"والله سوري!": إستراتيجيات الاعتذار كما يستخدمها المتحدثون بالإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في دولة الكويت

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة الكويت
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة الخليج للعلوم والتكنولوجيا، دولة الكويت

1. المقدمة

تستكشف هذه الدراسة أفعال الكلام الاعتذارية بشكل عام والإستراتيجيات الاعتذارية التي يستخدمها طلاب جامعة الكويت. تنقص الدراسة مجموعتين، هما: خريجو مدارس خاصة (الأنظمة البريطانية والأميركية؛ يتم تدريسهم باللغة الإنجليزية بشكل أساسي) و خريجو المدارس الحكومية (يتم تدريسهم باللغة العربية بشكل أساسي). وقد تم تنفيذ مواقف لحواري بـ "هيئة إكمال الخطاب" (DCT) لتحقيق أهداف أساسي ورئيسي، وهو تحديد أي المجموعتين لديها وصول أكبر إلى مجموعة كاملة من استراتيجيات الاعتذار في اللغة الإنجليزية. تشير النتائج إلى أن الطلاب الذين تخرجا في المدارس الخاصة يثمرون بإمكانية وصول أكبر من نظرائهم في المدارس الحكومية، وعديهم وهي أكبر بالثقافة المصاحبة للغة الإنجليزية. ومن المثير للإهتمام أن النتائج تظهر أن الطلاب الذين تخرجو في المدارس الحكومية هم الطلاب الوحيدون الذين ذكروا اسم الله في ردوهم الاعتذارية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أفعال الكلام، الاعتذار، إستراتيجيات الاعتذار، CCSARP، الكويت، اللهجة الكويتية، اللهجات، اللغويات الاجتماعية.

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“Wallah, I’m Sorry!“: Apologetic Strategies Used Among L2 English Speakers in Kuwait

* Shamlan al-Qenaie
* Mohammad al-Hamad
** Dhari al-Otaibi

* Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, College of Arts, Kuwait University
** Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, College of Arts, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait

Abstract

This study explores the speech act of apology generally and the apologetic strategies used by students at Kuwait University in particular. The study examines two groups: graduates from private schools (British and American systems; taught mainly in English) and graduates from governmental schools (taught mainly in Arabic.) Ten situations were adopted for the discourse completion task (DCT) with the core objective of determining which group has greater access to the full range of apologetic strategies. The results indicate that the students who graduated from private schools have greater access than their governmental counterparts. They, hence, exhibit greater culture awareness of the English language. Interestingly, the results show that the students who graduated from governmental schools were the only students who invoked the name of Allah (God) in their apologetic responses.

Keywords: Speech Acts, Apology, Apologetic Strategies, CCSARP, Kuwait, Kuwaiti Arabic, Dialectology, Sociolinguistics

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1. Introduction

The speech act of apology can be considered a useful tool to alleviate tension between interactants in any given speech situation. It can also be seen as a device for maintaining harmony between the speaker and the hearer. In this study, apology is defined as a tool that may be used to resolve issues of any kind.

To illustrate the power of an effective apology, we may cite an incident from the mid-1980s involving Israel’s Likud and Labor parties, in which an apology saved the Israeli cabinet from a crisis. The Minister of Industry, Ariel Sharon, had criticized the Prime Minister, Shimon Peres. Consequently, Peres intended to discharge Sharon, which would likely have triggered the dissolution of the coalition government. Peres considered the criticism to be an insult and asked Sharon to apologize so that he could save face. The latter did eventually apologize, only after a significant conflict between the two parties. This apology sustained the Israeli cabinet, the coalition government, and Sharon’s position as Minister of Industry (Olshtain(a) 155-165).

Herein, we will explore the factors that induce people to choose certain strategies over others by elaborating the nature and severity of infractions between the interactants. These factors apply to both native and non-native speakers of any given language. Our primary focus will be on the latter, for whom proficiency in L2 plays a pivotal role in influencing the selection of specific apologetic strategies over others.

1.1. Objectives

The primary research objectives are twofold:

- What are the apology strategies utilized by L2 English speakers in Kuwait and in what situations are they realized?
- Who has better access to apologetic strategies: private schools’ or public schools’ graduates?

2.1. Speech Act Theory

Speech acts are acts that are performed through various types of utterance, such as when promising something or issuing orders (Austin). Hatch states that speech acts consist of direct and indirect utterances, whether they are full sentences, single words, or simple gestures, as long as these acts contribute to specific functions within communication, such as expressing gratitude and apologizing. To minimize the risk of misunderstanding, the speaker should have both knowledge of the language they are using and the appropriate usage of that language in any given society. Specifically, the speaker should be aware of specific subtle distinctions pertaining to language usages, for example, the difference between ‘I’m sorry’ and ‘Excuse me,’ as addressed by Borkin and Reinhart, along with the social norms that exist in each society. For
example, in Arab culture, adults tend not to apologize explicitly to children, while in other cultures, they do (Bataineh and Bataineh).

Austin and Searle both contribute significantly to Speech Act Theory. Austin introduces the concept of ‘performative utterance’. This type of utterance should meet two conditions: first, the utterance must perform an action, and second, it must elicit specific results. Austin also discusses the successful conditions for performatives, referring to them as ‘felicity conditions’; these vary, ranging from overly formal (e.g., ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife,’) to informal contexts, such as the expression of gratitude or sympathy in everyday conversation.

