speakers of the target language to avoid any communication breakdowns (Altakhaineh & Rahrouh, 2015). Amongst the most important aspects of learning the target language is knowledge of the proper use of speech acts. According to Austin (1975), speech acts are amongst the most culturally related aspects in comparison with other aspects of language. Speech acts are regarded as utterances which are accompanied by action performance. Searle (1969) and Yule (1996) explained in their accounts of speech act theory that the function of utterances is not only restricted to the indication of different patterns of grammatical structures and different uses of words, but the indication of actions that people may perform as well. According to Levinson (1983), an utterance is a means of communication between the speaker and the hearer. That is, the hearer performs an action in reaction to the speaker's utterance within the social context or a situation. There are various types of speech acts, such as expressions of condolence, invitations, refusal, request and apologies. Apologies, which is the speech act explored in the current study is considered of expressive speech acts (Yule, 1996). An apology is defined as "a speech act addressed to V's face-needs and intended to remedy an offence for which A takes responsibility, and thus to restore equilibrium between V and A (where A is the apologist, and V is the victim or person offended)" (Holmes, 1989, p. 196). In this regard, Bataineh (2005, p. 4) posited that the methods employed by individuals in order to express the speech act of apology are referred to as apology strategies. Previous research on apology strategies by EFL learners in general and Arabic-speaking EFL learners in particular, has showed that these learners encounter many challenges in expressing apologies in English, and thus, fail to communicate effectively with native speakers of English (Al-Sobh, 2013). One of the methods in which the researcher can determine whether the apology strategies employed by EFL learners are appropriate in English is to compare the strategies used by them with those

utilized by native speakers of English. This suggestion has driven researchers such as (Alsulayyi, 2016) to recommend conducting a contrastive study that compares the apology strategies used by EFL learners with those employed by native speakers of English in order to determine the extent to which EFL learners reflect their understanding of foreign language values and norms when choosing appropriate apology strategies. The current study is motivated by this suggestion. In particular, this study, firstly, investigate the apology strategies employed by British native speakers of English, and secondly compares the politeness strategies utilized by Saudi EFL teachers, as reported by Alsulayyi (2016, p. 70), with those used by British native speakers of English. It also tests the effect of gender on the use of apology strategies by British native speakers of English and compares them with those of Saudi EFL teachers. The following section reviews the related literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Apology Strategies

Among the researchers who examined apology strategies are Fraser (1981), Bergman & Kasper (1993) Brown & Attardo (2000) and Bataineh & Bataineh (2006) among others. However, in this study, the six apology strategies suggested by Bergman & Kasper (1993, p. 88) are adopted, as they provide a more comprehensive list. These strategies include:

- a) Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), which is an apology strategy that expresses regret explicitly through uttering expressions, such as “sorry”, “excuse me”, “forgive me”, “I regret” (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1998). This strategy emphasizes the speaker’s need to gain forgiveness for his/her actions through overtly expressing his/her regret.
- b) Upgrader and apology strategies, which refer to words/expressions which give more power to the apologetic expressions, such as “very, so, terribly etc.”
- c) Taking on responsibility, in which the apologizer strives to make up for his/her fault through taking verbal and non-verbal actions. Such a strategy can be divided into three sub-categories: expressions of self-blame, expressions of lack of intent and expressions of admission of fact (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981).
- d) Downgrading responsibility or the severity of the offence, in which the speaker attempts to reduce his/her responsibility for the offence. Such an act can be expressed via various strategies, e.g., excuse, claiming ignorance, justifying, problematizing a precondition, reducing the severity of the offence, and denial.
- e) Offers of repair, where the offer endeavors to repair the damage brought about by his/her offense (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981). Such an act can have a literal sense or may come in the form of payment to compensate the victim of that fault when actual repair is impossible.
- f) Verbal redress, where the offender shows concern for the offeree.

The next section reviews some studies that compared the use apology strategies by native and non-native speakers, including Arabs.

2.2 Contrastive Studies on Apology Strategies between Native and Non-Native Speakers Including Arabs

There are various studies which highlight the impact of culture on use of apology strategies (e.g., Xiang, 2007; Al-Zumor, 2011; Abu-Humei, 2013) as discussed below. Based on comparison and contrast, Al-Zumor (2011) examined the use of various English apology strategies by two different groups of non-native speakers of English (i.e., Saudis and Indians) and two different groups of native speakers of English speakers (i.e., Americans and British). Saudi speakers of English have been found to adopt “taking responsibility” strategies, while native speakers of English tend to adopt verbal redress and offers of repair. According to Al-Zumor (2011), the similarity of cultural aspects and values has influenced the use of English apology strategies by both non-native speakers of English (Saudis and Indians). Al-Zumor (2011) explained that Saudi EFL learners of English differ in their choice of English apology strategies from native English speakers because of the extensive cultural dissimilarities between them. For example, Al-Zumor (2011, p. 22) stated that “so far as the... expression of regret is concerned, all the Arab subjects have used it in their English performance, i.e., 100% of the subjects have used “I am sorry” with some preceded by intensified adverbials”. In a similar study to that of Al-Zumor, Abu-Humei (2013) investigated how the gender and status of Iraqi EFL learners can affect their use of English apology strategies in comparison to the American native speakers. The results indicate that Iraqi males usually employ apology strategies with those who have higher positions than them in a clear indication of the influence of Arabic language culture, norms and values on their communicative styles in the target language. In other words, the pragmatic English production of Iraqi males is highly characterized by features of Arabic culture, norms and values. However, their American counterparts tend to use apology strategies with those who

