

Full Length Research Paper

Apology strategies and gender: A Pragmatic study of apology speech acts in Urdu language

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Abstract

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In this paper it has been tried to study apology speech acts in Urdu with the special reference to the gender. How different genders express apologies in different situations, is the main focus of this paper. The data is collected through an open questionnaire from the students of National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad in 2010. The questionnaire consists of ten social situations and in each situation the respondent has committed an offence to someone and is asked to apologize with that person. The offence affected persons belong to different social backgrounds and have different relations with the respondents from more formal to more informal. There is also the difference between the age of the respondent and his/her interlocutors and also in the degree of offence committed. Keeping in mind the time limits, 25 students (15 males and 10 females) were chosen for the data collection. Data has been analyzed with the help of the model proposed in the project of Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns which was initiated in 1982 by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The findings reveal that girls seemed to be more conscious about their face wants and they used less dangerous strategies even with their friends and siblings more than the boys. However while apologizing in formal settings both adopted similar types of strategies.

Keywords: Apology Speech Acts, CCSARP, Positive/Negative Face Wants, Formulaic Strategies, Social Distance, Social Dominance

INTRODUCTION

An apology according to Holmes (1995) is a speech act that is intended to remedy the offense for which the apologizer takes responsibility and, as a result, to rebalance social relations between interlocutors. Another explanation of the nature of apology is given by Fraser (1981) who argues that apologizing is at least taking responsibility for the violation and expressing regret for the offense committed. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) perceive apology as a social event when they point out that it is performed when social norms are violated. Bergman and Kasper (1993) emphasize this view as they see that the purpose of apology is to restore social relational agreement after the offense is committed. Such forms are more conventional – used more often than

others, such as 'I'm sorry' in English and the word 'mu'af krna' in Urdu which literally means 'forgiveness'. Blum-Kulka and Kasper (1993) state that speech acts differ in the extent to which conventionalized linguistic forms are used; some speech acts, such as apologizing and thanking, exhibit more conventional usage than others do. Linguists classify the apology act according to various criteria. Divisions are primarily based on external factors such as the situation or object of regret. Sometimes the speaker explicitly apologizes to the other person for his/her offence whereas sometime he/she admits his/her fault and considers him/her responsible for the mishap. Sometime speaker regrets and explains the reason of the mishap and sometime he/she shows his/her offer to pay

for the loss. Moreover sometime he/she shows his/her determination to be careful in future. Though all such apology strategies affect the speaker's positive face want but some are considered more dangerous than the others. IFIDs and EXPL moves are labeled as less dangerous while the other three moves (RESP, REPR, FORB) are taken as more dangerous for speaker's positive face want. Moreover IFIDs are the formulaic form of apology and rest of four are non-formulaic forms of apology.

There are different measures to measure these apology strategies. These measures mostly depend upon the speaker, the addressee or both. The social distance, sex, power, social status, age and situation also play their respective part in this regard. Apologies speech acts are performed by the individuals when they commit any mistake or nonsense to others who may have different kinds of relations with the speakers ranging from most formal to most informal. They may also have different social dispositions and power. Therefore apologies may vary according from highly apologetic to least apologetic depending upon the interlocutor. Moreover they also differ with the intensity and type of mistake or mishap. For measuring and calculating apologies different frameworks have been proposed especially by the western linguists. These frameworks place apologies in different places. More recently many Japanese, Chinese, African and Middle Eastern scholars have started to probe into the field of politeness and apologies. In the last couple of decades many studies have been conducted to investigate apology speech acts in western languages particularly Arabic and Persian. The underlying assumption of such studies of apology speech acts is to draw pragmatic rules that govern the use of speech acts in different socio-cultural backgrounds. Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) project initiated in 1982 by Blum Kulka and Olshtain, was an attempt to analyze speech acts (in this case requests and apologies) across a range of languages and cultures aiming at investigating the existence of any possible pragmatic universals and their characteristics (Afghari, 2007). This project found out five different apology speech acts that are similar to IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device). In this case speaker expresses an overt apology and takes responsibility for the offence. This project seems to draw boundaries between different types of apology strategies.

According to CCSARP project, the apologizer can choose any of these five apology strategies.

- An expression of an apology (use of IFID) e.g. I apologize.
- An acknowledgement of responsibility (RESP) e.g. it was my fault.
- An explanation or account of the situation (EXPL) e.g. I'm sorry, the bus was late.
- An offer of repair (REPR) e.g. I'll pay the price.

