

On the Use of Apology Strategies by Iranian EFL Learners: Do Gender and Proficiency Level Matter?

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Abstract—The current body of knowledge presents a great emphasize on teaching EFL learners to become pragmatically competent. Despite such an emphasis on pragmatics competence, apology strategies in English and Persian have been ignored. Moreover, it is known that EFL learners' gender and level of proficiency affect the use of these strategies while second language communication. To this purpose, 120 EFL students from State and Azad universities of Zahedan and Zabol were selected (60 males and 60 females). Two instruments were used for collecting data including Oxford Placement Test and Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The participants were divided into three levels (pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate) based on their scores on the placement test, then they received DCT; they were required to provide the L2 equivalents of apology strategies depending on the communication situations. Data were tabulated and analyzed based on Olshtain and Cohen (1983) model. The results of the study showed that the most frequent used apology was IFIDs; (59%), Offer of Repair (15%), taking on Responsibility (8.3%), and Explanation or Account (7.17%). The findings further revealed that male and female respondents differed in the order of the secondary strategies they used. Females were intended to use intensifications twice more than males. Also it has been cleared that level of proficiency is a significant factor in determining the kind of the strategy an individual is intended to use. However the percentage of intensified IFIDs for males were increased by raising the level of proficiency, while decreasing happened for females by raising their level of proficiency.

Index Terms—pragmatic competence, speech act, apology strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence, as a new approach to language teaching, has been broadly acknowledged by applied linguists as a response to inadequacy of linguistics competence theory and structural linguistics (Rodgers & Richards, 2001). Leung (2005) claims that communicative competence comprises of both linguistic competence and pragmatic competence. The main supposition of the communicative competence is that language learners should be linguistically, pragmatically, and socio-pragmatically competent so that they can communicate efficiently (Krasner, 1999). Pragmatics competence as one the constituents of communicative competence has been studied by many researchers. A significant matter within pragmatics which effects communication among the speakers from two dissimilar language backgrounds is speech acts. Apologizing as speech act has been stated to be significant in communication failures or success.

Viewing the related studies on pragmatics and speech act theories, it could be assumed that simple knowledge of any language is not sufficient. For one to communicate one's meaning properly, one should have both the social conventions and knowledge of the language that have an impact on it (Sharifian, 2005).

While a large number of researches done in apology, insufficient research done on apology strategies in Persian (e.g., Shariati and Chamani 2010, Karimnia & Afghari, 2012). The impact of the level of proficiency and gender of the language learners on the use of apology strategies has, to my best of knowledge given, little attention. Therefore, this study is an attempt to shed light on these issues on Iranian EFL learners' apology strategies use.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pragmatic competence is the ability to communicate your proposed message with all its gradations in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended. As serious as this ability is for communication success, it is often not given the emphasis it deserves in the teaching of a second language, with the result that second-language speakers, who absence pragmatic competence, may produce grammatically faultless speech that nonetheless miscarries to achieve its communicative aims (Fraser, 2010). Leech and Thomas categorized pragmatics into two constituents: Pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Pragmalinguistics is the properties for carrying communicative acts and relational on interactive meanings. Leech (1990) described the sociological boundary of pragmatics, mentioning the social insights underlying contributor's clarification and enactment of unrestrained act (p.

10). According to Holms (2001) speech communities vary in gradation of their calculation of social distance and social power distance. Bardovi-Harlig (1996) claims pragmatic instruction can happen in the classroom. Rose and Kasper (2002) consider a variety of studies that verified the efficiency of teaching explicitly.

Bachman (1990) divides 'language competence' into two constituents: 'organizational' and 'pragmatic' competence. Organizational competence is the linguistic knowledge units and the rules that connecting them together at the levels of sentence. and discourse competence. Pragmatic competence has two type named; 'illocutionary ' and 'sociolinguistic' competence.

Utterances do not only cover words and grammar but they also carry actions. The term "speech act" is used to define an action such as apologizing, requesting, refusing, promising, informing, and questioning (Yule, 2006). For instance, if someone says "*I'll be there at six*", the utterance carries the speech act of promising. Allan (1996) splits speech acts into three main kinds: (a) locutionary act, which is embodied in the act of saying an utterance; (b) illocutionary act, which is the acknowledgement of the speaker's utterance, or as Searle (1979) puts it, they are efforts made by the speaker to make the hearer do something. For example, uttering a fact or attitude, confirming or rejecting something, giving advice or permission, requesting, asking, ordering, promising, offering, thanking, greeting, etc.; (c) perlocutionary act, which is the act done by the hearer that is formed by means of saying something, for example the act of closing the door is a perlocutionary act for the locutionary act "*Close the door.*" (Richards & Schmidt 2002, p. 315). Actually, speech acts are categorized in different ways. There is no best classification for them but researchers divide them along with their own findings.

