



## The Realization of Apology Strategies: A Comparative Study between Moroccan EFL Learners and Native Speakers of English

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**Abstract**

*Pragmatic competence, generally defined as the study of language in its social context, has been part and parcel of language learning and teaching. Oftentimes, second language learners tend to fall short in expressing themselves in spite of their linguistic competence. Second language pragmatic research has shown that the greater the difference between cultures, the greater the likelihood of pragmatic failure among non-native speakers of English. With this in mind, this study aims at comparing the similarities and differences between Moroccan University Learners of English (MLE) and Native Speakers of English (NSE) apology strategies in order to identify and predict aspect of language use which are likely to create intercultural communication breakdowns among the two cultures, thus contributing to foreign language education. Henceforth, using a discourse completion task, data was elicited from 50 MLE and 50 NSE, who responded to 8 apology situations. Results showed that the most frequent strategy used for both groups is the explicit Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID); however, the two groups differ in the frequency of other implicit apology strategies.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's significant problem facing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students is communication, particularly pragmatic weakness (Blum-Kulka & Kasper, 1993; Alrefaee et). When learners are unaware of cultural differences, they frequently struggle with learning the English language. Similarly, learners who pursue their studies in a foreign environment—as is the situation in Morocco, where English is regarded as a foreign language—tend to have substantially higher levels of language learning anxiety than their peers due to the lack of communication opportunities. In light of this, Jassim and Nimehchisalem (2016) assert that

“Arab EFL students encounter a problem in using the speech act of apology, especially when communicating in the target language either at formal or informal levels” (p. 117). For this reason, the use of speech acts by second-language learners has received much attention in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics (Prachanant, 2016).

In this respect, several studies have investigated speech acts across languages and cultures (Trosborg, 1995; Blum-Kulka & Kasper, 1989; Olshtain, 1989; Matsumutto, 1989; Mao, 1994; Gu, 1990; Kerouad, 2001; Al-Zumor, 2011; Salehi, 2014; Hazhar et al., 2021.) and the speech act of apologizing is no exception. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, very few (e.g., Ezzaoua, 2020) investigated apology performance, especially in the Moroccan context. For this reason, by conducting a comparative study between Moroccan university learners and native speakers of English, this study will, first, add to the existing theoretical knowledge regarding the universality and variability of speech acts and, second, it will contribute to the development of a model which comprises Moroccan speech acts strategy set and thus benefit second and foreign language education.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Pragmatic competence has been given many definitions. For instance, Paltridge (2006) defines pragmatic competence as “what people mean by what they say, rather than what words in their most literal sense might mean by themselves” (p. 3). Thomas (1983, p. 92) considers it “the ability to use language effectively to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context”. Common in both definitions is the emphasis on context, which interlocutors need to analyze to understand, in Austin’s (1962) terms, the illocutionary force of the utterance—the intended meaning. Hence, failing to analyze the context of the utterance may lead to pragmatic failure, eventually resulting in communication breakdowns among interlocutors, particularly in intercultural encounters.

In addition to the aforementioned pragmatic definitions, Leech’s (1983) pragmatic competence model offers a much clearer definition. According to him, pragmatically competent requires two types of competencies: “pragma-linguistic” and “socio-pragmatic” competence. He defined the former as “the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions” and the latter as “the sociological interface of pragmatics” (Leech, 1983, pp. 10-11). That is to say that while pragma-linguistic competence refers to the knowledge of the linguistic resources, including linguistic rules, available in a particular language, socio-pragmatics is concerned with the social aspect of language; the ability to understand and apply this knowledge appropriately in various contexts.