have “lower” status levels than them. In addition, the Iraqi EFL females differ from their American counterparts in using apology strategies more often than their male counterparts. The Americans outperform their Iraqi counterparts in their ability to express their regret in various ways. This is attributed to the inadequate pragmatic competence on the part of the Iraqi learners of English as they do not study apologies in terms of pragmatics, but in terms of grammar. Therefore, they are not well-trained to produce such expressions when required in various situations. The American males rather than the females usually provide long expressions of regret and tend to use colloquial language with those who have equal status to them. This is an indication that American females, in contrast to their male counterparts, do not exercise sympathy towards the people offended, but tend to provide short apologies.

Xiang (2007) studied the different use of apology strategies between British and Mandarin Chinese speakers of English in light of their cross-cultural differences. He analyzed how native and non-native speakers of English differ in their perceptions of apology strategies by revealing the underlying cultures, values and normative differences in both groups. Xiang reported that the British differ from the Chinese in using explicit apology strategies which are highly affected by the severity of offence. On the other hand, the implicit apology strategies adopted by the Mandarin Chinese are highly affected by social distance and power. The Chinese, in contrast to the British, view apology as a “face-losing” act. This explains why the Chinese find it easier to express their apologies by using the English word “sorry” without any psychological effects reflected on their faces than they say in their mother tongue. This shows the cultural differences between the British and the Chinese as saying “sorry” in English culture is a normal matter while to the Chinese it may lead to misunderstanding. In contrast to the individualist-oriented British culture, the apology strategies used by the Chinese reflect their collectivist culture.

In addition, a number of studies investigated English and European speech acts and their relation to culture. For example, Iragui’s (1996) studied Spanish language, Gonda’s (2001) studied Greek, and Demeter (2006) undertook a study of Romanian. Iragui (1996) handled the production of an English request “as a pre-event act” and apology “as a post-event act” by Spanish students of English Philology in comparison with American native English speakers in light of their different levels of language proficiency, their cultural backgrounds and their gender. The present study focuses mainly on Iragui’s reported results of apology. Iragui affirmed that Americans, in contrast to the Spanish, use more intensifiers when expressing apology. This is an indication that native speakers usually tend to employ more politeness markers than non-native speakers who employ direct language when using apologetic expressions; subsequently, they do not use combined strategies of apology as frequently as native speakers do. Iragui also concluded that the difference between the native and non-native respondents in terms of gender is statistically insignificant. Moreover, Gonda (2001) examined the differences in using apology strategies between Greek speakers of English, who have high levels of English proficiency and native English speakers. Gonda also handled how apology strategies are chosen based on the severity of the offence and the interlocutors’ social distance. The difference between the Romanians and the English native speakers is insignificant when expressing apologies. The influence of offence severity and social distance is clearly visible in the case of the strategies of offer, of repair and explanation, and on combined strategies that are adopted. The offence severity according to Gonda is no doubt effective in intensification and expression of emotions as the Romanians tend to adopt long expressions of apology in an indication of cultural effect. Moreover, Demeter (2006) reported that the Romanians tend to use a clear expression of apology whenever they take responsibility for their faults. They tend as well to adopt various apology strategies, such as blaming someone else, giving justifications and offering repairs in an attempt save face on the one hand, and to preserve their friendship with their interlocutors, on the other hand. This is a reflection of the cultural influence on their adopted apology strategies. This suggests why Romanians usually adopted combined apology strategies like IFID and justification, on the one hand, and blaming someone else and denial of responsibility, on the other. The latter are always accompanied with an emphasis on the importance of friendship. In terms of proportion, the Romanian adoption of combined apology strategies is in contrast to that of English native speakers, who usually use apology strategies based on what Demeter (2006, p. 119) has labeled “half combinations or half standalone”. Likewise, Hussein & Hammour (1998) compared the apology strategies adopted by both Jordanian and American speakers of English. They explained that Jordanians employ various apology strategies like explicit and implicit denial of the offence occurrence, justification of offence, or blaming other people for the offence. In contrast, American speakers of English are more likely to accept responsibility for the offence. Both Jordanians and Americans show common apologetic features like expression of regret, promises of forgiveness and exerting concern for their interlocutors. Hussein & Hammour (1998) are of the opinion that the failure of Jordanians EFL learners in adopting proper English apology strategies can be attributed to other factors besides the mother tongue transfer, such as their poor English proficiency levels and their failure to justify the occurrence of some offences.

