

Apology Strategies in English: A Pragmatic Analysis of Moroccan Undergraduate EFL Learners and British Native Speakers

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Abstract

The current interlanguage study investigates the realization of apologies by Moroccan EFL undergraduate students from two educational levels: semester one (S1) and semester five (S5). Their production is compared and contrasted against the apologies performed by British English native speakers. To this end, a total of 120 participants, including 40 Moroccan EFL S1 students, 40 Moroccan EFL S5 students, and 40 English native speakers, completed a written discourse completion task consisting of eight hypothetical scenarios. Adopting the mixed-method approach, data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively using Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) taxonomy. The findings revealed some cross-cultural differences between the British and the Moroccan EFL respondents. In addition, the qualitative and statistical tests indicated that S5 students displayed less significant differences with English native speakers compared to S1 students in their use of apology strategies. However, only minimal progress towards native-like norms was observed.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the critical goals of English language teaching in Morocco, according to the White Book (2002), is to build the students' communicative competencies required for various real-life situations. According to the Ministry of National Education Guidelines (2007), teaching English to learners in Morocco is about two essential elements. First, they need to know the linguistic components and use them in authentic contexts. Second, they should gradually acquire the language competencies essential to effective communication. The MNE (2007) acknowledges that the emphasis on language learning and teaching in Morocco should focus on both linguistic and communicative competence. The latter is defined by the Council of Europe (2001) as the ability to act in a foreign language in socio-linguistically and pragmatically appropriate situations. In other words, communicative competence refers to the language learners' ability to use language appropriately for different social functions in different contexts. The social norms, however, that govern the performance of speech acts, in general, and the speech act of apology, in particular, differ from one culture and one language to another, which makes the task of communication harder for EFL learners. If learners are unaware of the socio-cultural and pragmatic differences in the target language and apply the pragmatic knowledge and social norms governing apologies from their native language and culture, rather than in English, miscommunication and pragmatic failure are likely to occur.

Hence, "The study of speech acts can provide us with a better understanding and new insights into the correlations between linguistic forms and socio-cultural context" (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983, p. 35).

Despite the importance of pragmatics in SLA, there is still a huge gap in research in this field in Morocco. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap and contribute to the field of pragmatics in the Moroccan context. This study examines the speech act of apology from two perspectives: cross-cultural and interlanguage. In the former, the study mainly focuses on comparing and analyzing British native speakers and Moroccan EFL learners' realization patterns of the speech act of apology based on three social variables: social distance, social power, and severity of the offence. In the latter, the researcher is interested in investigating the realization of the speech act of apology by Moroccan EFL learners from two different educational levels, S1 (first semester at the University) and S5 (fifth semester); it aims at exploring how the two educational levels use English to perform the speech act of apology, the extent to which their realization deviates from native speakers, and whether there is any development in their apologies. The participants' utterances from the three groups will be analyzed and compared in terms of the types of semantic formulas, sub-formulas, and the combination of strategies they employ.

A strong motivation for this research is grounded in the researcher's personal experience in using English in a natural context with native speakers. As stated earlier, the cultural norms that govern speech acts differ from one culture and one language to another. When interacting with British native speakers, the researcher found herself relying on the pragmatic knowledge and the social norms of the native culture, rather than the target culture. This sometimes led to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. Therefore, this study must explore how this speech act is realized by British native speakers in a range of situations. Investigating the British native speakers' apologies would be useful in this study to give insights into the socio-pragmatic norms that govern apologies, and that would help evaluate Moroccan EFL learners' performance from the two levels when apologizing in the target language. The current study focused on EFL learners from the University level with a year gap because pragmatic competence is slower to develop compared to linguistic competence. Since it is not possible to investigate all speech acts in one study, the researcher focused on the speech act of apology for two main reasons. First, it is one of the most frequently utilized speech acts employed in our daily lives in all human communities. Second, speech acts in general, and apologies in particular, have always been the main focus of many types of studies in second language acquisition. However, only a few studies seem to have explored the realization of apology strategies by EFL learners.

This research answers the following questions.