Searle (16-37) considers Speech Act Theory to be a form of language that represents rule-governed behavior, and suggests that speech acts are characteristically performed by uttering expressions that conform to certain constitutive rules. He provides a theoretical framework within which the three dimensions of utterances (actions involved in the speech act) could be seen as a unified whole. He distinguishes between ‘regulative’ rules, which regulate existing forms of behavior, and ‘constitutive’ rules, which not only regulate but also create or define new forms of behavior.

2.2. The Speech Act of Apology

There is a general consensus on the essence of apology: that it is at the cost of the speaker, and provides benefit for the hearer by maintaining harmony between the two following the speaker’s violation of social norms. Goffman, and Bergeman and Kasper conceptualize apology as ‘remedial interchanges’; compensatory work that serves to reinstate social harmony after a real or virtual offense. Apology is an essential solution when an offense has been committed by one of those involved in a situation (cf. Goffman). Bataineh and Bataineh (1902-1903) take Goffman’s definition further, arguing that the apology contains myriad ‘felicity conditions.’ These entail the apologizer’s admission that they have offended the hearer and their assumption of responsibility for that offense. Thus, the apologizer expresses their willingness to compensate for the damage caused.

Olshtain (156-157) sees apology as “a speech act which is intended to provide support for the H [hearer] who was actually or potentially malaffected by a violation X.” When verbally apologizing, the speaker is willing to humiliate themselves to some extent and to admit to fault and responsibility for the violation; this act is seen as face-saving for the hearer while it is face-threatening for the speaker (ibid.).

Because the hearer has been harmed, the speaker should acknowledge this and take responsibility for their action. As they verbally perform the apology, they degrade their position for the hearer’s benefit for the purpose of restoring harmony between them. As the person at fault apologizes, the risk that the hearer might not accept the apology is
present; this is typified by the face-threatening act. The face-saving act, by contrast, is represented by the speaker’s act of apologizing to the hearer, which restores harmony and saves the hearer’s face.

Márquez-Reiter (44) considers apology to be a “compensatory action for an offence committed by the speaker, which has affected the hearer.” Apology is, therefore, a tool for maintaining harmony between parties and is a face-threatening act for the speaker and a face-saving act for the hearer.

Apology is an expressive speech act, similar to the expression of gratitude or congratulations and the offering of condolences. Olshtain and Cohen (20) argue that this taxonomy and classification of the speech act is the most apt. However, it does not provide a concrete description of the nature of the speech act. Bataineh and Bataineh (2006) claim that for an apology to be positive and effective, the apologist must convey their sincere feelings of ‘sorrow and regret,’ as this is the keynote to a genuine apology. However, this aspect is ignored by Fraser (1981, 261), who indicates that the consideration of an apology as sincere or insincere is a different issue.

People may issue apologies for many different reasons, and their intentions cannot be studied. However, we may be able to analyze the apology itself, as illustrated by Fraser. Fraser (261) indicates that “we can analyze an apology into two different spheres: [first,] what we customarily believe to be true about the speaker who is apologizing; [and, second,] what must be true in order for an apology to be made.” The first sphere contains four assumptions. First, the speaker, when apologizing, must perform the speech act that is relevant to the time and act done; one cannot apologize ‘for not having left by tomorrow.’ Second, it is assumed that the speaker acknowledges that they have offended the hearer by the act they have committed. Therefore, there must be an offending party and an offended party. Third, it is assumed that the speaker believes (even if not entirely) that they played a role in causing the offense; that is, the speaker apologizes for the offensive actions committed and, at the very least, has control over the apology’s degree of sincerity. For instance, if the speaker says, ‘I apologize for being born,’ it will not be considered to be a profound apology. Fourth, it is assumed that there is the speaker experiences sincere regret at having harmed or offended the hearer (Fraser 261).

Regarding the second sphere, two fundamental conditions coincide. First, it is assumed that the speaker admits that they feel regret, and, second, that the offender expresses sorrow for having offended the hearer (Fraser 261-262).

Obeng proposes four paradigmatic classifications, from the simplest to the most complex. The first is the explicit apology, e.g., ‘Forgive me’ and ‘I am sorry.’ The second is the implicit apology, which is secondary (i.e., uses other strategies). The third is the complex apology, which is a combination of the two previous types (i.e., explicit + implicit). The fourth is the compound apology (implicit + implicit). These four types form the Obeng paradigm of apology. It is worth mentioning that Obeng’s paradigmatic classification emphasizes the fact that an apology may be performed in two fundamental ways: (a) the act of apology, and (b) the act of justification for a wrongdoing.
2.3. The Apologetic Strategies

Trosborg (150-152) provides and discusses a suggested list of apologetic strategies and argues that the apologizer may choose one or more strategies to form the required degree of apology to guarantee the restoration of harmony between the ‘apologizer’ and the ‘apologizee.’ Let us now take up such a list in more details:

1. ‘Minimizing the degree of offense’

Under this category, the apologizer does not take responsibility. Rather, the apologizer tries to minimize the offense perpetrated against the hearer or blames a third party. The apologizer may say, ‘What does that matter?’, ‘That’s nothing,’ or ‘What about it?’

1.1 Minimizing: ‘What about it?’
1.2 Querying preconditions: ‘Everybody does that.’
1.3 Blaming someone else.

2. ‘Acknowledgment of responsibility’

This strategy differs from the previous one in that the apologizer acknowledges responsibility, whether implicitly or explicitly, and engages in a degree of self-blaming. The sub-categories are listed from low intensity to higher intensity. These include ‘hearer supportive’ and ‘self-demeaning.’