Recently, Alsulayyi (2016) conducted a study to investigate apology strategies employed by Saudi EFL teachers, taking into account social variables, such as social distance and power and offence severity. The study also examined the effect of gender on the apology strategies used by the Saudi respondents. Using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) that comprised 10 situations, the results of the study reveal that Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) is the most used apology strategy by the respondents followed by downgrading responsibility (DR), upgrader, offer of repair, taking on responsibility and then verbal redress. The results also reveal that gender has a great impact on the use of apology strategies by the Saudi respondents (Alsulayyi, 2016). The researcher recommended that a contrastive study between Saudi EFL learners and native speakers of English to be carried out to examine the difference between the two groups in using apology strategies. This study is motivated by this suggestion. In particular, it aims to compare the apologies strategies used by Saudi EFL teachers (reported by Alsulayyi, 2016) and British native speakers of English. It aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

- (1) What are the apology strategies used by British native speakers of English in expressing regret?
- (2) Does the respondents' gender affect their use of apology strategies?
- (3) How do Saudi EFL teachers differ from British native English speakers in using apology strategies?
- (4) How do apology strategies differ between Saudi EFL teachers and British native speakers of English in terms of gender?

The next section discusses the methodology adopted in the current study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

The sample of the current study includes 30 British English native speakers, who are administrative staff at Manchester Metropolitan University, England (MMU) or students enrolled at the MMU Department of languages whether for under or postgraduate studies. For the purpose of this study, the respondents were divided into 15 males and 15 females in order to test the effect of gender on the use of apology strategies by the respondents.

3.2 Tool

Similar to previous studies that examined the use of politeness strategies by different respondents (e.g., Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Nureddeen, 2008; Alsulayyi, 2016 among others), the present study employed a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) that consists of ten situations to elicit the data. The DCT used in this study is the same one used in Alsulayyi (2016), except for the names which were adapted for cultural reasons (see Appendix A). The same test was employed to enable the comparison between the responses' results. The respondents were asked to react to the ten situations through imagining that they belong to different social status. Moreover, social distance and power have been taken into account when designing the ten situations included in the DCT used in this study. Other social variables such as closeness, distance (i.e., strangers) and middle relationship status were also taken into consideration in designing the 10 situations in the DCT. The DCT also observed different levels of power, namely, high-low, low-high and equal. The variables which were taken into account in the DCT employed in the current study and that of Alsulayyi (2016) are illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Variables of the ten situations as adopted from Nureddeen (2008, p. 297)

No.	Situation	Distance	Power	Severity	Type of Offense	H's damaged faced
1	Damaged car	Close	Equals	Serious	Possession	-
2	Damaged magazine	Close	Equals	Mild	Possession	-
3	Failed student	Acquaintances	High-Low	Serious	Integrity	+
4	Borrowed book	Acquaintances	Low-High	Mild	Possession	-
5	Wrong office	Distant	Equals	Mild	Place	-
6	Falling bag	Distant	Equals	Serious	Physical	-
7	Delayed message	Acquaintances	Equals	Mild	Possession	-
8	Borrowed money	Acquaintances	Equals	Serious	Integrity	+
9	Late for interview 1	Distant	High-Low	Serious	Time	-
10	Late for interview 2	Distant	Low-High	Serious	Time	-

3.3 Data Analysis

The study employs an analysis of frequency and percentage which is also utilized in other studies that tackled this topic (e.g., Hussein & Hammour, 1998; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006; Nuredden, 2008; Afghari & Karimnia, 2012; Jones, 2013; Alsulayyi, 2016 among others). This study is a quantitative descriptive research study; thus, data collection has been performed using a DCT, which has had its reliability, and internal and external validity verified. This study investigated three categories of variables (binary, nominal and ordinal). The binary variables refer to gender, i.e., male and female, the nominal category is concerned with Arabic and English languages, and ordinal variables refer to the most frequent apology strategies employed by the respondents. The next section presents the results and discusses them.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The frequencies of all apology strategies used by the British native English speakers in general shown in Table 2 are as follows: IFID (53%), upgrader (36.3%), taking on responsibility (49%), downgrading responsibility (75.6%), offer of repair (24.3%), and verbal redress (18.3%). Downgrading strategies are the most frequently used strategies followed by IFID, TORs, upgrader, offers of repair and verbal redress.