Since second language (L2) learners are still learning the pragmatic norms of their L2 and the pertinent background information, they find it challenging to infer the intended meaning of a given utterance while simultaneously reconciling this with their current first language (L1) and cultural norms (Schauer, 2009). As a result, cross-cultural misunderstandings often arise, which lead to, as Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) assert, cultural or ethnic stereotypes, which make from pragmatic competence a prerequisite for foreign language learners. In order to avoid such cultural misunderstandings, Benattabou (2020) contends that EFL students must develop not only their ability to construct grammatically correct sentences but also their ability to produce and comprehend a wide range of cultural conventions and norms when engaging in a variety of communicative speech acts.

One of the underlining principles of pragmatic competence is speech acts which are the smallest communication units (Searle, 1969). For cross-cultural comparison purposes, researchers have investigated pragmatics through the study of speech acts (Searle, 1969; Austin, 1962) which might include thanking, requesting and ordering, complementing, complaining, greeting, apologizing and so forth. The study under investigation takes the speech

act of apology as the unit of analysis for MLE and NSE cross-cultural comparison. In this respect, Bergman and Kasper (1993) define an apology as a “compensatory action to an offence in the doing of which S (the speaker) was causally involved and which is costly to H (the hearer)” (as cited in Ezzaoua, 2020, p. 3) and in which the speaker makes an effort to “restore the hearer's face” (Brown & Levinson, 1978). As such, an apology is seen as face-saving for the hearer and face-threatening for the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1978). In the same vein, by apologizing, “the speaker recognizes that a violation of a social norm has been committed and admits to the fact that s/he is at least partially involved in its cause” (Blum-kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 206). The pragmatists state that at least three prerequisites must be met before an apology can be made. The X below refers to the violation of the offence and (S) to the Speaker:

- a. S did X or abstained from doing X (or is about to do it).
- b. X is perceived by S only, by H only, by both S and H, or by a third party as a breach of a social norm.
- c. X is perceived by at least one of the parties involved as offending, harming, or affecting H in the same way.

(p. 206)

Added to the criteria as mentioned above, Blum-Kulka and Olshtein (1984) and Blum-Kulka and Kasper (1993) produced some important theoretical frameworks concerning apology classification. The common principle in these classifications is that an apology can be performed either “directly utilizing an explicit apology utilizing one of the verbs directly signalling apology (apologize, be sorry, excuse, etc.), or it can be done indirectly by taking on responsibility or giving explanations” (Trosborg, 1994, p. 376). To exemplify, the apologizer may express their regret in one of these two ways. First, s/he may utilize an “illocutionary force indicating device” (IFID) to carry out the action. This device “selects a routinized, formulaic statement of regret (a performative verb) such as: (be) sorry; apologize; regret; excuse, etc” (Blum-Kulka & Olshtein, 1984, p. 206). Second, the researchers argued that mentioning one of the following parts can also satisfy an apology: (a) the reason for X; (b) S's accountability for X; (c) S's readiness to make amends for X or vow forbearance (that X will never happen again). In summary, along with IFIDs, there are four additional ways that can be used to execute the speech act of apologizing.

The current study adopts Blum-Kulka and Kasper's (1993) classification and is adapted to suit the study under investigation. The classification is divided into five main categories:

1. IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device), specifying the force of apology (I'm sorry, I'm afraid)
2. Upgraders: they include,
  - a. Element increasing apologetic force (I'm terribly sorry, I really didn't mean to hurt you),
  - b. Taking on Responsibility in which the speaker admits the offence, including self-blame (how stupid of me).
3. Downgrading Responsibility or Severity of offence: this includes,
  - utterance reducing the speaker's accountability for the offence, such as:
    - a. Excuse (My watch had stopped),
    - b. Justification (I was suddenly called to a meeting),
    - c. Claiming ignorance (I didn't know you were expecting me),
    - d. Problematizing a precondition (we weren't supposed to meet before 12:00),
    - e. Denial (I didn't do it), or
  - Utterance reducing the severity of the offence (I'm only 10 minutes late)
4. Offer of Repair: offering a remedy to the damage inflicted on the offended party by an

action to reconstitute H's prerogatives (I'll pay for it, I'll have it marked tomorrow)

5. Verbal Redress: this strategy includes

- a. Showing concern for the offended (I hope you weren't offended),
- b. Efforts to appease (let me buy you a drink) or
- c. Promising of forbearance (it won't happen again).