- A promise of forbearance (FORB) e.g. this won't happen again.

Urdu equivalents of these apology strategies are as under.

- Main ma'azrat khawan hon. (IFID)
- Ye mera kasoor hi. (RESP)
- Mujhey afsos hi, bus min dair ho gai. (EXPL)
- Main nuksan pora ker don ga. (REPR)
- Main ainda ahtiyat keron ga. (FORB)

METHODOLOGY

Research participants

Twenty five students (fifteen males and ten females) took part in the study. The participants were all Urdu speaking university students studying in different departments of National University of Modern Languages Islamabad. The participants use different languages as their mother tongue but speak Urdu as national language. The average age of the male participants is 21.4 years and average age of female participants is 21.8 years. The rationale behind choosing university students for the study of apology strategies in Urdu language is that in university, you can find both male and female with equal IQ levels. In other social settings, there might be difference in the intelligence of the participants and this difference might affect their expression of apology. In other words there is not a very clear variation in the population. So university students can be considered the most suitable and reliable population for data collection.

Data collection

The data in this study was collected through an open questionnaire which is very much similar to 'Discourse Completion Test' (DCT) which was used in the CCSARP by Blum Kulka, 1982. This open questionnaire includes ten statements with the brief description of the situations which an individual may face with in real life. Each statement also includes the short description of the addressee's features i.e. social status, profession, age, social distance with speaker, degree of social power and also the offence being committed. All these features of the addressee and description of the offence are supposed to be necessary for the addresser to know about because all such descriptions help him/her to choose appropriate apologetic utterance.

The three social factors were considered important in this study. These are age, social distance and social dominance or power relationship between the participants. The addressee may be older than the addresser (teacher or officer) or younger than him/her (sister/brother) or of the same age (class fellow or friend). There might be some social distance between the

Table 1. Relational Features

| Setting | Age | Dominance | Distance | Frequency |
|------------|---------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| University | + H.Age | + H.Dom | + Dis | 2 |
| University | +H.Age | + H.Dom | +Dis | 2 |
| University | =Age | =Dom | - Dis | 2 |
| Home | +S.Age | + S.Dom | -Dis | 2 |
| Home | =Age | = Dom | -Dis | 2 |

Key:

- + H.Age = hearer is older than speaker
- +S.Age = speaker is older than hearer
- =Age = both are of almost equal age
- + H.Dom = hearer has social dominance
- + S.Dom = speaker has social dominance
- = Dom = no one has dominance over other
- Dis = no social distance between speaker and hearer
- + Dis = there is social distance between speaker and hearer

Table 2. Female

| Setting1 | Relational features | | | | Apology strategies | | | | | Total |
|------------|---------------------|--------|------|----------|--------------------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| University | + H.Age | +H.Dom | +Dis | No aplgy | IFID | EXPL | RESP | REPR | FORB | 20 |
| | | | | ----- | 2= | 16= | ----- | 2= | ----- | 20= |
| | | | | | 10% | 80% | | 10% | | 100% |

Table 3. Male

| Setting1 | Relational features | | | | Apology strategies | | | | | Total |
|------------|---------------------|--------|------|------------|--------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| University | + H.Age | +H.Dom | +Dis | No aply | IFID | EXPL | RESP | REPR | FORB | 30 |
| | | | | ----- | 3= | 24= | 1= | 1= | 1= | 30= |
| | | | | | 10% | 80% | 3.33% | 3.33% | 3.33% | 100% |

participants or they have no distance. Moreover the participants might have equal power or there might be difference in power relations.

Data analysis

The collected data was organized according to the coding procedure developed by the CCSARP with some modifications for the purpose of suitability of our study. We can explain the whole procedure in the following table which has been designed with the help of the figure showing the distribution of the item characteristics in the study of apology speech acts realization patterns in Persian (Afghari, 2007). (See Table 1)

