

In the Name Of God



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Faculty of Humanities

Department of English Language and Literature

**An Investigation of the Apology Strategies Used by
Persian and Australian Nurses**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in
Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)**

Supervisor: M. Mansouri, Ph.D

Advisor: M. Aliakbari, Ph.D

By: Najme Komesh

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BY
Najme Komesh

THESIS

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ILAM
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

EVALUATED AND APPROVED BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE AS: *Excellent*

M. Mansouri.....M. Mansouri, Ph.D., ASSIST. PROF.
(SUPERVISOR)
D. Akbari.....M. Aliakbary, Ph.D., ASSIST. PROF.
(ADVISOR)
M. Hassraty.....M. Hassraty, Ph.D., ASSIST. PROF.
(EXTERNAL EXAMINER)
R. Khany.....R. Khany, Ph.D., ASSIST. PROF.
(INTERNAL EXAMINER)

January, 2010

Dedicated to my family

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Abstract

This study tries to investigate the similarities and differences in the apology strategies used by Persian and Australian nurses. A total of 200 medical staffs in 2 groups (100 Persian and 100 Australian) with the age range of 20 to 35 were chosen opportunistically from the whole medical staffs in two hospitals. They were from two medical centers (Imam Khomeini Hospital in Karaj, Iran and the Prince Charles Hospital in Brisbane, Australia) and responded to a ten-item questionnaire based on Sugimoto's questionnaire (1997). Some participants left some blanks in answering the items so from each group 20 questionnaires were discarded. The researcher studied 160 questionnaires and tabulated and analyzed the data based on Sugimoto's classification of the strategies which helps us to investigate the strategies and the effect of gender. An in-depth comparison of the use of apology strategies by the Australian and Persian respondents revealed cross-cultural differences in the use of apology strategies. Running Chi-square test revealed that, concerning gender, there is a significant difference between Iranians and Australians in using the apology strategies. The findings of this study are in line with the findings of studies which indicated that apology strategies vary from culture to culture (Shariati and Chamani, in press; Afghari, 2007; Olshtain, 1989; Garcia, 1989; Jung, 1999; Mir, 1992). They accentuated the idea that specifying the differences among the various cultures in apologizing can help the individuals to interact with people from different cultures. The researcher highlights the need to do ample research in the area of apology strategies in different languages. Doing such research can help to clarify the concept

of cultural differences and elaborates on why people are subject to misunderstanding in contexts other than their first language. Accordingly, EFL learners and teachers could grasp cross-cultural differences and utilize them in their teaching and learning English and Persian language.

Key words: Apology strategy, Cross-cultural differences, Speech act, Pragmatics, Politeness, Sociolinguistics

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List of Abbreviations

A.F. = Australian Female

A.F. & M. = Australian Female and Male respondents

A.M. = Australian Male

A.S. = Apology Strategies

CCSARP = Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns

EFL=English as a Foreign Language

IFID =Illocutionary Force Indicating Device

L1= first language

P.F. = Persian Female

P.F.&M. = Persian Female and Male

P.M. = Persian Male

S.R. = Statement of Remorse

Chapter 1
Introduction

1. Introduction

There is a tendency among people to be in a social community. In the social community, apologies or other communication behaviors are influenced by the cultures of the people who use them. Sometimes, when individuals of different cultures interact with each other, the difference in how an apology is used can lead to intercultural miscommunication. Studies of cultural anthropology, pragmatics and communication suggest that the use of apology is a cultural phenomenon (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989). Thus, understanding what occasions require an apology, as well as the form of the apology, is a way through which EFL pedagogy can be strengthened.

Apology strategies are studied in the area of sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Gumperz (1977, 1982), and Bernstein (1973) concluded that pragmatics helps sociolinguistics in some linguistic usages by understanding the deep structure and the process of verbal and interpersonal interactions. Brown and Levinson (1987) asserted that sociolinguistics contributed a lot to pragmatics in the study of speech acts and their uses. These two disciplines carry some commonalities. Studying language in the social context is one of the common features of both disciplines. Koyama (2001) mentioned that there is one type of social-indexical pragmatics that studies power relations and group identities which cannot be studied in structural descriptions, so these domains should be studied in the area of sociolinguistics. Thus apology strategies can be studied in both disciplines.

Learners usually face difficulties in learning another language. Maros (2006) mentioned that the difficulties that learners may face in acquiring the rules of English

social norms originate from the differences in the socio-pragmatic aspects, especially if it is learnt as a foreign language (EFL). Therefore, EFL environment may not be advantageous to the learners because of two important reasons: Being surrounded with their own native language culture and lack of opportunities for the social use of English. Hence, EFL learners in Iran may have the same difficulty in acquiring the rules of English social norms.