(p.

94)

### **2.1.Previous Research**

The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), established by Blum-Kulka and Kasper (1989), was one of the most significant studies on cross-cultural variation in apologies. Eight languages and varieties, including Australian, American, and British English, Canadian French, Hebrew, Danish, German, and Russian, were contrasted and compared to conduct the project.

Replicating Blum-Kulka and Kasper's (1989) project, Olshtain (1989) contrasted the realization patterns of apologies in Hebrew, Australian English, Canadian French, and German. One of the study's most significant results is that these languages all have access to the same kinds of strategies. In all of the scenarios offered in the Discourse Completion Task, the four languages have shown commonalities in their choice of IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device) phrases and expressions of responsibility. Olshtain (1989) concludes that various languages will perform apologies in comparable ways given the same social variables, the same contextual aspects, and the same level of offence.

However, there are still disparities when it comes to other eastern countries. For instance, Japanese speakers were found to use the word "I'm sorry" far more frequently than Americans, both in their L1 and English (Beebe-Takahashi, 1989, p. 105). This result is consistent with a finding by Rintell and Mitchell (1989; as cited in Trosberg, 1994, p. 405), who describe how a Japanese businessman irritates an American colleague by constantly apologizing for a late report, instead of providing clear answers and solutions to the problem.

Similarly, to ascertain how much the realizations of the speech act of apology are similar or different among the participants, Salehi (2014) examined apology strategies employed by 21 Iranian EFL learners and 15 English native speakers in various social contexts. In contrast to what was previously discovered, the results showed some commonalities and few variations in terms of the frequency and kind of techniques employed by the participants in those situations.

In addition to Salehi (2014), Al-Zumor (2011) examined apology strategies in Arab English learners studying in India across various social contexts. The apologies of Arab learners were then contrasted to those of English speakers from India, the United States, and Great Britain. Results revealed religious and cultural specificities. Many of the differences between Arabic language learners and native English speakers were predicted by their religious views, concepts, and values. Additionally, English native speakers use more formulaic verbal redress or promises of repair, whereas Arab English learners frequently use responsibility strategies. However, significant similarities between Indian and Arab English learners were discovered concerning the choice of arranging apologetic patterns, which Al-Zumor (2011) interpreted as the result of some cultural commonalities.

More recently, in the Moroccan context, Ezzaoua (2020) explored the apology strategies of Moroccan learners of English, American English, and Moroccan Arabic speakers. Using a discourse completion task, the performance of Moroccan EFL students was examined to determine how their strategy choices compare to those of native speakers and Moroccan

Arabic speakers. Results showed that learners of English in higher education significantly deviated from the overall desired strategies compared to American native speakers of English. However, data indicated some developmental patterns towards native-like norms.

Overall, the research on cross-cultural apologies mentioned above has some consequences to consider, especially for Moroccan language learners. As shown by cross-cultural studies, significant variations are critical to second and foreign-language learners. Consequently, Language learners, especially in intercultural interactions, need to be aware of the transferrable and culturally specific aspects, which can be done through classroom instruction, for such knowledge would likely help lessen cultural misunderstandings. At the same time, universal values such as tolerance, peace, and coexistence are strengthened.

**3. METHOD**

This study aims at comparing and contrasting NSE and MLE apologies. Consequently, to support frequencies with content and learners' speech act behaviour, which was obtained using the Discourse completion task (DCT), a mixed method design, mostly quantitative and qualitative, was the primary approach employed in this study. In addition, the elicited DCT responses were codified according to Blum-Kulka and Kasper's (1993, p. 94) coding scheme. This scheme is used in this study as it is mostly cited in the cross-cultural speech act realization project. Also, the scheme agrees with the current research objective as the strategies were found universal (Olshtein, 1989), which will account for the overall distribution of both groups' apology strategy selection.