There are five different social situations of which three relate to university and two to the domestic environment. In the first situation the addressee is the teacher and at this stage we find + H.Age, + H.Dom and + Dis as characteristic features of interlocutors' relationship. In the

second situation the student came across with the university officer and we can see + H.Age, + H.Dom and + Dis as the features of the relationship between them. In the third situation the student encounters with another fellow student and both have such relational features as = H.Age, = H.Dom and – Dis. Fourth is a domestic situation where participant offended his/her young sibling with which his/her relational features can be labeled as + S.Age, + S.Dom and – Dis. In the last setting the participant couldn't come up to the expectation of his/her close friend. The characteristic features of their relationship can be seen in this way =Age, =Dom and – Dis. In these five above mentioned situations the participants happen to encounter with the similar addressee twice. But the degree and the nature of offence is rather different in each situation. It is interesting to observe that how the same participant reacts with the similar addressee in different situations and after committing different offence. (See Table 2, 3)

In the first setting where the students offended a teach-

Table 4. Female

| Setting2 | Relational features | | | Apology strategies | | | | | | Total |
|------------|---------------------|--------|------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| University | +H.Age | +H.Dom | +Dis | No aply 1= 5% | IFID 2= 10% | EXPL 16= 80% | RESP ----- | REPR ----- | FORB 1= 5% | 20 19= 95% |

Table 5. Male

| Setting2 | Relational features | | | Apology strategies | | | | | | Total |
|------------|---------------------|--------|------|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| University | +H.Age | +H.Dom | +Dis | No aply 2=6.66 % | IFID 3= 10% | EXPL 24= 80% | RESP ---- | REPR ----- | FORB 1= 3.33% | 30 28= 93.3% |

Table 6. Female

| Setting3 | Relational features | | | Apology strategies | | | | | | Total |
|------------|---------------------|------|------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| University | =Age | =Dom | -Dis | No aply ----- | IFID 1= 5% | EXPL 14= 70% | RESP ----- | REPR 5= 25% | FORB ----- | 20 20= 100% |

Table 7. Male

| Setting3 | Relational features | | | Apology strategies | | | | | | Total |
|------------|---------------------|------|------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| University | =Age | =Dom | -Dis | No aply ----- | IFID 1= 3.3% | EXPL 19= 63.3% | RESP 3= 10% | REPR 6= 20% | FORB 1= 3.33% | 30 30= 100% |

cher, the results seem quite similar except the males take the responsibility 3.33% times and also show their 3.33% commitment that this won't happen again whereas the females don't show their expressions of apology in such ways but use REPR moves in 10% situations. If we look at the use dangerous/ less dangerous apology strategies, the result is same. Both the genders used 90% less dangerous strategies and 10% dangerous apologies strategies. The use of formulaic and non-formulaic is also same by the both genders. (See Table 4, 5)

In the interaction with the university official (officer/clerk) nothing seems to be abnormal in the comparative results of the apologetic strategies adopted by male and female participants in two situations except the fact that there are slight variations. The male students don't apologize with clerk (librarian) 6.66% times whereas females express such feelings 5% (they simply say that they will get another form). The point which is important is not the difference between performance of male and female participants and the fact that both the genders keep in mind the socio-political status of their interlocutors while expressing apologies. The ratio of dangerous and less dangerous apology strategies and

formulaic and non-formulaic strategies remained similar by the both genders. (See Table 6, 7)

There are differences in the apology strategies adopted by male and female participants in almost each and every expression of apologies to the class fellows. The point to be noted is that boys take the responsibility of the offence 10% and promise to be careful in future 3.33% whereas the girls don't express such feelings at all. This shows that males are more conscious about their relations with the class fellows whereas the girls seem to lack seriousness in this relationship according to this study. There is difference in the use of dangerous and less dangerous strategies by male and female participants. Girls used less dangerous apology strategies in 75% situations whereas boys used such strategies in 66.6% situations. There is also difference in the use of formulaic and non-formulaic strategies.

The expression of apologies to their younger siblings also reveals some interesting facts. The male participants used variety of strategies while girls expressed apologies in EXPL move in 30% situations and offer of repair in 70% situations. Less dangerous strategies were used in 30% situations by the female participants and in 23.33%

Table 8. Female

| Setting4 | Relational features | | | | Apology strategies | | | | | Total |
|----------|---------------------|--------|------|-------------|--------------------|-----------|-------|------------|-------|-------------|
| Home | + S.Age | +S.Dom | -Dis | No aply | IFID | EXPL | RESP | REPR | FORB | 20 |
| | | | | 1= 3.33% | 2= 6.66% | 6= 30% | ----- | 14= 70% | ----- | 20= 100% |