Table 2. Analysis of frequency and percentage of apology strategies used by British native speakers of English

Categories of apology strategies		TF	%
IFID		159	53%
Upgrader		109	36.3%
Taking on responsibility (TOR)	Self-blame	22	7.3%
	Lack of intent	4	1.3%
	Admission of fact	121	40.3%
	Total TOR	147	49%
Downgrading Responsibility (DR)	Excuse	26	8.6%
	Justification	116	38.6%
	Claiming ignorance	23	7.6%
	Problematizing a precondition	10	3.3%
	Denial	1	0.3%
	Reducing of severity	51	17%
Total DR		227	75.6%
Offer of repair		73	24.3%
Verbal redress		55	18.3%

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of apology strategies by 15 male respondents and Table 4 presents similar information for their 15 female counterparts.

Table 3. Analysis of frequency and percentage of apology strategies used by male British native speakers of English

Categories of apology strategies		TF	%
IFID		84	56%
Upgrader		54	36%
Taking on responsibility (TOR)	Self-blame	12	8%
	Lack of intent	3	2%
	Admission of fact	54	36%
	Total TOR	69	46%
Downgrading Responsibility (DR)	Excuse	12	8%
	Justification	51	34%
	Claiming ignorance	10	6.6%
	Problematizing a precondition	6	4%
	Denial	1	0.6%
	Reducing of severity	25	16.6%
Total DR		105	70%
Offer of repair		36	24%
Verbal redress		17	11.3%

Table 4. Analysis of frequency and percentage of apology strategies used by female British native speakers of English

Categories of apology strategies		T F	%
IFID		78	52%
Upgrader		53	35.3%
Taking on responsibility (TOR)	Self-blame	10	6.6%
	Lack of intent	1	0.3%
	Admission of fact	67	44.6%
	Total TOR	78	52%
Downgrading Responsibility (DR)	Excuse	14	9.3%
	Justification	65	43.3%
	Claiming ignorance	13	8.6%
	Problematizing a precondition	4	2.6%
	Denial	0	0%
	Reducing of severity	26	17.3%
	Total DR	122	81.3%
Offer of repair		37	24.6%
Verbal redress		37	24.6%

As shown in Tables 3 and 4, downgrading responsibility is the most frequently used strategy by male (70%) and female (81%) native speakers whereas IFID (56%) places second among male native speakers (52%), and TOR (52%) shares second place among other strategies used by female native speakers. Table 3 shows that while TORs (46%) and upgrader (36%) are in the third and fourth places among apology strategies used by the male native English speakers, offers of repair (11.3%) and verbal redress (24%) are in fifth and sixth places. Meanwhile, upgrader (35.3%), offers of repair (24.6%) and verbal redress (24.6%) place third, fourth and fifth for the female native English speakers. Clearly, the use of apology strategies by native speakers differs according to gender. Whereas males outperform their female counterparts in using IFID and upgrader strategies, the English females surpass their male counterparts in the use of the other four apology strategies: downgrading responsibility, TORs, offer of repair and verbal redress. The results of each apology strategy employed by both male and female British native speakers are presented separately in the following subsections:

4.1.1 IFID

Table 2 indicates that the native speakers have used IFID expressions 53% of the time to express their apologies. Their frequency of using IFID strategies falls between 23.3% and 73.3%. In the ten situations, the highest frequency of using the IFID strategy is found in situation 1 (23.3%), whereas the lowest use exists in situation 9 (7.3%). In terms of offence severity, the British respondents have the highest percentage of using an IFID strategy in the “late for interview” situation, which reflects distant relations and high-low power between the offender and the victim. The lowest percentage is found in the “damaged car” situation, which represents close relations and equal power between the offender and the victim. The percentage of using IFID in situations 3, 6, 8 and 10 are (43.3%, 50%, 60% and 46.6%). Whereas situation 3 and 8 represent acquainted relations between the apologizer and the offended person, situations 6 and 10 indicate distant relations between them. Power varies in these situations as shown in Table 1. For the five mild offence situations, the British respondents have used IFID 50% of the time for both situations 4 and 7, which reflects relations of acquaintance between the offenders and the victims, but indicates differential power between them as indicated in Table 1. Whereas the British respondents have used IFID by (46.6%) in the damaged magazine situation (close relation and equal power), their percentage of using IFID in the wrong office situation is (86.6%) (distant social relation and equal power). In terms of gender, the male respondents have used IFID expressions by 56% compared to 52% for their female counterparts. In terms of offence severity, both male and female native speakers have the highest percentage of using an IFID strategy in the serious offence “late for interview” situation (73.3 % each), while the lowest percentage use this strategy in the damaged car situation (males 26.6% and females 20%) as indicated in Tables 3 and 4. For the mild offence situations, the highest use of IFID by males and females exists in the wrong office situation (males 100% and females 73.3%).