Politeness is one of the notions that is linked directly to speech acts. Brown & Levinson (1987) and Lakoff (1973) deliberate politeness to be a universal notion that is in all languages. According to Lakoff, politeness has three main universal rules: "Don't impose, give options, and be friendly". He shows that only in the way the sequence in which they occur may vary from one language to another. Incidentally, Brown & Levinson (1987) indicate that the 'negative face' refers to one's desire for his actions not to be stopped by anyone while the 'positive face' refers to the situation when people suppose that their needs are accepted and desired by others.

Austin argues that locutionary act is differ from illocutionary act, and consequently the meaning study may remain self-sufficiently, but improved by an illocutionary theory of acts. Mey (2003) mentions that when someone says the sentence like: *It's cold in here*, he says that the weather is cold and nothing else, meanwhile the speaker utilizes locutionary part of competence. Illocutionary part refers to the act completion through words. Perlocutionary part refers to the resulting effect(s) from the statement. For hearer it may mean close up the door. Searle(in Levinson, 1983, p. 240) classifies the action we can do in speaking in five categories: (i) representatives, which force the speaker to the information of uttered offer such as concluding, asserting, etc. (ii) Directives, in which the speaker make the addressee do something such as ;questioning, requesting, etc. (iii) commissives, which obligate the speaker to some approaching sequence of action such as; offering ,threatening, promising. (iv) expressives, which shows the psychological state of utterer such as; apologizing, thanking, congratulating, welcoming (v) declarations, such as; declaring war, excommunicating, , firing from employment, christening.

In line with Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory, a variety of related theories have been emerged for instance, Lakoff's politeness rules (1973), Leech's Politeness Principles (1983) and Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature and Cooperative Principles (1989). The Cooperative Principle (CP) is made of four maxims which consist of quality, quantity, relation and manner (Grice, 1989), and the politeness rules are camaraderie, deference and formality, through two pragmatic competence rules: "be polite" and "be clear" (Lakoff, 1973). Leech constructs his theory of pragmatic and utilizes Politeness Principles which are intended to "minimize (equality of all things) the manifestation of impolite opinions; maximize (equality of all things) the manifestation of polite opinions" (Leech, 1983, p. 81).

The largest speech act study has been the cross-cultural speech act realization project (CCSARP) conducted by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). They focused on requests and apologies in five languages (i.e. Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew, and English) to establish patterns of realization for native speakers', compare speech acts through languages, and establish the similar and different patterns of realization of these acts between NSs and NNSs. The framework used by the CCSARP was replicated in later speech act studies (e.g. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Kasper, 1989) and led to a large body of comparable data from many more languages. Consequently, continuing debate between universality and culture-specificity in speech act realization appeared.

Dispite a variety of studies on apologies in other languages, merely a few researches have been done on apologies by Persian learners of English. Afghari (2007) conducted a study under title of "A socio pragmatic study of apology speech act realization patterns in Persian". He found similarities between Persian and English use of apology strategies. In line with the other western studies, he found that apology strategies in Persian fit with the structure of those findings of scholars like Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, (1984).

Shariati and Chamani (2009) launched a study to explore and describe apology strategies in spoken of Persian language. They scrutinized 500 apology strategy exchanges. The results showed that Persian speakers used the same strategies in speech act set, however they used a demand for forgiveness (bebaxš'id) as IFID more than other apology strategies. Chamani and Zareipour (2010) launched a study to compare and contrast the apology strategies in British English and Persian. They used Persian corpus in order to collect data during one year. It was interesting that in the

British data males offered 46% and received 40% of the apologies while females performed 54% and received 42% of the apologies. Similarly, in the Persian corpus 50% of the apologies were performed by males and 50% by females while 49% of the apologies were directed toward males and 51% toward females. Thus, they concluded that there were no significant gender differences between the two language groups. Chamani and Zareipur (2010) also intended to analyze and contrast apology strategies and the events that motivated apologies in British English and Persian. The analysis demonstrated that hearing offenses in English (31%) and accidents in Persian (27%) elicited the highest rate of apologies. It was also found that both groups used the same apology strategies relatively with the same hierarchy. By focusing on intensifying strategies; Esmaili-Rasekh and Mardani (2010) investigated effectiveness of teaching apology strategies on development of pragmatic competence of EFL Learners. The outcome of the study shown that short, explicit, and interesting dialogues accompanied with illustrations should be apply in classrooms. Esmaili-Rasekh and Mardani (2010) asserted that the EFL learners convey their intensification strategies from L1 to express exaggerated utterances in L2. Farashian and Amirkhiz (2011) carried out a comparative study and analyzed the apology strategies used by Malaysian ESL learners and Iranian EFL in the same apology situations. Results of the study showed certain similarities and differences in terms of frequency and typology of strategies utilized by Iranian and Malaysian students. Shahrokhi and Jan (2012) investigated the apology speech act realization which are used by Iranian male native speakers. They classified and articulate the apology strategies used in their communications in numerous community settings. Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) were the most frequently used strategy in Persian language. The second frequent category of apology strategies among Persian male participants was taking on Responsibility (TOR). Explanation of Situation and Offer of Repair were the third and fourth strategies respectively.

III. METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants of the present study comprised of 120 Iranian undergraduate EFL students majoring in English literature, English Translation, and Teaching English (60 males and 60 females) from Universities in Sistan and Baluchestan province of Iran. They were at age range of 18- 25. At first 120 students were selected through convenience sampling. Then, a placement test was administered to all of them. Based on their scores on the placement, they were divided into three groups: pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate. 40 out of 120 were labeled as pre- intermediate and 40 were labeled intermediate and 40 upper-intermediate.

Procedure

Since this study followed an ex-post facto design to investigate the types of apology strategies which Iranian Language learners use, to identify the relationship between gender and language proficiency of the language learners and the apology strategies which they use, no special treatment was needed. Therefore, after selecting the participants and identifying their level of proficiency through the placement test, they were all required to take the discourse completion test. To this end, the current study was conducted in two consecutive sessions. In the first session, the participants took the proficiency test. In the second session, the participants were divided in three groups based on their performance on proficiency test (pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper- intermediate). Then they answered to the items in DCT. The collected data were analyzed through appropriate statistical procedures.

The data of the present were analyzed in different phases. At first the apology strategies used by the participants were analyzed. In doing so, different classification systems developed for the strategies of apology (Owen, 1983; Meier, 1992; Brown & Attardo, 2000) were reviewed. The data were investigated as stated by Olshtain and Cohen (1983), as well as the coding manual Blum-Kulka et al (1989).

Instruments

Two types of instruments were used in the present study: English proficiency test and Discourse Completion Test. Each is explained in details in the following section.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Overall strategies

Olshtain and Cohen (1983) strategies have been used as the basis of the analysis. Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) was the strategy most frequently used by male and female respondents across the sample. The use of "An expression of regret" was the most frequently strategy (32.2%) utilized by Iranian EFL students. The expression of regret "sorry or I'm sorry" is the most crucial and most frequently used strategy in the apology strategies, which was proved by the results of the current study and numerous studies have done before. (e.g. Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2008; Shahrokhi & Jan, 2010) viewing that it is the most regularly utilized strategy, and consequently is learned earlier. The second sub strategy which participants utilized was "request for forgiveness" strategy. In this study it gained the second position among apology strategies (16.5%). It is a matter of Persian culture which all Farsi speakers extensively use *bebaxšid* 'forgive' as a request for forgiveness (Chamani & Zareipur, 2010).

Table 1 reveals that 'offer of repair' is the third apology strategy that EFL learners tended to use (15%). It is because Iranian are sensitive to observe other people right and like to keep others' belongings safe, as a trustworthy behavior. Therefore if the damage is happened to others' belongings, promote a duty for offender to repair it in addition to

apologize. "An offer of apology" e.g. I apologize, was the fourth strategy (11.3%). All in all ,Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) were the most frequently used apology strategies in compare to other strategies.

TABLE1:
THE OVERALL APOLOGY STRATEGIES USED BY MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS.

Category	NO./Percentage
A. PRIMERY STRATEGIES	////////////////////
(1)Illocutionary Force Indicating Device	////////////////////
a. An expression of regret	461/ 32.1%
b. An offer of apology	163/11.3%
c. A request for forgiveness	238/16.5%
(2)Explanation or Account	103/7.17%
(3)Taking on responsibility	////////////////////
a. Explicit self-blame	9/0.62%
b. Lack of intent	16/1.1%
c. Expression of self-deficiency	55/3.8%
d. Expression of Embarrassment	18/1.2%
e. Self-dispraise	2/0.13%
f. Justify hearer	9/0.62%
g. Refusal to acknowledge guilt	////////////////////
- Denial of responsibility	12/0.83%
- Blame the hearer	0
- Pretend to be offended	0
(4)Concern for the hearer	9/0.62%
(5)Offer of Repair	218/15.1%
(6)Promise of Forbearance	28/1.9%
SECONDRY STRATEGIES	////////////////////
Intensified IFDs	31/2.15%
Hope for forgiveness	13/0.90%
Thanking	33/2.29%
Brushing off incident as not important	10/0.69%
Silence	8/0.55%

In investigating the data, five other minor strategies were found. However four of them (Intensified IFDs, Hope for forgiveness, Thanking, Brushing off incident as not important) were considered as apology strategies by Sigmoto (1997). In addition the participants did not answer some situations properly. They wrote down "I become ashamed and I will say nothing." or "I stay silent, because s/he is my professor". These expressions showed that Iranian EFL students are very respectful to others especially when they are in a high status. Additionally, there is an expression of shame in Persian Language" s'armandam" (Shariati & Chamani, 2012), which does not exist in any so far investigated languages. So when an Iranian student tries to make an appropriate apology, s/he does not have" s'armandam" means: I am ashamed, as an apology strategy in L2, so s/he prefers to act as a polite person in Persian culture and be silent ; show his/her shame by facial expression.

It is worth to say, silence was L1 socio pragmatic strategy, appearing in L2 reproduction, thereby transfer from L1 to L2 was occurred.