Table 9. Male

| Setting4 | Relational features | | | | Apology strategies | | | | | Total |
|----------|---------------------|--------|------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| Home | + S.Age | +S.Dom | -Dis | No aply | IFID | EXPL | RESP | REPR | FORB | 30 |
| | | | | 1= 3.33% | 2= 6.66% | 5= 16.66% | ---- | 21= 70% | 1= 3.33% | 29= 96.6% |

Table 10. Female

| Setting5 | Relational features | | | | Apology strategies | | | | | Total |
|----------|---------------------|------|------|------------|--------------------|------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------------|
| Home | =Age | =Dom | -Dis | No aply | IFID | EXPL | RESP | REPR | FORB | 20 |
| | | | | ----- | 1= 5% | 16= 80% | ----- | 3= 15% | ----- | 20= 100% |

situations by the male participants whereas male participants used formulaic strategies in 6.66% situations and girls didn't use formulaic strategies while apologizing to their siblings. (See Table 8, 9, 10)

The expression of apologies with close friends also reveals some interesting results. Though there are differences in each and every expression of apology by male and female participants but important thing is that girls express apology of repair 15% while boys express 3.33%. This shows that girls are more conscious of their friendship relations and want to pay the price of their offence to their friends. They express their apologetic expression in all situations whereas boys express their apologies to their friends 90% and in 10% situations they don't express their apologies rather remain silence or made counter attack. Ratio of the use of less dangerous strategies is higher in the expression of apologies by the female participants. They chose less dangerous strategies in 85% situations while boys used such apologies in 76.6% situations to their friends.

Now we will see how the relational factors affected the use of apologies by the both genders. (See Table 11, 12)

Results of tables 1 and 2 when the relational features were + H.Age, +H.Dom, +Dis

Following table shows almost similar results as there is no noticeable difference in any of the strategies by the male and female participants. It also shows that both girls

and boys perceived similarly the age, social dominance and social distance of the addressees.

Results of tables 3 and 5 when the relational features were = H.Age, =H.Dom, -Dis

Following table shows some interesting facts because both female and male participants used apology strategies differently while apologizing to their friends and class fellows. Girls used less dangerous strategies in 80% situations while boys in 71.66% situations. It shows that girls have higher level of formality with their friends and class fellows as they have the fear of damaging their positive face wants. This is also evident by the higher ratio of the use of formulaic strategies by the girls. It reveals that boys have more confidence in their friends as they counter attack in 5% situations even after committing offence. (See Table 13)

Results of tables 4 when the relational features were + S.Age, +S.Dom, -Dis

Here it is also clear that even with their younger siblings, girls are more conscious of their face wants. Boys on the other hands feel no threat to their face wants as they use dangerous strategies frequently than the girls. Boys also counter attack which means they are not conscious of their face wants while apologizing to their siblings. (Table 14)

Table 11. Male

| Setting5 | Relational features | | | | Apology strategies | | | | | Total |
|----------|---------------------|------|------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Home | =Age | =Dom | -Dis | No aplyg | IFID | EXPL | RESP | REPR | FORB | 30 |
| | | | | 3=10% | ---- | 23= 76.6% | ---- | 1= 3.33% | 3= 10% | 27= 90% |

Table 12. Comparative Analysis Based on University Setting

| | Less Dangerous | Dangerous | Formulaic | Non-formulaic | Counter Attack |
|--------|----------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| Female | 90% | 7.5% | 10% | 87.5% | 2.5% |
| Male | 90% | 6.67% | 10% | 86.67% | 3.33% |

Table 13. Comparative Analysis Based on Home Setting (with siblings)

| | Less Dangerous | Dangerous | Formulaic | Non-formulaic | Counter Attack |
|--------|----------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| Female | 80% | 20% | 5% | 95% | Zero |
| Male | 71.66% | 23.33% | 1.67% | 93.33% | 5% |

Table 14. Comparative Analysis Based on Home Setting (with friends)

| | Less Dangerous | Dangerous | Formulaic | Non-formulaic | Counter Attack |
|--------|----------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| Female | 30% | 70% | Zero | 100% | Zero |
| Male | 23.33% | 73.33% | 6.66% | 90% | 3.33% |

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study is an attempt to see apology strategies of Urdu language adopted by men and women in different situations from the most formal and dominating to the most informal and dominated situation. The result provides insights to the politeness strategies of the community on one hand and also on the other it tells us about the nature of apology speech acts whether they are formulaic and systematic in Urdu are not. Moreover we can also get help from the findings about the variation in the apology strategies adopted by either of the gender. Moreover it is also useful to see whether the participants remain defensive or authoritative after committing mistakes. This study also helps to realize whether the participants take into consideration the age, social distance and social position of the offence affected persons or not and also what is difference in the degrees of realization of these social factors in male and female participants. This study also proves useful to observe that which of the strategies are mostly used by the participants.