4.1.2 Upgrader

The frequency percentage of using an upgrader strategy by native speakers is 36.3% (see Table 2). In terms of offence severity, native speakers show the highest use of upgrader strategies (63.3%) in the damaged car situation, whereas their lowest use of this strategy exists in the failed student and late for interview 1 situations

(26.6% each). For the other serious offence situations (6, 8 and 10), they have used an upgrader strategy by 43.3%, 43.3% and 53.3%, respectively. Situations 6 and 8 reflect equal power whereas situation 10 represents low-high power. As for the mild offence situations (2, 4, 5 and 7), the native speakers show percentages of 40%, 26.6%, 10% and 30%, respectively. These situations indicate that the closer the social relation the higher the use of an upgrader strategy by native speakers. This is supported by the percentage apologies in the “wrong office” situation, which is the least severe of the mild offence situations. With regard to gender, the male native speakers’ percentage (36%) slightly exceeds that of their female counterparts (35.3%). The highest percentage of using an upgrader strategy among British males (60%), in relation to serious offence situations, exists in situations 1 and 10, whereas for their female counterparts it is 66.6% and occurs in situation 1. In mild situations, the highest percentage of use among British males and females (40% each) is found in situation 2, where the offender and the victim are acquainted and have equal power.

4.1.3 Taking on Responsibility (TOR)

Table 2 indicates that the frequency percentage of native speakers using taking on responsibility (TOR) is 49%. This strategy ranks third among apology strategies used by the native speakers. In terms of offence severity, the percentage of native speakers in serious offence situations 1, 3, 6, 8, 9 and 10 are 50%, 76.6%, 73.3%, 50%, 6.6%, and 16.6%, respectively. Therefore, the highest TOR percentage (73.3%) among the British respondents occurs in the falling bag situation, where the offender and the victims are of distant social relations and of equal power. Meanwhile, the lowest TOR percentage (6.6%) exists in the late for interview 1 situation, where the apologizer and the victims have distant social relations and high-low power. In addition, the third situation reflects high-low power and a relation of acquaintance between the offender and the victim. Concerning the mild offence situations (2, 4, 5, and 7), the native speakers’ percentages of adopting TOR strategy are 20%, 83.3%, 26.6% and 86.6%. The highest TOR percentage in these four mild situations exists in situation 7, where the offender and the victim are acquainted and of equal power. It is followed by situation 3, which reflects relations of acquaintance and low-high power between the offender and the victim. Meanwhile, situations 2 and 5 have a lower TOR percentage although they reflect equal power between the offender and the victim, who have close relations in the damaged magazine situation but distant relations in the wrong office situation. In terms of gender, the female native speakers (52%) have higher frequencies than their male counterparts (39.3%) in adopting the TOR strategies, as reported in Tables 3 and 4.

4.1.4 Downgrading Responsibility

Table 2 indicates that downgrading responsibility is the most frequently used apology strategy by native speakers (75.6%). For the serious offence situations (1, 3, 6, 8, 9 and 10), the native speakers’ percentages are 80%, 70%, 73.6%, 80%, 76.6% and 86.6%, respectively. The highest percentage among these six situations exists in the late for interview 2, where there is a distant social relation and low-high power between the offender and the victim. Meanwhile, situations 1 and 8 have the second highest percentage among serious offence situations. They reflect close and acquainted social relations and equal power between the apologizer and the offended people. Situations 3 and 6, in spite of reflecting different social distance and powers, have high percentages of using downgrading responsibility strategy (DR). On the other hand, the highest DR percentage among the native speakers exists in one of the mild offence situations, (i.e., situation 2, 96.6%), where offender and victim have a close relation and equal power. In terms of gender, female native speakers (81%) have significantly higher frequencies of use than their male counterparts (70%) in using the DR strategy (see Tables 3 and 4).

4.1.5 Offers of Repair

Table 2 shows that the frequency percentage of using the offer of repair strategy by the native speakers is 24.3%. In terms of offence severity, the percentages of native speakers in situations (1, 3, 6, 8, 9 and 10) are 46.6%, 63.3%, 23.3%, 6.6%, 0% and 0%. Their lowest offer of repair percentage occurs in situations 9 and 10, which reflect distant social relation and both high-low and low-high powers. Their highest offer of repair percentage (63.3%) exists in situation 3, which represents acquainted social relation and high-low power between the apologizer and the victim. This is followed by the situation 1 (46.6%), which reflects close social relation and equal power. With regard to the mild offence situations (2, 4, 5, and 7), their percentages are 26.6%, 56.6%, 0% and 20%, respectively. This shows that native speakers have tended to adopt offers of repair with the highest percentage in these situation whenever the offender and the victim are socially acquainted and have low-high power (situation 4). In terms of gender, there is a very slight difference between male and female native speakers in using the offer of repair strategy which is in favor of the British females (see Tables 3 and 4).

4.1.6 Verbal Redress

The frequency percentage of the native speakers using the verbal redress strategy, according to Table 2, is 18.3%.