1. What are the apology strategies used by Moroccan undergraduate EFL students and British native speakers of English?
2. How similar or different are Moroccan EFL students' apologies compared to English native speakers' across different situations?
3. Does the educational level influence the performance of Moroccan EFL students' apologies?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization has fostered the need to learn English in most countries across the globe. For this reason, English is an international medium of communication (Crystal, 1997). According to Kachru (1985), many countries from the expanding circle, such as Morocco, which was not colonized by English-speaking countries, recognized the importance of English and started teaching it as a foreign language. Sadiqi (1991) states that "policymakers in Morocco have

certainly realized that international communication between Morocco and the rest of the world could not be achieved by French alone; they know that English is the key to communication in a very tangible sense” (as cited in Ennaji, 2005, p. 120). To elaborate on this, Sadiqi (1991) stresses the importance of learning English because it is a global lingua franca that connects Morocco with the rest of the world.

Notwithstanding, it is difficult to predict that the number of students learning English today in Morocco will use it daily, just like in countries from the inner or outer circle, such as Singapore and many other Asian countries in which English is taught as a second language. On the contrary, English is taught as a foreign language in Morocco. That is, it is taught in schools but does not play a major role in social life or national politics; therefore, it seems that students will need to use English more in an international context where native and multilingual speakers use English. Accordingly, successful communication with multilingual speakers requires not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic and intercultural competence that will equip Moroccan learners with the appropriate tools for successful communication with native and non-native speakers of English.

2.1. Pragmatics

Pragmatics has been defined differently by many researchers. One of the widely used definitions is provided by Crystal (1997) who states that “pragmatics is the study of language of users, especially the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (p. 301). Based on this definition, pragmatics studies the relationship between language users’ points of view and how they express themselves in different social contexts. This relationship is governed by the conditions of society, as described by Mey (2001). Along similar lines, the British pragmatist Leech (1983) defines pragmatics as the study of how speakers use language as social actors who want to get their message transferred to the listeners and consider the impact of language on their interpersonal relationships. This definition explicitly implies that meaning in pragmatics is relative to the speaker’s use of language (Leech, 1983). That is, the speaker's and hearer’s intentions generate meaning. Besides, Leech (1983) views pragmatics “as problem-solving both from the speaker’s and hearer’s point of view” (p. 36). From the speaker’s point of view, the problem is to organize what to say, to whom, when, where, and under what circumstances. From the hearer’s point of view, the problem is related to making inferences about what is said to interpret the speaker’s intended meaning. Further, Yule (1996) clarifies the notion of meaning in pragmatics. Yule (1996) points out that “understanding how people communicate is a process of interpreting not just what speakers say but also what they intend to mean (p. 134). Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener. It has, consequently, more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. However, the meaning of a word remains ambiguous unless it is contextualized.

2.2. Interlanguage Pragmatics

This thesis primarily focuses on interlanguage, a concept in second language acquisition. As defined by Henstock (2003), interlanguage refers to the language produced by second-language learners, which differs from both their native language and the target language. Interlanguage pragmatics specifically studies nonnative speakers' (NNS) comprehension, production, and acquisition of linguistic actions in a second language (L2). In other words, it examines how non-native speakers develop and use pragmatic competence in a second language (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). Therefore, interlanguage pragmatics is a hybrid field combining pragmatics and second-language acquisition (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). Schauer (2009) further explains that "interlanguage pragmatics is a subfield of both interlanguage studies, within the realm of second language acquisition research, and pragmatics" (p. 15).

2.3. The Concept of Appropriateness

Appropriateness, or appropriacy, is a key concept in the field of pragmatics. Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) emphasize that while grammar focuses on structural accuracy, such as morphology and syntax, pragmatics is concerned with the appropriate use of language in specific contexts, taking into account the situation, speakers, and content (p. 223). While knowing how to form grammatically correct sentences is important, it is equally crucial to understand "when to speak, when not, and what to talk about with whom, when, where, and in what manner" (Hymes, 1972, p. 227). The norms of appropriateness vary across societies, meaning what is considered appropriate in one culture may not be in another. This raises the question of which norms to follow. Rose (1994) highlights this issue, stating that in university EFL/ESL programs, it makes sense to teach the host community's pragmatic norms. However, in EFL contexts, this question is more complex (p. 55). As Rose suggests, the question of which norms to follow is not straightforward, and researchers hold different views. With many varieties of English, it can be difficult in EFL settings to determine which variety should serve as the standard (LoCastro, 2003). Some argue that native-speaker norms, such as American or British English, should be the model (Timmis, 2002). However, the concept of English as an International Language (EIL) challenges this view, rejecting the idea of native speaker ownership of the language. As Crystal (2003) notes, "One predictable consequence of English becoming a global language is that nobody owns it anymore; rather, everyone who has learned it has a share in it" (p. 2). In the Moroccan context, English is taught as a foreign rather than an international language. Therefore, students should adhere to some extent to native-speaker norms.