The findings show that the informants apologize more often by the use of IFID and EXPL in almost all pairs of situations. It means that they tend to protect their positive face wants by using less dangerous apology strategies. By choosing such categories the respondents do not apologize explicitly but implicitly. In some interactions

with siblings and close friends the participants also use REPR to a considerable extent. But it doesn't mean that here participants use REPR as indicative of dangerous for positive face wants of the speakers. They use REPR with siblings and friends because they haven't any feelings of formality with them. They do so not because they have any threat or fear from the other person but also in order to negotiate the relations with their intimate partners. We can also find that sometimes there appears gendered difference in the expression of apology with the other persons because of the social position and authority he/she possess and the female participants seem to be more conscious about their face wants while negotiating with their friends and siblings.

One of the most important findings of this study is that we can see Urdu apologetic strategies as non-formulaic because in most situations the participants don't express apologies in formulaic forms. They mostly use statements and explanations for this purpose. Moreover in many situations the participants use English apology strategies. Out of 146 apologies expressed by male participants, 59 (40.41%) have been expressed in English language i.e. I'm sorry, Sorry Sir/Mam or Sorry along with EXPL, RESP or other apologies strategies. The girls also used English strategies frequently as in 56(56.56%) out of 99 situations, English language was used by them. This tendency on one hand shows the influence of dominant

language and on the other hand shows the nonformal nature of Urdu apologetic strategies.

Finally the influence of social factors is also evident on the expression of apology strategies from both the genders. Age, dominance and distance also play their part in the selection of apology speech acts. Both male and female participants use REPR apology strategies for their siblings to a considerable amount (see tables of setting 4 under male and female). This strategy has not been adopted by either of the gender in any of the setting up to the reasonable extent. Even if it has been used, it has been used in the similar situations as in setting 3 and 5 with the close friends and class fellows. There is no use of such strategy in settings 1 and 2 where other person has +Age, +Dom and also +Dis. So it suggests that social factors also determine the use of apology speech acts. Similarly in the setting 2 in the interaction with the librarian both male and female show their indifference (male 6.66%, and female 5%) after committing offence. There is no such expression of indifference by any of the participants in any of the situations.

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Appendix A (English version of original DCT that is also enclosed herewith)

This open questionnaire (Discourse Completion Test) will be used in to collect data for the study of Urdu apologetic utterances.

Age ----- Gender ----- Degree-----

Mother Tongue----- Resident of city/ town/ village-----

Please read the following situations carefully and imagine yourself in these situations practically and write down your reaction under each situation.

• You have borrowed your class fellow's book and any child at your home tore some of its pages. What would you say when you return the book?

• You have been supposed to meet your class fellow at the university library but you get there an hour later. What would you say, when you apologize with your class fellow?

• You were to submit an assignment to the teacher but due to ill health, you have not been able to even attend the class. What would you say to your professor the next session you attend the class?

• You were to discuss some of your problems with your teacher but due to a traffic jam, you came 45 minutes late. What would you say to your supervisor as you see him/her?

• You promised with your friend to go for outing, but at the nick of time you got an urgent piece of work at home and couldn't go with him/her. How would you apologize with your friend?

• You promised to reach at your friend's house at his/her marriage two days before the ceremony. But you couldn't get leave from university. What would you say to your friend when you meet him/her at the marriage ceremony?

• You were getting late from the class and hurriedly ran towards the class. While going upstairs you dashed with one university officers. How would you react?

• You were given a form to fill in and return for getting library card but you lost the form. What would you say to the librarian when you meet him/her?

• You have promised your younger sister/brother to take her/him to the park on Sunday but on Sunday evening some of your friends came to meet you and you couldn't go with him/her. You have forgotten to do so. What would you say to her/him?

• On the way back to home from university, you were to bring 'Gool Gappas' for your younger brother/sister. But due to strike you got late and couldn't bring Gool Gappas. What would you say to your brother/sister on reaching home?