Tabulating the data, we believed that the Iranian EFL learners use two or three apologies together. It is because of the feature of Iranian culture; for being more polite Persian speaker should try to use more than one apology strategy. Table 2 illustrated the frequency of combined apology strategies. It shows that "an expression of regret+ Offer of Repair" e. g. "I am sorry, I will repair it for you"(26%), is the most frequently used apology combination. Use of this combination is originated from the Islamic ethic; says "You should compensate the offense to someone's face or damage you caused for her/his belongings". Therefore, Iranian EFL learners do their best to satisfy the offended person by express their regret or apologize in addition to remedy the offense and compensate the damage they caused.

An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency (10.7%) was the second strategy combination used mostly by participants. Again, it is because of the cultural feature of Iranian families. In Iran most families construct based of the power of father as the head or the manager of the family, so all members of the family, especially children, should respect and obey father and also should be responsible in front of him; if they commit an offense or do wrong thing. Therefore, accepting the responsibility and expressing of self-deficiency is easier for Iranian people than other nationalities.

TABLE2:
OVERALL COMBINATION USE OF APOLOGY STRATEGIES (MALE AND FEMALE)

Category	NO./percentage
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency	11/7.3%
A request for forgiveness+ An offer of apology	14/9.3%
An expression of regret+ Explanation or Account	9/6.0%
A request for forgiveness+Offer of Repair	15/10.0%
A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair+ Intensified IFDs	2/1.3%
A request for forgiveness+ Explanation or Account	3/2.01%
An expression of regret+ Offer of Repair	40/26.8%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency	16/10.7%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Promise of Forbearance	3/2.01%
Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	3/2.01%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-blame	3/2.01%
An expression of regret+ Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	6/4.02%
An offer of apology+ Offer of Repair	10/6.7%
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Offer of Repair	5/6.0%
A request for forgiveness + Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	4/2.6
An expression of regret+ Self-dispraise	3/2.01%
An expression of regret+ Denial of responsibility	2/1.3%

A request for forgiveness+Offer of Repair (10%) is the third most utilized combined strategies, which is categorically so similar to the first combined apology strategy, encompasses all provided explanations.

Male used apology strategies

Single strategies

According to table 3 Iranian male EFL learners utilize the following strategies mostly: An expression of regret, a request for forgiveness, offer of Repair, an offer of apology, explanation or account (17.9%, 15.5%, 14.4%, 10.6%, 7.4% respectively).

TABLE3:
MALE USED STRATEGIES

Category	NO./Percentage
A. PRIMERY STRATEGIES	////////////////////////////////////
(1)Illocutionary Force Indicating Device	////////////////////////////////////
a. An expression of regret	210/ 27.9%
b. An offer of apology	80/10.6%
c. A request for forgiveness	117/15.5%
(2)Explanation or Account	56/7.4%
(3)Taking on responsibility	////////////////////////////////////
a. Explicit self-blame	5/0.66%
b. Lack of intent	5/0.66%
c. Expression of self-deficiency	29/3.8%
d. Expression of Embarrassment	5/0.66%
e. Self-dispraise	0
f. Justify hearer	0
g. Refusal to acknowledge guilt	////////////////////////////////////
- Denial of responsibility	7/0.93%
- Blame the hearer	0
- Pretend to be offended	0
(4)Concern for the hearer	9/1.1%
(5)Offer of Repair	109/14.4%
(6)Promise of Forbearance	16/2.1%
SECONDRY STRATEGIES	////////////////////////////////////
Intensified IFDs	7/.93%
Hope for forgiveness	12/1.5%
Thanking	12/2.9%
Brushing off incident as not important	3/0.39%
Silence	6/0.79%

Combined strategies

Table 4 shows different strategies and their frequency used by Iranian male EFL learners. an expression of regret + offer of repair (26%), a request for forgiveness+offer of repair (14.6%), a request for forgiveness + an offer of apology (12.1%), an expression of regret+ expression of self-deficiency(10.9%).

TABLE4:
MALE COMBINED STRATEGY

Category	NO./percentage
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency	6/7.3%
A request for forgiveness+ An offer of apology	10/12.1%
An expression of regret+ Explanation or Account	6/7.3%
A request for forgiveness+Offer of Repair	12/14.6%
A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair+ Intensified IFDs	0
A request for forgiveness+ Explanation or Account	2/2.4%
An expression of regret+ Offer of Repair	22/26.8%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency	9/10.9%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Promise of Forbearance	0/2.4%
Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	0
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-blame	2/2.4%
An expression of regret+ Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	2/0.30%
An offer of apology+ Offer of Repair	0
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Offer of Repair	5/6.0%
A request for forgiveness + Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	0
An expression of regret+ Self-dispraise	0
An expression of regret+ Denial of responsibility	0

Female used apology strategies

Single strategies

Observing table 5 reveals that the most frequently apology strategies Iranian females use are the same to males. The most highly used apology strategies are: an expression of regret (37.9%), offer of repair (16.4), an offer of apology (12.5%), and a request for forgiveness (10.1%).