Low Intensity

2.1. Implicit acknowledgment: ‘Perhaps I shouldn’t have done it.’
2.2. Explicit acknowledgment: ‘I’ll admit I forgot to do that.’
2.3. Expression of lack of intent: ‘I didn’t mean to.’
2.4. Expression of self-deficiency: ‘I was confused.’
2.5. Expression of embarrassment: ‘I feel so bad about it.’

High Intensity

2.6. Explicit acceptance of blame: ‘It was entirely my fault.’

3. ‘Explanation or account’

In this category, the offender or apologizer explains the offensive situation to mitigate his or her guilt; this seems to offer a means of partially evading blame.

3.1. Implicit explanation: ‘Such things are bound to happen, you know.’
3.2. Explicit explanation: ‘Sorry I’m late, but my car broke down.’

4. ‘Expression of apology’

In this category, an explicit apology is offered by the apologizer. This category consists
of three sub-categories:

1.1. Expression of regret: ‘I’m sorry.’

1.2. Offer of apology: ‘I apologize.’

1.3. Request of forgiveness: ‘Excuse me; Please forgive me.’

5. ‘Offer of repair’

The infraction causes damage, and accordingly, the offender offers to pay for the damage that they have caused or offers compensation instead. This depends on the circumstances of the situation, and whether or not the offender is in a position to pay.

5.1. Repair: ‘I’ll pay for the cleaning.’

5.2. Compensation: ‘You can borrow my dress instead.’

6. ‘Promises of forbearance’

Here, the apologizer gives their promise that they will not engage in such actions again or that they will attempt to gradually overcome their proclivity. Usually, the apologizer uses the ‘performative verb’, for example, by assuring the hearer, ‘It won’t happen again, I promise.’

7. ‘Expressing concern for hearer’

In this category, the offender shows their concern for the hearer so that the hearer may be pacified (Trosborg 150-152).

The apologizer should implement one or more of the above-mentioned strategies if the apology is to be deemed acceptable. According to the severity of the offense, the apologizer chooses from these strategies with some modifications. It can be assumed that the more severe the offense is, the more strategies would be involved in the apology. For instance, when someone makes a disruptive noise (e.g., knocking over a book in a dentist’s waiting room), they might simply say ‘I’m sorry.’ This would appear to be adequate, although some might see it as insufficient and choose to employ two strategies, such as acknowledgment of responsibility and expression of an apology: ‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to.’

However, some strategies cannot be used in tandem with others, depending on the situation at hand. Some strategies are situation-specific. In the example given above, it would appear awkward if the offender was to offer repair in addition to apologizing. In general, the more strategies that are implemented, the more the act of apology would appear awkward. For example, it would be inappropriate to say, ‘I’m sorry, I apologize, such things are bound to happen, and I was confused.’
Moreover, some situations require more than one strategy, and some strategies are situation-specific (cf. al-Asqah; Elasfar & Mustafa). For instance, if someone causes a road accident, it would be insufficient for them to simply say ‘I am sorry.’ They might apologize, express concern for the ‘apologizee,’ and acknowledge responsibility. It stands to reason that people use more strategies in more severe situations. It is worth mentioning that the act of apologizing does not guarantee that the hearer would accept the apology.

Olshtain and Cohen introduce ‘the speech act set of apology,’ and identified five possible semantic formulas from which the apologizer may choose in the case of a willing apology:

1. ‘An Illocutionary Force Indicating Device’ (IFID): ‘Sorry’; ‘Excuse me.’

   In this formula, the apology is direct and applicable to all languages (i.e., not language-specific). However, each language has several sub-formulas.

2. ‘An expression of the speaker’s responsibility for the offense’: ‘It’s my fault; I was confused.’

   Here, the apologizer accepts the responsibility; this type of apology is not language-specific either.

3. ‘A statement or account of the cause which brought about the violation’: ‘The bus was delayed.’

   This is not language-specific, but sometimes the appropriateness of specific ‘discourse’ situations could be language-specific.

4. ‘An offer of repair’: ‘I’ll pay for the broken vase.’

   This formula differs from the previous ones, as it is situation-specific. When there is physical injury or inflicted damage, the apologizer might choose a specific additional strategy.

5. ‘A promise of forbearance’: ‘It won’t happen again.’

   In this category, the apologizer is inclined to show the hearer that he or she will not do such an action in the future. For example, if one always arrives late for meetings with someone else and wishes to reassure that person that this will not happen again, they may choose this strategy. Accordingly, it is situation-specific (Olshtain and Cohen 22-23).

Fraser provides an extended list of nine apologetic strategies. In his account, Fraser (262-265) divides the nine apologetic strategies into two broader categories: direct strategies and indirect strategies. First, a person announces that he or she is apologizing, exemplified by ‘I hereby apologize for …’. Second, the speaker states that he or she is obliged to apologize, e.g. ‘I must apologize for …’. Third, the speaker offers to apologize: ‘I offer my apology for …’. Fourth, the speaker asks the hearer to accept the apology ‘Let me apologize for …’. Fifth, one expresses regret for the offense
'I'm sorry for ...'. Sixth is the request for forgiveness: ‘Forgive me for ...’. Seventh is the account exemplified by ‘That was my fault.’ Eighth is the promise of forbearance: ‘I promise you that that will never happen again.’ The ninth strategy is the offer of redress ‘Please let me pay for the damage I’ve done.’ Fraser (1981) asserts that the first four are direct strategies, which means that the speaker would indicate that the apology is ‘at issue’. By contrast, the rest are indirect, in which the apology is not ‘at issue.’ Moreover, the speaker may combine strategies as the situation requires (Fraser, 262-265).