Few studies have been done in the field of intercultural communication in different languages in spite of its importance in teaching and learning. This study is conducted on the differences between males and females' apology strategies of Persian nurses in comparison to Australian nurses to provide further implications in the field of English pedagogy. By investigating the apology strategies of Persian and Australian nurses, both males and females, and determining the differences between them, the implication of this research is hoped to be utilized in the field of intercultural communication, and EFL/ESL pedagogy.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

As all human beings are sociable by nature and live in social communities which require the existence of a certain amount of harmony, apologies should be found in all societies, and we would expect universals in terms of how apologies are performed. According to this social harmony, when social norms are impinged by an intentional or unintentional disturbance (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983), apology plays a remedial action (Goffman, 1971). Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that apology is a face-threatening act. They believed that in order for an apology to be performed, the

speaker should admit to having done something wrong. If a speaker is not successful to perform an apology when an infraction has occurred, this threatens the recipient's face and social harmony is not established.

There are differences in the strategies used by the speakers of different languages. Most studies (Meier, 1996; Garcia, 1989; Lipson, 1994) have shown that the relative frequency of strategies differ from one culture to another. However, as apologizing is a social act, and human societies vary greatly in their social organization, there are few studies which discuss Persian apology strategies and fewer that compare them to their Australian counterparts. There is relatively little information at hand about the speech act, in particular apology act, differences between English and Persian. In order to handle this problem, the researcher dealt not only with the tabulation and comparison of the strategies used by two groups, as well as male and female nurses in each group, but the researcher intended to see whether there is any potential and significant differences in the use of these strategies.

The researcher has only found few studies that represent differences in the use of apologies between speakers of English and Persian. There is the assumption that most Persian speakers studying English as a foreign language face difficulty due to the intercultural differences. Knowing that intercultural differences is of great importance in the field of intercultural pragmatics, the researcher tries to embark on the apology strategies used by Persian and Australian nurses as a subgroup of both societies to see if there are any differences in the use of apology strategies by both male and female respondents in each group.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was as follows. On the one hand, the study was considered as a contribution to the learners and teachers of English to see if there were any differences between the apology strategies used by Persian and Australian nurses. Despite the richness of the cross-cultural research into many kinds of speech acts, a few studies have attempted to investigate the issue of apology strategies in Iran and Australia. On the other hand, the issues which shaped the format and the focus of the present study were as follows: First, the present study was to investigate the strategies used by Persian and Australian nurses in apologizing. Second, this study was to investigate the gender differences of apology strategies in each of the above-mentioned languages. Finally, the comparison of the gender differences in apology strategies of both languages was the last issue that would also be embarked on.

The researcher hopes that the findings of the present study can be helpful in English teaching pedagogy in Iran. At the same time, this study tries to promote our knowledge about speech acts in general, and apology strategies in particular in Iran.

1.4. Research Questions

This study tries to investigate the following questions:

1. What apology strategies are used by Persian nurses?
2. What apology strategies are used by Australian nurses?
3. Are there any gender differences in using apology strategies by Persian nurses?

4. Are there any gender differences in using apology strategies by Australian nurses?
5. Are there any differences in using apology strategies between Australian and Persian nurses?

1.5. Significance of the Study

Speech acts, particularly apologizing, are significant among scholars. Different studies (e.g., Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Sugimoto, 1998; Bataineh and Bataineh, 2005; Afghari, 2007) were conducted throughout the world to investigate the ways people apologize and to signify speech acts (e.g. apologizing). In spite of all the developments and investigation in the area of speech act in general and apology act in particular in the world, few studies have investigated the apology strategies used by Australian and Persian nurses. Therefore, the key questions were ‘*What strategies do people draw on to apologize? How do the Persian nurse native speakers apologize compared with their Australian counterparts?*’ Because of poor position of investigations upon apology strategies between Persian and Australian English Speakers and because of the importance of apology in speech act, one of the significances of the current study is to specify the apology strategies utilized in the afore-mentioned languages.

This study was especially significant because it explores the intercultural differences in the area of apology in Persian and English that has not been explored. Better understanding of cross-cultural differences in apology can help individuals to

improve their communicative competence in interacting with others from different cultures. The researcher hopes that the findings of the current investigation help and enrich the field of pragmatics and sociolinguistics in Iran. The study is also hoped to furnish the understanding and production of social acts, in particular apology, when the speech acts are used in appropriate speech community. Iranian teachers can utilize the aforementioned knowledge in teaching speech acts, particularly apology used by Persian and Australian speakers in their teaching EFL pedagogy.

1.6. Definition of Key Terms

Sociolinguistics: is related to the study of the intersection and interaction of language and society which is mainly concerned with an increased and wider description of language which makes it distinct from sociology of language that is concerned with explanation and prediction of language phenomena in society at the group level. Sociology of language is mainly done by social scientists and a few linguists (Paulston and Tucker, 2003).

Pragmatics: is “the systematic study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on, the use of language and it is a rapidly growing field in contemporary linguistics” (Huang, 2007, pp. 1-2).

Speech Act: is defined by Austin (1962) as acts performed by utterances such as making promises which may be a direct or an indirect utterance. They can serve a function (e.g., apologizing) in communication (Hatch and Swan, 1992). Speech act is “an act performed in uttering a linguistic expression (Akmajian, et al., 2001, p. 588).