In terms of severity, the verbal redress percentages of the native speakers in the six serious offence situations are 20%, 16.6%, 63.3%, 13.3%, 23.3% and 29%. Their highest verbal redress percentage (63.3%) occurs in the falling bag situation, where there is a distant social relation and equal power between the offender and the victim. Their lowest verbal redress percentage (13.3%) exists in the delayed message situation where the offender and the victim are acquainted and have equal relations. Their low percentages in the four mild offence situations (2, 4, 5, and 7) are 3.3%, 6.6%, 3.3%, and 13.3%, respectively. In terms of gender, the British males' percentage of verbal redress use (11.3%) is less than that of their female counterparts (24.6%). The next section discusses the results presented above and compares the apology strategies used by British native speakers of English with those used by Saudi EFL teachers as reported by Alsulayyi (2016).

4.2 Discussion and Comparison

As reported in section 4.1.1, British speakers in general have tended to mostly use an IFID strategy where there is distant social relations and high-low power between the offender and the victim (e.g., late for interview 1). This affirms the fact that British respondents culturally adopt direct expressions of apology regardless of their power in relation to the victim; it is the culture of the nobles which is reflected in their polite behavior. However, their lowest use of IFID strategy exists in the damaged car situation. This suggests that the native speaker uses less direct expressions of apology whenever they have close social relations with their victims. This result resembles that reported by Abu-Humei (2013), as native speakers use direct and explicit apologies to those who have less power. In terms of gender there is a difference between the British respondents using an IFID strategy based on their gender where males use it more frequently than do females. Native speakers tend to use an IFID strategy (53%) less than their Saudi counterparts (79%) in expressing apologies (see Alsulayyi, 2016). Whereas an IFID strategy is the most frequently used strategy for the Saudis, it is the second most used for native speakers. This result is similar to that reported by Iragui (1996), who notes that for the non-native speaker it is easier to use direct apologetic expressions than to use any other apology strategies. This finding emphasizes the cultural influence involved in selecting the proper apology strategy. Whereas the Saudi respondents give priority to using direct expressions in order to express their apology, the native speakers give less preference to adopting an IFID strategy. This result is also compatible with the findings reported by Bergman & Kasper (1993) and Murad (2012), where an IFID strategy is the most frequently used by Thai speakers of English. In addition, gender proves to have a similar influence in using the IFID strategy between the respondents of both groups, where the Saudi and British males have higher percentages of using IFID strategy than their female counterparts. This result contradicts the findings reported by Al-Zumor (2011), where females display a higher use of an IFID strategy. The current study result and that of Al-Zumor are similar in suggesting the influence which gender may have on using apology strategies in various ways.

As shown in section 4.1.2, native speakers are more inclined to use an upgrader strategy when there is a close social relation and equal power between the offender and the victim as shown in situation 1. They are less inclined to use this when there is high-low power (as in situations 9 and 3). This result is in contrast to that of the Saudi respondents, who employ more upgrader strategies whenever there is a distant social relation between the offender and the victim. Both Saudi and British use of strategies are similar to the results found by Abu-Humei (2013), where the adopted upgrader strategy was combined with other strategies like IFID followed by explanation and/or justification. The native speakers have a higher percentage of using upgrader strategies (36.3%) than their Saudi counterparts (34%) (see Alsulayyi, 2016). This result confirms the result reported by Iragui (1996). In terms of gender, there is a similarity between the Saudi and British respondents in the sense that male respondents use them more often than do females. However, there is a significant difference in the case of the Saudi respondents while there is only a slight difference between the British males and females. This is explained by Abu-Humei (2013) due to the fact that Arab females are more reserved than their male counterparts because of the values and norms of the Arab culture. On the other hand, that sort of reservation on the part of British females is less likely than in their Arab counterparts due to their greater equality with their male counterparts, again due to different cultural values and norms. Hence, the difference between British respondents based on gender is slight. The influence of gender on using upgrader strategy is similar to that reported by Al-Zumor (2011).

Looking at section 4.1.3, it is interesting that native speakers are keener on adopting TOR strategies than their Saudi counterparts. Whereas TOR strategies rank third among apology strategies adopted by the native speakers, they come fifth among apology strategies employed by the Saudis (see Alsulayyi, 2016). This difference can be attributed to the language ability that enables native speakers to vary their strategies between self-blame, lack of intent and admission of fact. This result affirms that reported by Abu-Humei (2013). It is notable that it is the social distance, not the power relation between the offender and the victims, (with the exception of situation 6)

that is responsible for the high percentage of adopting the TOR strategy as evident in situations 5, 3, and 8, which shows higher percentages than situations 9 and 10. The exception of situation 3 asserts the role of culture and norms in providing apologies in situations where the victim is really offended and the offender should take responsibility for committing an offence. This result is compatible with that of Bergman & Kasper (1993), who emphasized that close relations lead to greater adoption of the TOR strategy. In contrast, the high TOR percentage for Saudi respondents occurs in situations that reflect low-high power between the offender and the victim regardless of their social acquaintance. This result resembles that found by Murad (2012) since the Arab students have the highest percentage of taking responsibility for their offences towards their lecturers. The result of Saudi respondents reflects as well the influence of their culture on choosing the appropriate apology strategy. This result is similar to that reported by Farashaiyan & Amirkhiz (2011). In addition, gender is an influential factor in employing TOR strategies among native speakers as it is significantly high in favor of female respondents. Similarly, Saudi females have a higher percentage of adopting TOR strategies than their male counterparts. This is a reflection of cultural influence as females in general are more likely to declare their responsibility for wrongdoing in order to avoid getting into further discussion over their offences.