**3.1. Questions**

The following research questions guided the study under investigation:

1. To what extent do MLE and NSE differ in their apology strategies?
2. What are the most frequent apology strategies in MLE and NSE?

**3.2. Participants**

To answer the research questions, a total of 100 participants divided into two groups took part in this study. The first group includes a group of third-year Moroccan university learners of English (MLE). They were following their studies within the English department for the academic year 2020-2021, with an average age of 23. The second group addresses Native Speakers of English (NSE), who belong to different American university departments.

In addition to the participants' background, table 1 displays the MLE degree of interaction with NSE. Hence, the majority of MLE participants reported that they sometimes interact with NSE (38%). On the top of the table, only a few students (6%) mentioned that they never communicated with people from English-speaking countries. In comparison, 6% said they always interact with native speakers of English. These numbers imply that generally, English department students' interaction with native speakers is medium at the time of collecting the data.

Table 1. MLE degree of interaction with NSE

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	3	6.0
	Rarely	11	22.0
	Sometimes	19	38.0
	Usually	14	28.0

Always	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0

### 3.3. Instruments

The respondents filled out a Discourse Competition Test comprising 8 situations with different contextual factors. In this study, we shall discuss only the apology strategies without mentioning social distance. In addition, in a few instances, some respondents responded by what they would do rather than giving specific examples of what they would say in real-life encounters, which were excluded from the data. The situations and the contextual factor of social distance are presented in table 2:

Table 2. Description of apology situations

	The meeting	Computer damage	Photos	Exam results	Footstep	Librarian	Assignment	Misunderstandings
Apology situations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Social distance	—	—	—	—	+	+	+	+

Notes: + indicates high; — indicates low

### 3.4. Procedure

To ensure the instrument's validity, a group of 15 NSE and 5 MLE participated in a pilot test. The purpose of the pilot test was to see whether the items were contextually acceptable for generating the speech act being examined (Blum-kulka & Olshtain, 1984); that is, to see if the completion items actually generated apologies. A revised version of the dialogues that didn't prove to be properly and contextually delimited was given to an additional 10 participants before the final distribution of the instrument.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is concerned with the analysis of MLE and NSE apology strategies. As mentioned earlier, the overall apology strategies are 1) *IFIDs*, 2) *element increasing the apologetic force*, 3) *excuse*, 4) *justification*, 5) *claiming ignorance*, 6) *problematizing a precondition*, 7) *denial*, 8) *offer of repair*, 9) *showing concern for the offended*, 10) *efforts to appease*, 11) *promise for forbearance* and 12) *taking on responsibility*. In order to fit the data yielded in the two languages, one category of *opting out* or refrain from making an apology was added (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Moreover, due to the different apology distribution between MLE and NSE, the results of each group are presented in separate tables. Last but not least, the strategies are descendingly listed from the most to the least frequent and the strategies which the respondents did not use are skipped from the analysis but are kept in the tables for the big picture of the data.

### 4.1. Overall apology strategies by MLE respondents

As shown in table 3, MLE respondents' responses to the DCT resulted in *IFID* being the most frequent strategy (n=172) across all 8 items with a total percentage of 44.1 %. This implicates that the participants expressed their apologies using explicit expressions such as *I apologize for not bringing the stories on time; I'm sorry for being late; please accept my apologies; I apologize, sir*. The second most frequent strategy is *elements increasing apologetic force*. In 16.1 % of the total number of the situations (n=16.1), MLE increased the

force of their apologies by resorting to adverbial intensifiers such as *so*, *very*, *awfully* to mitigate the force of the offence and express their regret to the hearer.