Apologetic Strategies (Fraser 1981)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offering</td>
<td>Expressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcement</td>
<td>Requesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Admitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking</td>
<td>Redressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forbearing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Direct and Indirect Apologetic Strategies by Fraser, 1981

Bataineh and Bataineh argue that one strategy in particular is found only in Arabic-speaking cultures, namely the invocation of God’s name in apologizing. This is also supported by al-Asqah where religious amplifiers such as ‘inshallah’ and ‘alhamdallah’ are often used with other response strategies (returning, explaining, thanking and disagreeing) while attempting to apologize.

2.4. Factors Influencing the Selection of Specific Apologetic Strategies

Fraser (265-266) explores the reasons that induce us to apologize. He asserts that ‘the individual feels genuinely regretful for his actions and wants to set things right by taking responsibility and expressing regret.’ As he classifies the matter, two types of motivations lead to apologies: the genuine concern and the ritual concern. The genuine concern can be illustrated by the case of a mother who is getting divorced and is apologizing to her children: ‘I’m sorry… I know how much it hurts you … dad will still be your father’ (266). The ritual motivation can be exemplified by an airline clerk who is speaking on the phone with a customer after having kept them waiting for a long time; the clerk says, ‘I’m sorry you had to wait so long: thank you for waiting’ (266). It is evident that the delay is out of the clerk’s control, but they apologize, nonetheless.

Several factors may be significant in selecting specific apologetic strategies. Fraser (266-267) presents the first factor, which is the ‘nature of the infraction.’ The criterion for measuring this factor is based on whether the violated norm was social or personal. Borkin and Reinhart state that people tend to use ‘Excuse me’ over ‘I’m sorry’ in formal settings. When a social norm is violated, it seems more appropriate to use ‘Excuse me’, as it is more formal and shows social distance. For example, in formal
settings, it is better to say ‘Excuse me, what did you say?’, while if a personal norm has been violated, it would be more appropriate to use ‘I’m sorry’ than ‘Excuse me.’ The nature of the infraction appears to play a pivotal role in the selection of the strategy.

The second factor taken into consideration is ‘the degree of the severity of the infraction.’ This can be measured based on social violations. The situations presented were merely slight inconveniences, such as a person entering the wrong room. Almost all situations are initiated with ‘Excuse me’ and followed by accounts that explain the reasons for the infraction’s occurrence. Few situations begin with ‘I’m sorry.’ For instance, a waitress who is late serving a customer may say, ‘I am terribly sorry, two of the staff are sick today.’ The second part of the apology explains why the delay occurred in the first place. However, people tend to issue an apology along with an offer of redress in cases of severe injury or inconvenience. This may be illustrated by an example of a person who hits his neighbor’s dog with his car, apologizes for this, and afterward offers to take the dog to the vet and pay the charges (Fraser).

The third factor is ‘the situation in which the infraction occurred’. Fraser (268) finds that “the more formal the situation, the longer and more elaborate the apology”. For example, if a person apologizes for interrupting the president of a university, they might say, ‘I’m sorry for interrupting you.’ Another example that can be given here is when a person steps on their spouse’s toe in the shower and says, ‘Oops.’ The latter example is short, as the situation is informal (taking a shower), whereas the former is longer and more elaborate, as the president was interrupted while speaking to another person.

The fourth factor is ‘the relative familiarity between the interactants.’ The familiarity between people involved in any given situation is generally found to play a significant role. People in stores, for instance, tend to merely say ‘Excuse me’ or ‘I’m sorry’. People tend to stick to formal apology with people they do not know. Fraser concludes that an apology will be less elaborate apology if there is greater familiarity between those interacting.

The final factor is the apologizer’s gender. Although women stereotypically tend to apologize more than men, Fraser (269) claims that gender is irrelevant to apologizing, having tested both men and women in various situations— ‘formal, intimate, trivial, severe, social and personal’—and observed no exact ‘systematic or predictable frequency.’ Some men apologize, and others do not, just as some women apologize while some other do not (Fraser 265-270).

By contrast, Holmes investigates gender differences as they pertain to apologies and finds both similarities and differences between both genders. She concludes that women apologize significantly more than men and that women apologize most to the hearers of equal status while men apologize to women irrespective of status (cf. al-Sallal & Ahmed; Harb; Bataineh and Bataineh 1910).
2.5. Factors Influencing Non-native Speakers of Any Language in Selecting Specific Apologetic Strategies over Others

According to Chang (409), second language learners tend to use external modifications as their language proficiency increases. As it seems easier to access direct requests than indirect requests, it is found that lower-proficiency students express more direct requests than their counterparts of high proficiency. Moreover, learners with high proficiency used more indirect requests. It has also been observed that learners with higher proficiency often use upgraders, downgraders, and supportive moves (cf. al-Asqah). Rose and Trosborg both claim that learners of different proficiency levels have access to a full range of apology strategies. It has also been found that there is a positive, pragmatic transfer correlation with the degree of proficiency in the language (cf. al-Harbi & Mahfoodh; al-Harbi & Suleiman). Learners with high proficiency levels can control their second language and express their feelings without the transfer from their first language (cf. Chang 409-410).