2.3.1. Speech Act Theory

The study of speech acts has drawn considerable attention from philosophers and linguists alike (Sadock, 1974, p. 1). Among the various topics within the theory of language use, speech acts have been the focus of the most interest (Levinson, 1983). Speech Act Theory (SAT) was first developed in the 1960s by a group of language philosophers, with Austin (1962) being one of the most notable figures. In his influential book *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin (1962) explains that language is not only used to describe the world but also to perform actions, such as greeting, apologizing, requesting, inviting, and many other everyday tasks. According to Austin (1962), a speech act involves making an utterance that functions as an action. He states, "The issuing of an utterance is the performing of an action" (p. 6). Similarly, Searle (1969) argues that "talking is performing acts according to rules" (p. 22) and that "speech acts are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" (p. 6). In other words, when people speak, they are not just producing words with grammatical structures to convey information, but they are also performing actions or expecting others to act. For example, when someone says, "it's really hot in here" in a closed room, they are not merely stating a fact about the temperature. Instead, they are performing a request and expect the listener to recognize the intention behind the statement, such as opening a window or door. Therefore, any utterance that acts is called a speech act (Yule, 1996; Hazhar et al., 2021).

According to Austin (1962), speech acts can be categorized into three types. First, a locutionary act involves producing a sentence with a specific meaning; this is essentially 'what is said'. Second, an illocutionary act refers to what is done through the utterance, such as making a promise, offer, or request; this is 'what is intended'. Third, a perlocutionary act describes the effect the utterance has on the listener, such as persuading, convincing, or deterring them. Austin (1962) clarifies the relationship between these three acts:

1. A locutionary act involves saying a sentence with meaning and reference, similar to the traditional idea of 'meaning'.
2. An illocutionary act involves performing actions such as informing, ordering, or warning, which have a conventional force.

3. A perlocutionary act refers to the impact the utterance has on the listener, such as persuading or convincing them (p. 108).

2.3.2. Apology Strategies

The variety of definitions for apologies has led to numerous apology strategies. Several researchers have developed different systems to classify these strategies (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Owen, 1983; Trosborg, 1987). The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (1984) identified five main strategies for performing apologies:

1. Using an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID),
2. Accepting responsibility,
3. Offering an explanation or account of the situation,
4. Offering to repair the offence, and
5. Making a promise of forbearance.

Olshtain and Cohen (1983) proposed seven categories of apology strategies, divided into two parts. The first part contains five categories that are used when the speaker feels the need to apologize:

1. Expressing an apology (e.g., "I am sorry" or "I apologize"),
2. Giving an explanation or account of what happened,
3. Acknowledging responsibility,
4. Offering repair, and
5. Promising forbearance.
6. Each of these categories has sub-categories for further clarification. The second part includes two strategies used when the speaker does not feel the need to apologize: denying the need to apologize and denying responsibility. Holmes (1990) revisits this classification, dividing apologies into four main categories with subcategories:
7. Explicitly expressing an apology:
8. a) Offering an apology/IFID,
9. b) Expressing regret,
10. c) Requesting forgiveness,
11. Providing an explanation, excuse, or justification,
12. Acknowledging responsibility:
13. a) Accepting blame,
14. b) Expressing self-deficiency,
15. c) Recognizing the hearer as deserving an apology,
16. d) Expressing lack of intent,

17. e) Offering repair or redress,
18. Making a promise of forbearance.

Bergman and Kasper (1993, p. 86) identified seven apology strategies:

1. Using an IFID like "I am sorry,"
2. Using an intensified IFID,
3. Taking responsibility,
4. Giving an account of the reasons behind the offence,
5. Minimizing the effects of the offence,
6. Offering repair or compensation, and
7. Providing verbal redress (e.g., "This won't happen again").