Table 3. The distribution of apology strategies by MLE across each situation

Apology strategies	Situations								T	%
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
IFID	20	11	24	6	32	26	30	23	172	44.1
Elements increasing Apologic Force	16	9	10	3	10	7	7	1	63	16.1
Promise for forbearance	4	0	5	33	1	2	1	0	46	11.7
Offer of repair	1	24	3	1	0	3	0	0	32	8.2
Excuse	3	1	3	5	0	7	5	0	24	6.1
Opting out	0	1	1	1	1	0	3	12	19	4.8
Justification	4	0	0	0	1	1	1	6	13	3.3
Denial	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	1	7	1.7
Taking on Responsibility	1	1	1	0	0	2	1	0	6	1.5
Efforts to appease	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	5	1.2
Showing concern for the offended	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	3	0.7
Claiming ignorance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Problematizing a precondition	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The third most frequent strategy for MLE is the *promise for forbearance*. In 11.7 % of the elicited responses (n=46), the respondents promised the offended that the offence will never happen again, except in situations 2 and 8. Examples of promise for forbearance strategies are: *I did my best, but next time I will work harder (4)*; *I am really sorry; it won't happen again and I'll submit it as soon as possible (7)*; *I promise I will double my effort (4)*.

Offer of repair appears as the fourth most frequent strategy (n=32) with a percentage of 8.2%, except for items 5,7 and 8. In order to express remorse, respondents preferred to repair the damage by compensatory apology strategies such as *I am sorry, how can I make it up for you (6)*; *please forgive me, I will buy you a new computer (2)*; *sorry, I will fix it (2)*. What is worth noting is that the majority of offers of repair strategies were in response to the second item with a frequency of 24 out of 32. As for the fifth strategy, the participants expressed their apology using an *excuse* (n=24; 6.1%), except in situations 5 and 8. Some examples of this strategy are presented below:

*Sorry I was busy with other exams (7).*

*I didn't have time to send you the photographs (3).*

*I am sorry for not attending the meeting I had an urgent problem to deal with (1).*

The other remaining apology strategies were less frequent and less used by MLE participants. To exemplify, the *opting out* strategy was used by 4.8% of the total responses (n=19), while *justification*, *denial*, *taking on responsibility*, *efforts to appease* and *showing*

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concern for the offended were the less frequently used apology strategies (3.3%, 1.7%, 1.5%, 1.2%, 0.7%, respectively).

**4.2. Overall apology strategies by NSE respondents**

Table 4 lists NSE apology performance from the most to the least frequent strategy. The data shows that NSE use the same number of apology strategies as those of MLE, but with different frequency distribution, except for the first strategy, which is almost similar to MLE respondents. In this, similar to MLE participants, *IFID* is the first and most frequent apology strategy (n=165; 41.2%), which is used across all situations. Examples of *IFIDs* realized by NSE are as the following:

*Hey I'm sorry about the pics! I got completely sidetracked and will send them out to you tonight. (3)*

*I was paying any attention to where I was walking. I apologize for hitting you. (5)*

*I apologize for my tardiness. Would you still accept my assignment? (7)*

As opposed to MLE, the second most frequent strategy for NSE is the *offer of repair*, which is used only in three situations, namely situations 1, 2 and 6. Henceforth, in 10% of the situations mentioned above, NSE participants prefer to pay for the offence committed to lessen the damage caused and hence redress the addressee's positive face. Below are some examples taken from the second and the sixth situation:

*Oh no. Completely damaged? Can't it be repaired? Was it something I did? I was only typing. I don't understand how that could break it. Have you backed up your files or saved them to the cloud? It's awful, but I don't understand why simply typing would damage it. I am sorry this has happened and for my part in it. Would you like me to help you towards the cost of recovering your files, or towards a new computer? (2)*

*I'm returning these. I'm sorry I forgot to bring them back on time. I am sorry and will pay the fine. I hope it hasn't caused any inconvenience. How much is the fine? (6)*