2.6. Cross-cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP)

The main focus of the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain; Suszczynska; Afghari; Trosborg) has been with ‘requests and apologies and aimed at establishing native speakers’ patterns of realization comparing speech acts across languages and establishing similarities and differences between native and non-native speakers and their realization of these acts” (Nureddeen 283). The study aims to identify universalities across languages (Afghari 177). On the other hand, some studies have focused on intercultural variations (cf. Chang) and adopted cross-sectional observation. Cross-sectional observation “looks at different learners at different moments in time and establishes development by comparing these successive states in different people” (Cook 34). Such studies address many questions pertaining to apology, primarily whether or not universality is present and whether or not the language proficiency level plays an influential role in the speaker’s access to the full range of apology strategies.

2.7. The Kuwaiti Context

English major students at Kuwait University are graduates of either governmental or private schools in Kuwait. The language of instruction in governmental schools is Arabic, even in English classes. After students graduate from these schools and major in English, their exposure to the English language and culture will be increased. As the University’s medium of instruction is English and most students there speak in English, it is plausible that their proficiency will improve swiftly. Regarding the other students majoring in English who graduated from private schools (British and American systems), it seems logical to assume that many are highly proficient in English and are considered fluent in the language, as they were mainly taught through English by native speakers from childhood. This study explores whether the former students
have the same degree of access to the range of apologetic strategies that the latter do. It is hypothesized in this study that the English major students at Kuwait University who graduated from private schools have greater diversity in the range of apologetic strategies than their counterparts who graduated from governmental schools. The study is guided by two main research questions:

1. What are the apologetic strategies exhibited by governmental school students and private school students?
2. What are the differences and similarities between the two groups?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study are all students at Kuwait University’s Department of English Language and Literature who were randomly selected. The total number of students is 300: 150 males and 150 females (median age = 22). The participants are divided into two groups. The first comprises those students who had graduated from governmental schools, with 121 females and 86 males, whereas the second comprises students who had graduated from private schools, with 29 females and 64 males.

**Participants: Private Schools**

Graduates (39 out of 300 = 31%)

![Pie chart showing gender distribution among private school graduates]

**Figure 1 (Left)**

**Figure 2 (Below)**
Kasper and Dahl (215) define interlanguage pragmatics as “the investigation of non-native speakers' comprehension and production of speech acts, and the acquisition of L2-related speech act knowledge”. Since this study explores the production of non-native English language speakers with variation in terms of language proficiency, the instrument considered most fitting for this purpose is the discourse completion task (DCT), i.e., the instrument here is an open questionnaire.

### 3.2. Instrument Design

The questionnaire that has been developed for this study includes ten situations (cf. Olshtain and Cohen; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain; Olshtain(a); Afghari; Nureddeen) (see Table 2 below). Every situation included in this study has its own characteristics in terms of the relationship between the interlocutors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Speaker-Hearer Relationship</th>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Professor to respond</td>
<td>A university professor promised to return a student’s paper that day but had not finished reading it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role to respond</td>
<td>Scenario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student to respond</td>
<td>A student borrowed their professor’s book, which they promised to return that day but forgot to bring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Staff manager to respond</td>
<td>A staff manager has kept a student waiting for half an hour for a job interview because he (the staff manager) was called to an unexpected meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Waiter or waitress to respond</td>
<td>The waiter or waitress in an expensive restaurant brings fried chicken (instead of steak) to a surprised customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Unpunctual student to respond</td>
<td>A notoriously unpunctual student is late again for a meeting with a friend with whom he or she is working on a co-authored paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Driver to respond</td>
<td>A driver in a parking lot backs up into another driver’s car.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The speaker to respond</td>
<td>The speaker offended a colleague during a discussion at work; after the meeting, the colleague mentions this fact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The borrower to respond</td>
<td>The wind breaks a borrowed umbrella beyond repair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The one who submitted the assignment to respond</td>
<td>Homework borrowed and submitted but not returned to the owner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The one who broke it to respond</td>
<td>Breaking a brother’s or sister’s iPod.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: The Situations Included in the Questionnaire (Adapted from Nureddeen)**

In situations 1, 3, and 4, the speaker is dominant over the hearer. In situation 2, the hearer is dominant over the speaker as the conversation takes place between the student and their professor. As for situations 5, 8, 9, and 10, neither participant is dominant over the other, nor distance exists between them. In situations 6 and 7, although neither participant is dominant over the other, some social distance exists between the interlocutors.
3.3 Data Collection

A DCT has been utilized to elicit the needed data (cf. al-Asqah; al-Harbi & Mahfoodh; al-Harbi & Suleiman). Chang (412) claims that the DCT is inadequate when it comes to representing what occurs in real situations. In other words, factors other than verbal ones are at play. In real situations, para-linguistic and non-verbal features play a significant role in conveying, for example, emotions. This lies beyond the capability of the DCT. However, we believe that this instrument has several advantages that serve this study’s purposes. The first is that “the written DCT allows the L2 learners to produce an L2 apology that better reflects their current L2 proficiency” (Chang 412). The second advantage is that the DCT produces a clear mental representation concerning the speech act of the speakers or learners of a particular language (cf. Beebe and Cummings). Thus, this tool is likely to enable us to elicit different types of answer from the same speaker, wherein both the context and the producer of the apology remain constant.

Students majoring either in English linguistics or English literature have been given the DCT during class hours.

3.4. Data Analysis

A coding scheme has been adopted from Trosborg to explore the similarities and differences between each group in terms of their use of the speech act of apology. The coding scheme is divided into categories (e.g., offer of repair, intensifiers, interjections) and sub-categories (e.g., querying preconditions, request for forgiveness). Some modifications have been added to this coding scheme for the purpose of documenting every aspect of the data collected. Those modifications have been adopted from Chang and Bataineh and Bataineh.