TABLE5:
FEMALE USED APOLOGY STRATEGIES (SINGLE APPLICATION)

Category	NO./percentage
A. PRIMERY STRATEGIES	////////////////////////////////////
(1)Illocutionary Force Indicating Device	////////////////////////////////////
a. An expression of regret	251/ 37.9%
b. An offer of apology	83/12.5%
c. A request for forgiveness	67/10.1%
(2)Explanation or Account	47/7.1%
(3)Taking on responsibility	////////////////////////////////////
a. Explicit self-blame	5/0.75%
b. Lack of intent	11/1.6%
c. Expression of self-deficiency	21/3.1%
d. Expression of Embarrassment	13/1.9%
e. Self-dispraise	2/0.30%
f. Justify hearer	0
g. Refusal to acknowledge guilt	////////////////////////////////////
- Denial of responsibility	5/0.75%
- Blame the hearer	0
- Pretend to be offended	0
(4)Concern for the hearer	0
(5)Offer of Repair	109/16.4%
(6)Promise of Forbearance	12/1.8%
SECONDRY STRATEGIES	////////////////////////////////////
Intensified IFDs	17/2.5%
Hope for forgiveness	1/0.15%
Thanking	11/1.6%
Brushing off incident as not important	4/0.60%
Silence	2/0.30%

Female combined strategies

Table 6 shows that most Iranian females who utilized combined strategies are intended to apply "An expression of regret + Offer of Repair (30.7%)" e.g. I 'm sorry I will buy another one for you ,while "An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency (15.3%)" e. g. I am sorry, it's my fault, stands at the second position of application. An expression of regret+ A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair (7.6%) e. g. Sorry ,please forgive me, I will pay all cost of repairing it; which is a triple strategy, is the third strategy applied by females.

TABLE6:
FEMALE COMBINED APOLOGY STRATEGIES

Category	NO./percentage
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency	1/1.9%
A request for forgiveness+ An offer of apology	3/ 5.7%
An expression of regret+ Explanation or Account	1/1.9%
A request for forgiveness+Offer of Repair	2/3.8%
A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair+ Intensified IFDs	1/1.9%
A request for forgiveness+ Explanation or Account	3/ 5.7%
An expression of regret+ Offer of Repair	16/30.7%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency	8/15.3%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Promise of Forbearance	0
Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	2/3.8%
An expression of regret+ Explicit self-blame	2/3.8%
An expression of regret+ A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair	4/7.6%
An offer of apology+ Offer of Repair	2/3.8%
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Offer of Repair	0
A request for forgiveness + Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	2/3.8%
An expression of regret+ Self-dispraise	2/3.8%
An expression of regret+ Denial of responsibility	2/3.8%

Comparing table 3 and table 5, we can observe some similarity and differences between males and females in adopting the proper strategies. The first strategy both groups use (male: 17%, female: 37%) is the Expression of Regret, but female use it more than males. A Request for Forgiveness (15%) is the second strategy for males while it is the fourth one (10%). The third apology for men is Offer of Repair but for women it appears as the second apology strategies. An Offer of Apology is the fourth strategy attracts males but for females it is the third one. The other similarity between male and female use of apology is applying Explanation or Account as the fifth strategy.

Scrutinizing the secondary strategies, researcher finds that the first three strategies for males respectively are Thanking (2.9%), Hope for forgiveness (1.5%),and Intensified IFIDs (0.93%); and for females are Intensified IFIDs (2.5%), Thanking (1.6%), Brushing off incident as not important(0.60%).

Table4 and table 6 provide us with a comparison between males and females combined strategies. The most frequently used strategies for males are: An expression of regret+ Offer of Repair (26.8%), A request for forgiveness+Offer of Repair (14.6%), An Expression of Regret+ Explanation or Account (12.1%), An expression of regret + Expression of self-deficiency (10.9%),while the following strategies have no attraction to apply by males: A request for forgiveness + Offer of Repair+ Intensified IFDs, Explanation or Account + Offer of Repair, A request for forgiveness + Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair, An expression of regret + Denial of responsibility.

For males, the first utilized combined strategy is the combination of An Expression of Regret+ Offer of Repair (30%); while the second, third, and fourth common combined strategies among females are: An expression of regret + Expression of self-deficiency (15.3), An Expression of Regret+ A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair (7.6%), A request for forgiveness+ Explanation or Account (5.5%). Females do not use two apology strategies; An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Promise of Forbearance and A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Offer of Repair.

In Iran, using an appropriate apology strategy as a matter of politeness is crucial. So a man should be polite enough to attract his prospective wife, and also a young lady needs to decorate her personality with a charming way of welcoming and apologizing. The most frequent apology strategy which Persian speakers are intended to apply is" bebaxs'id" (Afghari, 2007; Shariati & Chamani, 2009) in every situation even they do not commit a serious mistake. Expressing regret, requesting forgiveness, offer of repair, and intensified IFIDs are the strategies which show the fitness of the behavior of wrong dower for saving the face of the other person. Observing the above assumptions, the researcher concludes that both male and female use nearly the same apology strategies, but females are little more polite than males because of the application of intensified IFIDs. Applying the IFIDs, females have an opportunity to be sure that the remedy of the committed offense is done correctly. Therefore, gender is assumed as a significant variable.