In contrast to the Saudi respondents, native speakers have shown that downgrading responsibility is their mostly frequently used apology strategy (see section 4.1.4). This difference emphasizes the role of language supremacy in favour of the native speakers that helps them vary their apology strategies and use the sub-categories of downgrading responsibility. Furthermore, it is the type of social distance that affects the adoption of DR strategies by the native speakers; this is a matter that reflects the cultural impact of English society, with its norms and value, on adopting a DR strategy (Bergman, 1993). This finding is in contrast to that of the Saudi respondents who tend to adopt a DR strategy when the offender and the victims have a distant social relation. This is also a reflection of the cultural influence on choosing the DR strategy as the construction of the Saudi society, which is based on tribal values and norms, pays more attention to those who are socially closely acquainted than to strangers (Abu-Humei, 2013; Al-Sobh, 2013). Gender once again proves influential among the native speakers in adopting the DR strategy in favor of the British females over their male counterparts. This finding is dissimilar to that of the Saudi respondents (see Alsulayyi, 2016). However, both British males and females have downgraded their responsibility more than the Saudi males and females have done. The result is similar to that reported by Abu-Humei (2013).

As reported in section 4.1.5, offers of repair are the fifth apology strategy that is frequently used by the native speakers. As reported by Alsulayyi (2016), the Saudi respondents demonstrate higher frequency than the native speakers in adopting this strategy. This is attributed to the values and norms of Arab culture which promote the belief in offering compensation on the part of the offender to the victim in order to mitigate the feeling of guilt towards the victim (Nureddeen, 2008; Abu-Humei, 2013). In this regard, Song (2012) emphasized the important role that values and norms play in politeness theory. In terms of offence severity, it was found that it is the type of social distance, not the type of power that is responsible for the adoption of offers of repair by both the Saudis and the native speakers. That is, the respondents in both groups are more likely to adopt the offer of repair strategy if they are acquainted or have close social relations. This result is compatible with that reported by Bergman & Kasper (1993). This selection aims to maintain the close social relations between the offenders and the victims. The result is similar to that reported by Nureddeen (2008) and Al-Zumor (2011). Gender was found not to be that influential in distinguishing between the use of offers of repair by male and female native speakers. This result is similar to that of the Saudi respondents even though the slight difference is in favor of the Saudi males. A similar result is reported by Bataineh & Bataineh(2006).

Finally, as shown in section 4.1.6, the verbal redress strategy is the least frequently used apology strategy adopted by the two groups in this study; it ranks sixth among other apology strategies used. The results are similar to those reported by Farashaiyan & Amirkhiz (2011) and Al-Sobh (2013). In addition, the British respondents were found to use a verbal redress strategy more often than the Saudi respondents. In terms of offence severity, the native speakers were found to have the highest percentage of verbal redress whenever there is a distant social relationship and equal power between the apologizer and the victim. The Saudi and British respondents are similar in using a verbal redress strategy when equal power and distant social relations are involved, as in the falling bag situation, but they differ in using it in the delayed message situation. This result is in contrast to the findings reported by Bergman & Kasper (1993). Furthermore, gender is found to have great influence in the adoption of verbal redress strategies by British males and females. British females have significantly higher use than their male counterparts compared to British males (see Tables 3 and 4). In contrast, among the Saudi respondents, gender proved insignificant between Saudi males and females (see Alsulayyi, 2016). The result is similar to that reported by Cameron (1997) and Bataineh & Bataineh(2006).