Table 4. The distribution of apology strategies by NSE across each situation

Apology strategies	Situations								T	%
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
IFID	20	6	27	6	36	28	21	21	165	41.2
Offer of repair	5	24	0	0	0	11	0	0	40	10
Elements Increasing Apologic Force	19	2	0	0	8	5	0	3	37	9.2
Justification	3	3	0	7	0	0	6	18	37	9.2
Opting out	0	2	0	8	0	5	11	8	34	8.5
Efforts to appease	0	4	23	0	0	0	6	0	33	8.2
Promise for forbearance	0	0	0	19	0	0	3	0	22	5.5
Taking on Responsibility	3	0	0	3	1	0	3	0	10	2.5
Denial	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	2.25
Excuse	0	0	0	7	0	1	0	0	8	2



Showing concern for the offended.	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	1.2
Claiming ignorance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Problematizing a precondition	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The third and the fourth strategies, *element increasing apologetic force* (n=37) and *justification* (n=37), share the same frequency number (9.2%; 9.2%, respectively). The frequency of the numbers in each situation, however, is different. For *element increasing apologetic force* strategy, situation 1 takes the most frequent value (n=19), while for *justification*, it is situation 8 (n=18).

The next most frequent apology strategies for NSE concern *opting out from expressing remorse* and *efforts to appease* with almost the same percentage (8.5%; 8.2%), whereas the *promise for forbearance* strategy is repeated by 5.5%. As for the last remaining strategies, *taking on responsibility*, *denial*, *excuse* and *showing concern for the offended* were the least favoured by NSE (2.5%; 2.25%; 2%; 1.2%, respectively). The next section concerns the similarities as well as the differences between MLE and NSE apology strategy selection.

### 4.3. MLE and NSE apology strategies compared

The data analysis indicated that MLE and NSE share similarities as well as differences. For similarities, *IFIDS* is the most frequent strategy used by both MLE (44.1 %) and (41.2%) NSE. The second most frequent strategy for MLE is *element increasing apologetic force* (16.1 %), which has a higher percentage than for NSE (9.2%). In addition, MLE used more *promises for forbearance* (11.7 %) and *excuse* (6.1 %), whereas NSE used more *offers of repair* (10%), *justification* (9.2%) and *opting out* (8.5 %). Moreover, NSE used much more *efforts to appease* (8.2 %), *taking on responsibility* (2.5 %), *denial* (2.25 %) and *showing concern for the offended* (1.2 %) strategies than MLE (1.2 %; 1.5%; 1.7 %; 0.7 %, respectively). In short, in addition to *IFIDs*, MLE utilized more *elements increasing apologetic force*, *promise for forbearance* and *excuse*, while NSE used more *offers of repair*, *justification*, *opting out*, *efforts to appease*, *taking in responsibility*, *denial* and *showing concern for the offended*.

First and foremost, both tables 3 and 4 above indicate that MLE and NSE use the same number of strategies, a finding which is in agreement with the universality of speech acts across languages and cultures (Brown & Levinson, 1978). To explain, both groups have access to almost all apology strategies, except *claiming ignorance* and *problematizing a precondition*, which both groups did not use. In addition, both groups showed much more preference for *IFIDs*, 44.1 % for MLE and 41.2 % for NSE. Again, this result is consistent with Olshtain’s findings. Olshtain (1989, p. 171) contended that “given the same social factors, contextual features and level of offence, different languages will realize apologies in very similar ways”. One explanation for such a parallel might be due to the advanced level of MLE, which is in line with Takahashi and Beebe (1987), who found that Japanese ESL speakers with advanced levels tended to be closer to NSE pragmatic competence than those with lower proficiency. Another reason for the choice of *IFIDs* is likely due to the degree of interaction with NSE (table 1), as the majority of the MLE learners mentioned that they fairly interact with NSE, which may have influenced their apology performance in English due to their exposure to the language.