Level of proficiency and apology strategies

TABLE7:
MALE USE OF SINGLE APOLOGY STRATEGIES ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY

Category	Pre-intermediate	Intermediate	Upper intermediate
A. PRIMERY STRATEGIES	No./Percentage	No./Percentage	No./Percentage
(1)Illocutionary Force Indicating Device	//////	//////	//////
a. An expression of regret	68/26.3%	85/29.4%	57/27%
b. An offer of apology	12/4.6%	32/11.0%	36/17.06%
c. A request for forgiveness	96/37.2%	47/16.2%	28/13.2%
(2)Explanation or Account	12/4.6%	27/9.3%	17/8.05%
(3)Taking on responsibility	//////	//////	//////
a. Explicit self-blame	0	5/1.7 %	0
b. Lack of intent	0	2/0.6%	3/1.42%
c. Expression of self-deficiency	4/1.5%	15/5.1%	8/3.7%
d. Expression of Embarrassment	0	2/0.6%	3/1.42%
e. Self-dispraise	0	0	0
f. Justify hearer	0	0	0
g. Refusal to acknowledge guilt	//////	//////	//////
- Denial of responsibility	4/1.5%	0	3/1.42%
- Blame the hearer	0	0	0
- Pretend to be offended	0	0	0
(4)Concern for the hearer	3/1.1%	2/0.6%	4/1.8
(5)Offer of Repair	28/10.8%	50/17.3%	31/14.02%
(6)Promise of Forbearance	8/3.1%	5/1.7%	
SECONDRY STRATEGIES	//////	//////	//////
Intensified IFDs	0	3/1.03%	9/4.07%
Hope for forgiveness	4/1.5%	5/1.7%	3/1.42%
Thanking	12/4.6%	7/2.4%	3/1.42%
Brushing off incident as not important	3/1.1%	3/1.03%	3/1.42%
Silence	3/1.1%	2/0.6%	0

Table7shows that the most frequent apology strategies, use by pre-intermediate males are: A request for forgiveness (37.2%). An expression of regret (26.3%), Offer of Repair (10.8%), while intermediates use An expression of regret (29.4%), Offer of Repair (17.3%), A request for forgiveness (16.2%).Finally upper-intermediates use An expression of regret (27%), An Offer of Apology (17.06), Offer of Repair (14.02%).

In secondary strategies, the first strategy adopted by pre-intermediates and also intermediates is thanking, respectively 4.6 and 2.4 percent. Contrastively, male upper –intermediates are intended to use Intensified IFDs (4.6%), while male pre-intermediates do not use Intensified IFDs at all and for intermediates it is only one percent.

TABLE8:
MALE USE OF COMBINED APOLOGY STRATEGY ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY

Category	Intermediate	Pre-intermediate	Upper-intermediate
//////	No./Percentage	No./Percentage	No./Percentage
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency	6/15.7%	0	2/20%
A request for forgiveness+ An offer of apology	6/15.7%	4/9.09%	0
An expression of regret+ Explanation or Account	0	6/13.6%	0
A request for forgiveness+Offer of Repair	10/26.3%	2/4.5%	10/10%
A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair+ Intensified IFDs	0	0	10/10%
A request for forgiveness+ Explanation or Account	0	2/4.5%	0
An expression of regret+ Offer of Repair	9/23.4%	12/27.2%	10/10%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency	3/7.8%	6/13.6%	0
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Promise of Forbearance	0	2/4.5%	0
Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	0	0	0
An expression of regret+ Explicit self-blame	0	0	0
An expression of regret+ A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair	0	2/4.5%	20/20%
An offer of apology+ Offer of Repair	3/7.8%	4/9.09%	10/10%
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Offer of Repair	0	4/9.09%	10/10%
A request for forgiveness + Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	0	0	10/10%
An expression of regret+ Self-dispraise	0	0	0
An expression of regret+- Denial of responsibility	0	0	0

Table 8 shows the first and second apology strategies for pre-intermediates are A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair (26.3%), An expression of regret + Offer of Repair (23.6%), for pre- intermediates An expression of regret+ Offer of Repair (23.6%) and An expression of regret+ Explanation or Account (13.6%), but male upper-intermediate utilize A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency (20%) and An expression of regret + A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair (20%).