5. Conclusion

This study has investigated the apology strategies used by 30 British native speakers of English in order to compare them with those utilized by 30 Saudi EFL teachers, using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The study has explored expressions of regret based on gender, cultural differences and severity of the offence. The results reveal that downgrading strategies are the most frequently used among other apology strategies by British native speakers of English in general, followed by IFID, taking on responsibility, upgrader, offer of repair and verbal redress which comes last. On the other hand, as reported by Alsulayyi (2016), the most used apology strategy by the Saudi respondents is Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) followed by downgrading responsibility, upgrader, offer of repair, taking on responsibility and then verbal redress. It has been argued that the differences between the answers of the two groups can be attributed to the different cultures they belong to. In terms of gender, Saudi and British males had higher percentages of using IFID than do their female counterparts. There is similarity between the Saudi and British respondents in using the upgrader strategy in the sense that male respondents have outperformed their female counterparts. However, the difference between the Saudi and British respondents is that there is large percentage of gendered difference among the Saudi respondents, while there is only a slight difference between the British males and females. In addition, gender is influential when native speakers employ TOR strategies; where female respondents are more likely to do so than men. Gender is also influential among British native speakers of English, since the DR strategy is adopted more by British females. Gender is less influential in distinguishing between the use of offers of repair strategy by male and female native speakers. This result is similar to that of the Saudi respondents even though the slight difference is in favor of the Saudi males. Furthermore, gender has an influence on the adoption of verbal redress strategy by British males and females. In contrast among Saudi respondents, gender made less difference as reflected in Saudi males and females' responses. Some of these differences have been ascribed to the cultural norms and beliefs that prevail in the two societies.

6. Implications for EFL Teachers in the KSA

The present study places an emphasis on the necessity of developing the English-pragmatic competence of Saudi learners and particularly the development of their speaking skills. This can be done through developing their English-pragmatic knowledge through further exposure to English. An important way of developing this knowledge is by targeting their real and accurate understanding of the culture, values and norms of the target language. The understanding of L2 cultural aspects can be achieved at two levels: the Saudi learners themselves and the teaching materials being used.

Saudi learners of English should be given the opportunity to practise English and transfer their language knowledge into practice, since practice makes perfect. This can be done through various types of activities that focus on the learners themselves in order to enable them to practise different speech acts. In this regard, it is proposed that Saudi learners should perform task-based activities in order to communicate with native speakers, their tutors or among themselves. Such activities include presentations, holding meetings, and seminars. Learners should attend to the necessity of evaluating their performance and that of the native speakers in order to maximize their learning benefits. This type of evaluation gives an opportunity to benefit from native speakers in how they use the language in different situations.

Finally, the teaching materials or the textbooks being used should contain real situations that reflect how language is used in interaction and communication between interlocutors of different social distance and power. These situations should contain daily language used by native speakers. Teaching materials would benefit as well from the findings of L2 pragmatic competence research in order to constantly update such materials and make the Saudi learners aware of different idioms and expressions used in everyday English.

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Appendix A

Discourse Completion Task by English Native Speakers

(Please note that all information will be handled with high confidentiality)

Name (optional):

Email (optional):

I have studied English for (years) in.....

Female Male

Nationality:.....

Occupation:.....

Please read the following situations and complete the dialogue using your everyday language. Please respond as realistically and honestly as possible.

1) Tiddy and Jones are friends. Tiddy borrowed Jones's car. But while he was backing up, he hit a lamppost and damaged the rear of the car. Tiddy is returning the car to his friend.

Jones: I Hope you are ok! What happened?

Tiddy:

2) Laura and Zara are friends. Laura borrowed a magazine from Zara, but a child at home tore the cover page. Now they are at Zara's home. Laura is giving back the magazine to Zara.

Zara: Oh! What happened to the magazine?

Laura:

3) A University teacher mistook one student's exam paper for another due to the similarity in their names and failed him. The teacher knew that he made a mistake, and the student knew what had happened and went to the teacher.

The student: What has happened, Sir?

The teacher:

4) A university student (f) borrowed her teacher's (m) book and promised to return it that day. When she arrived at the university, she discovered that she forgot the book at home. Now she meets her teacher.

The teacher: Have you brought the book?

The student:

5) Nancy wanted to visit Helen in her new office at the University. She went to the University and opened the door of an office, and went in supposing that it was Helen's office, but she discovered that it was somebody else's office (it was Joseph's). Nancy and Joseph don't know each other. Nancy opened the door and went in suddenly while Joseph was writing; he stopped writing and looked up. Nancy knew that it was wrong office.

Nancy:

6) While traveling, Jack placed a heavy bag on the bus shelf. The bus stopped suddenly and the bag fell on the passenger.

The passenger: Oh God! What was that?

Jack:

7) Sandra and George are co-workers. George forgot to pass a private message to Sandra—This is the second time he forgets to pass a message on to her. Sandra knew George had a message for her and went to him.

Sandra: I've been told that you have a message for me.

George:

8) Sam denied Monica's allegation that he borrowed money from her and did not give it back. During their conversation, a person came in and told Monica that he was the one who borrowed the money not Sam.

Sam: (angrily) Do you believe me now?

Monica:

9) A company manager is supposed to interview a man for a job, but he had been called to unexpected meeting in another place, therefore, he arrived at his office half an hour late.

His secretary: This is Tom Edwards. He has been waiting for you for half an hour.

The manager:

10) John Howard applied for a job in a factory and had an interview with the manager. He was caught in the traffic jam and arrived half an hour late. Now the secretary takes him into the manager's office.

The secretary: This is John Howard.

The manager: You are here at last.

John:

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