Yet, MLE and NSE differed in the frequency of use of other implicit strategies, which also supports the variability argument across languages and cultures. To exemplify, NSE and MLE's second most frequent strategy is the offer of repair by 10% and *element increasing apologetic force* by 16.1 %, respectively. Again, this finding is partially in agreement with the

findings obtained by Ezzaoua (2020), Beebe-Takahashi (1989) and Rintell and Mitchell (1989), who maintained that non-western cultures differed in their apology strategies with native speakers of English. The difference can be explained in terms of sociocultural differences in that MLE are less likely to offer repair for the damage caused, rather they suffice themselves with upgrading the apology by using upgraders such as *very*, *so* and *awfully*; unlike NSE who abide by the cultural-dimension of individualism, manifested in the paying for the offence committed.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The findings of this study have shown that there are similarities and differences concerning MLE and NSE apology performance. Henceforth, these findings have some significance for foreign language education, especially for teachers and learners. Instructors need to be aware of the similarities and differences between the two languages and cultures, for language and culture are intertwined. To do so, teachers need to know that although cultural dimensions such as politeness, face and speech acts are universal, they still vary from one culture to another, the fact which will require a concretization of the target sociocultural aspects in the classroom, and this can be fulfilled through the integration of real-life communication activities.

In addition to the teacher's implications, learners may also benefit from this study's findings. First, learners need to know that not only should they focus their attention on formal instruction to attain full mastery of the target language, but they also need to be exposed to different modes of learning, using all the available ICTS and Information Technology for their own benefit so as to improve their pragmatic competence. Second, they need to be aware that learning the target culture is as important as learning the structural rule of language since culture is part and parcel of the process of language learning and teaching.

All in all, despite the results obtained, this study has some limitations to mention. First, data obtained from this research cannot be generalized due to the small sample size and the study's context. Thus, future research may replicate this study in other contexts with a large sample. Second, this study has focused on apology strategies. In contrast, future research may focus on modification and may include other contextual variables such as distance and power so as to find out if the latter is a predictor of the participants' strategy selection. Last but not least, future research may approach the topic from a different methodological perspective. For instance, role play may be used instead so as to cater for instant interaction which the Discourse completion test may not reach.

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## APPENDIX

Dear participants

This questionnaire is part of a research project which aims at contrasting and comparing apologies among Moroccan university learners and native speakers of English. Please read the situations and provide an appropriate response in the blanks given. Try to write down the exact words you would say in real life situations. All personal information will be kept private and confidential.

1. Your friend arranged a meeting to prepare for the coming exams. And this is the second time that you miss a meeting of this kind. How would you apologize to him/her?

You:

.....

2. A PhD student is reviewing some of the lessons you didn't comprehend in the last session. You borrowed his computer as yours runs out of charge and as you are typing, his computer broke down and got completely damaged. How do you apologize to him/her?

You:

.....

3. Last week you were on a picnic with your classmate. As you took many photographs, you promised to send him/her some. You forget to send them until you came across him/her again in the class. What would you say to apologize?

You:

.....

4. Your parents have just seen the results of your last semester. They are not satisfied with the mark you obtained in writing. While sitting in the living room, they say "your mark in writing is under average and disappointing". How do you apologize to them?

You:

.....

5. You are sitting in the bus taking screen-shots on your smartphone in front of an elderly woman. Accidentally, you bumped on her leg, and she complains about it. How would you apologize to her?

You:

.....

6. You borrowed two short stories from the library but you did not bring them back on due time. You brought them back to the librarian after two months later. How would you apologize to him/her?

You:

.....

7. You did not do the homework assigned yesterday by your professor. And today is the deadline, how would you apologize to your professor?

You:

.....

8. You are invited to a meeting at your school. While expressing your opinion, one of the participants takes it personal and thinks it is an insult to him. How do you apologize?

You:

.....

### **AUTHORS' BIO**

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