TABLE9:
FEMALE USE OF SINGLE APOLOGY STRATEGY ACCORDING LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY

Category	Pre-intermediate No./Percentage	Intermediate No./Percentage	Upper intermediate No./Percentage
A. PRIMERY STRATEGIES			
(1)Illocutionary Force Indicating Device	////////////////////	////////////////////	////////////////////
a. An expression of regret	80/40%	73/35.2%	98/36.4%
b. An offer of apology	20/10.2%	31/14.95	32/11.8%
c. A request for forgiveness	17/8.6%	27/13.04%	23/8.5%
(2)Explanation or Account	17/8.6%	12/5.7%	18/6.6%
(3)Taking on responsibility	////////////////////	////////////////////	////////////////////
a. Explicit self-blame	2/1.02%	0	3/1.1%
b. Lack of intent	4/2.04%	0	7/2.6%
c. Expression of self-deficiency	4/2.04%	10/4.8%	7/2.6%
d. Expression of Embarrassment	7/3.5%	3/1.4%	3/1.1%
e. Self-dispraise	0	0	2/0.74%
f. Justify hearer	0	0	9/3.3%
g. Refusal to acknowledge guilt	////////////////////	////////////////////	////////////////////
- Denial of responsibility	2/1.02%	1/0.4%	2/0.74%
- Blame the hearer	0	0	0
- Pretend to be offended	0	0	0
(4)Concern for the hearer	0	0	0
(5)Offer of Repair	27/13.7%	33/15.9%	49/18.25%
(6)Promise of Forbearance	4/2.04%	3/1.4%	5/1.8%
SECONDRY STRATEGIES	////////////////////	////////////////////	////////////////////
Intensified IFDs	9/4.5%	5/2.4%	5/1.8%
Hope for forgiveness	0	1/0.4%	0
Thanking	3/1.5%	5/2.4%	3/1.1%
Brushing off incident as not important	3/1.5%	1/0.4%	3/1.1%
Silence	0	2/0.8%	0

A single glance at the table 9 shows us that the first and the second most frequent utilized strategies by all three levels are an expression of regret and An offer of apology. Intensified IFDs has the most attraction for females in all levels of proficiency, but its percentage is lessening from pre-intermediates to upper intermediates. This means that females lose their polite behavior when they become educated.

TABLE10:
FEMALE USE OF COMBINED APOLOGY STRATEGY ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY

Category	Intermediate No./Percentage	Pre-intermediate No./Percentage	Upper-intermediate No./Percentage
////////////////////	No./Percentage	No./Percentage	No./Percentage
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency	1/12.5%	1/4.3%	1/4.3%
A request for forgiveness+ An offer of apology	1/12.5%	1/4.3%	2/8.6%
An expression of regret+ Explanation or Account	2/25.00%	1/4.3%	0
A request for forgiveness+Offer of Repair	0	2/8.6%	0
A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair+ Intensified IFDs	0	1/4.3%	0
A request for forgiveness+ Explanation or Account	0	1/4.3%	0
An expression of regret+ Offer of Repair	1/12.5%	3/13.04%	11/47.8%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency	2/25.00%	3/13.04%	2/8.6%
An expression of regret+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Promise of Forbearance	0	1/4.3%	0
Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	0	1/4.3%	2/8.6%
An expression of regret+ Explicit self-blame	0	1/4.3%	2/8.6%
An expression of regret+ A request for forgiveness+ Offer of Repair	0	2/8.6%	0
An offer of apology+ Offer of Repair	0	1/4.3%	0
A request for forgiveness+ Expression of self-deficiency+ Offer of Repair	0	1/4.3%	0
A request for forgiveness + Explanation or Account+ Offer of Repair	1/12.5%	1/4.3%	0
An expression of regret+ Self-dispraise	0	1/4.3%	2/8.6%
An expression of regret+ Denial of responsibility	0	1/4.3%	1/4.3%

As table 10 shows Iranian females in all level of proficiency are intended to express their regret and then try to compensate the damage they caused.

Tables 7, 8, 9, and 10 provide us with data which make it possible to compare males and females use of apology strategies based on their level of proficiency. All participants eagerly use the IFIDs as their first apology strategy .This show that Iranian speakers are polite accepted of their gender and level of proficiency level. Male use of secondary strategies reveals that the upper-intermediates are intended to use intensified IFIDs, so they are more polite than the pre-intermediates and intermediates. Therefore, we imply that educated men are more polite than others.

Males, by increasing the level of proficiency, do not use silence as an apology strategy and try to speak and apply the other strategies. This shows educated male's benefit by the stronger self-confidence in comparison than less educated males or even educated females. Pre-intermediate females' higher percentage use of "Explanation or Account" shows

that less educated females are more talkative than males and females. So, this belief that women are more talkative than man is approved.

In line with Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani (2010), Iranians want to show a positive self- image of themselves through an over use of intensifiers in their apology, tables 7 and 9 show confirm it. However the percentage of intensified IFIDs for males are increasing by raising the level of proficiency, while decreasing happens for females by rising their level of proficiency. Therefore we can imply; educated men are more polite than less educated men and less or well educated women. The level of proficiency has no role for males in utilizing the intensified IFIDs, so more proficient lady, more impolite behavior is supposed to commit.