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<th>1.1</th>
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<td>Minimizing</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>Querying preconditions</td>
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<td>Blaming someone else</td>
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<td>Expression of self-deficiency</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>Expression of embarrassment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Explicit acceptance of blame</td>
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</table>
j. **Expression of embarrassment** – Two students expressed that they were embarrassed when hurting a close friend. It only appeared in items 8 and 9. A student responding to item 9: ‘I am really sorry; I feel embarrassed because I hurt you.’

k. **Explicit acknowledgment** – Some students explicitly acknowledged the responsibility for the harm done to the hearer. This category appeared in items such as 2 and 8. A student responding to item 2: ‘I’m so sorry, I forgot to bring it with me.’

l. **Repair** – Students offered to repair what had been damaged at their own expense. This category appeared in items 6, 8, and 10. A student responding to item 8 said: ‘I’m sorry, I will pay for the broken umbrella.’

m. **Expressing concern for the hearer** – Some responses were addressed to the hearer to show concern when severe damage or insult had occurred. This category appeared in items such as 5 and 6. A student responding to item 6 said: ‘Sorry, I hope that you are OK and not hurt. I’ll pay for the damage’.

n. **Minimising (the degree of the offense)** – Students, when following this formula, seemed to minimize the offense as a means of easing the tension between the interlocutors, which appeared in items such as 5: ‘C’mon, it is not the end of the world.’

o. **Invoking Allah’s (God’s) name** – Students of governmental schools heavily used Allah’s name in most items (8/10), indicating that the students revere God’s omnipotence. The invocation of Allah’s name is heavily encouraged by Islamic teachings. It occurred in items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10. For example, a student responding to item 1 said: ‘Insha’Allah [Allah (God) willing] I will have them ready next lecture.’

**The PGs used the following:**

a. **Expression of regret** – Similar to the GGs, this formula was common and was used in all situations. This formula was not used alone in any situation, but was always combined with other strategies or formulas, such as intensifiers or explicit explanations. A student responding to item 1 said: ‘I am really sorry for this.’

b. **Explicit acknowledgment** – Some students explicitly acknowledged their responsibility for the harm done to the hearer. This category appeared in items such as 1 and 8. A student responding to item 1 said: ‘Sorry, I did not finish reading it.’
Table 3: The Coding Scheme Adopted for this Study, Where Each Number Represents a Certain Strategy.

4. Results and Discussion

The most widely utilized apologetic strategy among both groups (government school (GGs) and private school graduates (PGs)) is category 4 (i.e., expression of apology), along with its sub-categories, 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3. GGs used 15 apology strategies, while PGs used 19. Below is the listing of all the strategies employed by the GGs.

a. 4.1. Expression of regret – This formula is ubiquitous, having been used in most situations. GGs implemented this formula for all items. However, some respondents did not use this formula in items 8 and 10. They may have considered the scenarios to be of minor importance as the relationship between the interlocutors
is close, or because these two items may have been considered less severe than
the others.

b. 10. Interjection – This category was used by students, particularly in severe
situations. It was invoked to express shock, dismay, or other feelings, depending
on the situation at hand (e.g., sympathy). This category was used in items such as
2, 4, 5, 6, and 9. For example, participants responding to item 9 uttered phrases
such as ‘Oh, I’m so sorry for forgetting your work’ or ‘Shit! I didn’t mean to’.

c. 3.2. Explicit explanation – Some students seemed to prefer using this category
to convey what happened truthfully. This category was, in most cases, combined
with an expression of regret and, in a few cases, with interjections. It appeared in
items such as 4, 5, and 6. For instance, a participant responding to item 5 said:
‘Oh, I am sorry for being late, but my car broke down.’

d. 4.3. Request for forgiveness – Some students at governmental schools were
prone to using this category more when addressing more distant hearers, as this
formula is more formal in construction. It was also clearly observed in severe
situations, such as items 2 and 9. A student responding to item 9 said: ‘Please
forgive me, I didn’t mean to.’

e. 6. Promise of forbearance – Some students seemed to prefer reassuring the
hearer that the offense would not happen again when the hearer was affected by
damage or harm. It appeared in, for example, items 2, 5, and 10. For example, one
utterance was as follows: ‘Oh, sir, I’m very sorry. I forgot to bring it. I promise you
not to do it again’ (item 2).

f. 8. Intensifiers – This formula was used in almost every situation, and was
always combined with expression of regret. It appeared in utterances such as: ‘I’m
really sorry, the wind broke it’ (item 8).

g. 2.3. Expression of lack of intent – This formula was triggered by almost
all respondents when reacting to item 7, and a few implemented this formula
when responding to item 9. For instance, a respondent answering item 7 said, ‘I
apologize for that, I meant no offense.’

h. 3.1. Implicit explanation – Some students used this category in situations in
which no distance existed between the interlocutors. It appeared in items such as
8 and 10. For example, a student responding to item 10 said: ‘I’m sorry, but these
things always happen, you know?’

i. 4.2. Offer of apology – This formula was sometimes seen in situations that
involve formal settings, exemplified by items 1 and 3. Item 3 triggered utterances
such as: ‘I owe you an apology, but it turned out that I had an important meeting.’
c. 8. Intensifiers – Similar to the GGs, but the choice of intensifiers varied. This formula was used in almost every situation, always combined with expressions of regret, and rarely with an offer of apology. It appeared in utterances such as, ‘I deeply apologize, I must have gotten the orders mixed up’ (item 4).

d. 4.3. Request for forgiveness – Similar to among the GGs, this formula was used when addressing high-distance hearers, as this formula is more formal. In addition, it is evident in severe situations, such as items 2, 5, and 6. A student responding to item 5 said: ‘Please do excuse me for my delay.’

e. 7. Expressing concern for hearer – Some responses were addressed to the hearer, showing concern when serious damage or insult had occurred. This category appeared in items such as 3, 5, and 6. A student responding to item 3 said: ‘You ok? Sorry to keep you waiting’.

f. 4.2. Offer of apology – This formula was sometimes seen in situations that involve formal settings, such as items 1, 2, 3, and 4. Item 1 triggered utterances, such as ‘I deeply apologize for not bringing the exam.’

g. 3.2. Explicit explanation – Some students seemed to prefer to use this category to convey what had happened truthfully. This formula was used in combination with most other formulas, except for minimizing the degree of the offense. It appeared in items such as 1, 2, 3, and 7. For instance, a participant responding to item 3 said: ‘Sorry, but as a matter of fact, I was swamped with other duties to do.’

h. Claim of denial – This is not an apologetic strategy. Only one respondent chose to say ‘No,’ in item 2, in which he was addressing his university professor.

i. 3.1. Implicit explanation – Some students used this category in situations in which no distance existed between the interlocutors. It appeared in items such as 5, 8, 9, and 10. For example, a student responding to item 9 said: ‘I forgot. Sorry, but anyone could face the same’.

j. 10. Interjection – This category was used by the students, particularly in severe situations. It was used to demonstrate shock, dismay, or other feelings depending on the situation at hand (e.g., sympathy). This category appeared in items such as 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10. For example, a participant responding to item 10 said: ‘Oh, I broke it, sorry.’

k. 2.3. Expression of lack of intent – This formula was used by respondents to demonstrate that what had happened was not deliberate. For instance, a respondent responding to item 2 said: ‘I don’t usually forget things, I am really sorry.’

l. 2.5. Expression of embarrassment – Students expressed that they were
embarrassed at having hurt a close friend. This formula was also seen in item 2 when addressing a university professor. It only appeared in items 2 and 8. A student responding to item 2 said: ‘I feel so stupid sorry; I was supposed to bring it today.’

m. 1.1. Minimising (the degree of the offense) – Students, when using this formula, seemed to minimize the force of offense that had occurred as a means of easing the tension between the interlocutors. This formula appeared in items such as 6, 8 and 10: ‘Oh, that’s really nothing, grow up’ (item 10).

n. 1.2. Querying preconditions – Only two students at private school used this formula of querying preconditions. It appeared in item 5: ‘Buddy, I am not the only guy who forgets meetings.’

o. 6. Promise of forbearance – Some students seemed to prefer to promise the hearer that they would not commit the offense again when damage or harm affected the hearer. It appeared in items 2, 4, 5, and 9. For example, one utterance was as follows: ‘Please forgive me homie, I promise not to forget meetings with you again’ (item 5).

p. 2.6. Explicit acceptance of the blame – Some students, when responding to items 5, 6, and 10, explicitly assumed the responsibility and blame for the harm or offense committed. One of the utterances in response to item 6 was: ‘It is my fault; I’ll pay for that.’

q. 2.4. Expression of self-deficiency – The main strategies (formulas) that involved expression of self-deficiency were items 4 and 5. A student responding to item 4: ‘I am so sorry, I was confused. I’ll bring you the steak instead, on the house’.

r. 5.1. Repair – Students offered to repair or replace what they had damaged at their own expense. This formula appeared in items such as 8 and 10. A student responding to item 10 said: ‘Sorry, I’ll get you another one.’

s. 5.2. Compensation – This only appeared in situation 8 among PGs. The respondents expressed their desire to compensate for the damage occurring to the hearer. ‘This is my umbrella. I want you to take it instead of your broken one’ was among the utterances used.

t. 1.3. Blaming someone else – Some respondents blamed a third party when responding to items 3 and 4. This formula appeared in answers such as ‘I apologize for that; it is the chef’s responsibility’ (item 4).

u. Insulting the hearer (the sufferer) – Only one respondent chose to insult the hearer, which is not considered to be an apologetic strategy, in item 6. The participant responding to item 6 said: ‘Go to hell; it is your fault.’
Table 4 below illustrates how many situations are involved in each apologetic strategy (i.e., in how many situations a certain apologetic strategy was used). For example, we can see that 'offer of repair' was used in five different situations/items. This can help to determine the distribution of strategies among the various situations.

Table 5 below shows the number of situations used for every apologetic strategy as produced by both GGs and PGs. The total number of productions for GGs was 89 apologetic strategies with 123 for PGs, with a ratio of 1:0.43 for the former, and 1:1.32 for the latter.

Each group was treated as a single entity comprised of its collective members. The frequency of recurrence is not in question, i.e., the use of any strategy in any situation by any member of the group was considered participation on behalf of the group in that situation. Therefore, each strategy (or sub-strategy) can have a maximum of 10 inputs, and each group can only have a maximum of 210 occurrences.