TABLE1
OVERALL APOLOGY STRATEGIES USED BY IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

Category	NO./Percentage					
	Male			Female		
A. PRIMERY STRATEGIES	Level of Proficiency			Level of Proficiency		
(1)Illocutionary Force Indicating Device	Pre-int.	Intermediate	Upper-int.	Pre-int.	Intermediate	Uper-int
a. An expression of regret	68/26.3%	85/29.4%	57/27%	80/40%	73/35.2%	98/36.4%
b. An offer of apology	12/4.6%	32/11.0%	36/17.06%	20/10.2%	31/14.95	32/11.8%
c. A request for forgiveness	96/37.2%	47/16.2%	28/13.2%	17/8.6%	27/13.04%	23/8.5%
(2)Explanation or Account	12/4.6%	27/9.3%	17/8.05%	17/8.6%	12/5.7%	18/6.6%
(3)Taking on responsibility	////////	////////	////////	////////	////////	////////
a. Explicit self-blame	0	5/1.7 %	0	2/1.02%	0	3/1.1%
b. Lack of intent	0	2/0.6%	3/1.42%	4/2.04%	0	3/1.1%
c. Expression of self-deficiency	4/1.5%	15/5.1%	8/3.7%	4/2.04%	10/4.8%	3/1.1%
d. Expression of Embarrassment	0	2/0.6%	3/1.42%	7/3.5%	3/1.4%	3/1.1%
e. Self-dispraise	0	0	0	0	0	2/0.74%
f. Justify hearer	0	0	0	0	0	9/3.3%
g. Refusal to acknowledge guilt	////////	////////	////////	////////	////////	////////
- Denial of responsibility	4/1.5%	0	0	2/1.02%	1/0.4%	2/0.74%
- Blame the hearer	0	0	0	0	0	0
- Pretend to be offended	0	0	3/1.42%	0	0	0
(4)Concern for the hearer	3/1.1%	2/0.6%	4/1.8	0	0	0
(5)Offer of Repair	28/10.8%	50/17.3%	31/14.02%	27/13.7%	33/15.9%	49/18.25%
(6)Promise of Forbearance	8/3.1%	5/1.7%	3/1.42%	4/2.04%	3/1.4%	5/1.8%
SECONDRY STRATEGIES	////////	////////	////////	////////	////////	////////
Intensified IFDs	0	5/1.7%	9/4.07%	9/4.5%	5/2.4%	5/1.8%
Hope for forgiveness	4/1.5%	3/1.03%	3/1.42%	0	1/0.4%	0
Thanking	12/4.6%	7/2.4%	3/1.42%	3/1.5%	1/0.4%	3/1.1%
Brushing off incident as not important	3/1.1%	3/1.03%	3/1.42%	3/1.5%	1/0.4%	3/1.1%
Silence	4/1.1%	2/0.6%	3/1.42%	0	2.08%	0

A compressed data are presented in table11 which clearly shows and justifies all the above findings.

V. CONCLUSION

This study was an attempt to investigate a) the realizations of EFL Iranian learners apology strategies, b) the relationship between EFL learners gender and apology strategies, and c) the effect of level of proficiency and apology strategies they adopt.

The most frequent used apologies were IFIDs; over 59 percent of male and females used this category. However among the IFIDs sub categories the expression of regret was the most frequent one (32%), request for forgiveness(16%) offer of apology (11%) and were the second and third sub strategies. Offer of Repair was the second primary strategy (15%) which participant of this study utilized.

Taking on responsibility (8.3%), and Explanation or Account (7.17%) were the third and fourth primary apologies Persian speaker adopted. The first four apology strategies show that Persian speaker use first apology strategy (IFIDs) the same as the English speakers use. Under the effect of Islamic ethical rules, Iranians try to observe others' rights and intended to repair the damages they caused or recover the offence they committed, that's why they apply Offer of Repair as the second primary strategy.

Although, Iranians use all the strategies are presented in Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka et al.(1989), they rarely use Denial of responsibility, and also they never use Pretend to be Offended as two sub strategies of Taking on responsibility. The application of these strategy consider as impolite behavior in Iranian culture.

In line with Sigmoto (1997); Intensified IFDs, Hope for forgiveness, Thanking, Brushing off incident as not important were the secondary strategies used by participant of this study. Additionally, they apply another strategy which the researcher labeled it as "Silence". One respectful way in Iranian culture is try to compensate damage and be silent in front of the face –threatened person especially if s/he was at the higher position or older than offender.

Intensification is other most valuable factor in Iranian culture; more intensifier users are assumed more polite person. So, Intensified IFDs were used as a tool to enrich apology act as an acceptable and effective act.

One of criteria for being polite is application of Request for forgiveness, "Excuse me" or what Iranian utter as "bebaxšid". In this criterion there was no difference between males and females. The other criterion is intensification of IFIDs. Assessing the apology strategies based on this criterion, we recognized that gender can be significant; because female used intensification over two times than male. So it should be concluded that females are more polite than males.

Findings of this study showed that proficient person was a more suitable selector of apology strategies. Under the effect of L1, they used more intensifications and reparations as face saving act in Persian. Different percentages of utilizing apology strategies among different levels of proficiency were a sign to confirm the role of proficiency in determining the proper apology strategy.

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