The majority of the participants seemed to be aware of each imaginary situation, as they admitted the harm occurring to the hearer, assumed responsibility for the action of the doer, and apologized for what had happened, thus satisfying the felicity conditions of the apology (cf. Austin; Goffman; Bataineh and Bataineh).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Situations In Which A Strategy Was Used</th>
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### Table 4: Number of Situations in Which Apologetic Strategies Were Used by Both Groups (GG and PG). (See Table 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Number of Times Strategies Were Used (Freq.)</th>
<th>Total (Both Groups)</th>
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<td>10</td>
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Table 4: Number of Situations in Which Apologetic Strategies Were Used by Both Groups (GG and PG). (See Table 3)
Table 5: Number of Apologetic Strategies Used by Both Groups (GG and PG). (See Table 4)

In some instances, PG respondents implemented strategies that could not be classified as apologetic. Generally, however, the apologetic strategies used by the participants of this study go hand in hand with the classification of Trosborg, who gives precise details and descriptions for those apologetic strategies. The DCT applied in this study was successful in motivating PG respondents to produce all the apologetic strategies classified by Trosborg using explicit language. However, the same may not be said for GG respondents.

In more intense situations, greater numbers of apologetic strategies were applied, and the use of external modification was also involved. For instance, some results showed that the respondent only used ‘sorry’ in situation 10, as the situation was not as severe as others and took place between siblings, whereas with severe situations, such as situation 6, more strategies were applied, like [m], in the GGs results, in which three strategies were combined.

Bataineh and Bataineh claim that the invocation of God’s name is only found in Arab cultures. In this study, the GG participants were fully exposed to Arab culture, unlike their PG counterparts, who rarely are. Instruction is only delivered in Arabic in governmental schools, and the teaching staff consists exclusively of Arabs. This leaves little opportunity for governmental school students to become exposed to other cultures. Arab culture is the root of Islam, and in Islamic teachings, followers are encouraged to invoke God’s name in both good and bad situations. This is a likely motivation for the fact that only the GGs invoked God’s name.
Furthermore, the utterance ‘I am sorry’ is distinguished in the findings, which echoes Trosborg’s findings. The results also reinforce the fact that in formal settings, people tend to choose ‘Excuse me’ over ‘I am sorry’, which echoes Borkin and Reinhart’s. Moreover, the results reflect Chang’s findings that L2 students with higher proficiency have greater control over their second language and, therefore, they can more easily access the full range of apologetic strategies. This is typified by the fact that PG participants—who, as mentioned above, are taught exclusively in English by native English speakers throughout their education—used more apologetic strategies, gave shorter, more conveyable answers, and used more external modifications on the strategies, thereby reflecting the fact that they have greater control over their L2. The expression of regret, for example, can be seen not only at the beginning of any response by PG participants, but also in the middle and at the end of any response, whereas the GG participants used this expression of regret only at the beginnings of responses.

The results further illustrate that PG participants exhibited more strategies than GGs. PGs used five more strategies than GGs did (1.2, 1.3, 2.4, 2.6, and 5.2), and produced 12 more occurrences. Two non-apologetic strategies were also used by PGs (claim of denial and insulting the hearer). They also gave shorter and more conveyable answers as some combined only two strategies—‘I am sorry I forgot it’ (situation 1), for example, while others produced only one strategy, I’m sorry (situation 10).

GGs always produced longer answers, but these were not always as conveyable. For instance, one student combined five strategies in situation 2: ‘Oh, I am so sorry, actually I forgot it, I promise not to do it again.’ Moreover, GGs exclusively invoked Allah’s name. This group tended to give very detailed answers, as some wrote, ‘Oh, I am sorry, but I didn’t read it yet. I was so busy, but I promise you that I will read it and finish it soon, I only need a couple of days’ (situation 1).

In summary, PG students are more diverse in their use of apologetic strategies than their GG counterparts. This appears to be due to their high proficiency level, as they were exposed to the English language and Western culture from early childhood.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the speech act of apology as used among bilingual students at Kuwait University. It provides an insight into the overall politeness of the speech community, but it cannot be generalized to all bilingual speakers in Kuwait. The paper has shown that GGs exclusively invoked Allah’s name when apologizing. Furthermore, PGs are more diverse in choosing and using apologetic strategies than their GG counterparts. PGs have demonstrated full awareness of the language and culture they were exposed to. This may indicate that those who have been exposed to the English language and culture since childhood have greater access to a wider range
of apologetic strategies in English than do those who are not exposed to that same culture and who cannot utilize them in line with cultural expectations. It also suggests that the greater one’s proficiency in the English language, the greater the ease with which they can understand, carry out, and manipulate the language and implement a greater range of strategies. They will have a higher level of intercultural awareness and are thus better intercultural communicators.

The implications of the findings of the current study lay in the fact that the use of one strategy/response is very much context-specific. It also sheds light into the importance of being exposed to the culture of a language to be able to express oneself adequately and in-line with mainstream socio-linguistic norms. This proves extremely important in applied settings whereby language is being used to achieve efficient, precise, and concise communication. The more severe the offense is, the greater effort one must put in trying to remedy the speech situation and restore harmony. To achieve this, combining multiple strategies has been seen to be a favorable approach by the speakers.

Limitations include not cross-referencing frequency and usage according to gender. The focus here has exclusively been on educational background. Besides, interviews and focus groups could have provided deeper insight into the interplay between situation and strategy utilized, and might very much aid in highlighting cognitive processes via methodological and systematic collection. Lastly, studying not only the strategies but the response strategies from hearers as well could pave the way for new research avenues for studying speech acts in the Kuwaiti context. Non-verbal illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) and non-verbal remedial interchanges are, too, an under-explored field of research in both the Kuwaiti and global contexts.

References


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