Trosborg (1995) distinguishes five strategies: explicit denial, implicit denial, giving a justification, blaming someone else, and attacking the complainer. Owen (1983, p. 169) classifies apologies into seven strategies: asserting imbalance, asserting that an offence occurred, expressing an attitude towards the offence, requesting restoration of balance, giving an account, repairing the damage, and offering compensation. The first four are non-substantive strategies, while giving an account is semi-substantive, and the last two are substantive.

In conclusion, there are many different categorizations of apologies, and this speech act is culturally specific. Not all strategies are suitable for all cultures. The taxonomy developed by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) is particularly relevant for this study as it reflects strategies observed in Moroccan culture.

2.3.3. Previous Studies on Apologies

In recent years, many studies have focused on the speech act of apology, with most using discourse completion tasks (DCT) to examine how non-native English speakers produce apologies. One of the earliest and most notable projects in this field is the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984), which analyzed how apologies and requests are performed across different cultures, including American, Australian, British English, Canadian French, Danish, German, and Hebrew speakers. A key study from this project, "Apologies across Languages" (Olshtain, 1989), explored apology strategies in Hebrew, Australian English, Canadian French, and German using seven apology scenarios in a DCT. The study found no significant differences in strategy selection across these languages, with all showing a preference for two primary strategies: Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) and expressions of responsibility. While all languages employed the full range of apology strategies, the extent of their use varied. The study also revealed a significant negative correlation between social status and the level of internal intensification ($r_s = -.821$), indicating that the lower the apologizer's status compared to the person they are apologizing to, the more intensification they used. This highlights how social and contextual factors influence the choice of apology strategies and their modifications.

Several studies have also been conducted in Arab and Moroccan contexts, including Ghawi (1993), Bataineh & Bataineh (2008), Hodeib (2019), and Ezzaoua (2020). Ghawi (1993) focused on pragmatic transfer in the apologies of Arab learners of English. The study aimed to identify how learners' perceptions of apology behaviors in their first language (L1) influenced their production of apologies in English. The study involved 17 native English speakers and 17 Arab university students from various countries, using role-plays and interviews for data

collection. Ghawi found that Arabs perceive Americans as apologizing more frequently and differently, though this perception does not prevent the transfer of L1 features into their L2 apologies.

Bataineh and Bataineh (2008) compared apology strategies in American and Jordanian cultures, with a focus on gender differences. Using a 10-item questionnaire, they studied 50 American and 50 Jordanian undergraduates. The results showed that American women used more explicit apology strategies than men, while Jordanian women used more apologies but expressed less responsibility than men. Jordanians generally employed a wider range of apology strategies and intensifiers compared to Americans.

Hodeib (2019) examined the apology strategies of Syrian Arabic speakers and how these strategies are influenced by social factors such as status, social distance, and age. The study, using a DCT, found that Syrian participants conformed to the general universality of apology strategies, while also incorporating culture-specific elements like references to God, proverbs, and folk expressions. IFIDs were used more frequently when addressing someone of higher status or older age, but less frequently when social distance was low or status was equal.

In Morocco, Ezzaoua (2020) analyzed the apology strategies of Moroccan learners of English, native speakers of American English, and Moroccan Arabic speakers. The study aimed to determine whether Moroccan learners of English exhibited pragmatic transfer in their apologies. Using a DCT with five hypothetical scenarios, the findings indicated some cross-cultural differences in strategy use. Moroccan learners of English in higher education deviated from the desired strategies as compared to American native speakers.

3. METHOD

The current study seeks to analyze the apology performance of Moroccan EFL students and British native speakers of English and explore the influence of the educational level on the Moroccan EFL students' apologies. To that end, a cross-sectional design was adopted.

3.1. Context of the Study

Since the main group of investigation is the Moroccan EFL learners, it is essential to shed some light on the context and status of English in Morocco to relate the study to its context. The linguistic context in which English is taught and learned in Morocco is characterized by multilingualism. Various languages are used in everyday life for different purposes; four major varieties: Amazigh, Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, and French; and two minor ones: Spanish and English. (Sadiqi, 2006, p. 1). Thus, Moroccan EFL Learners know at least three or four languages before learning English (Moroccan Arabic, Standard Arabic, Berber, French).

The status of French as a foreign language can not be denied. However, once English was integrated into the Moroccan educational system after independence, French started to face intense competition. Moroccan EFL learners have positive attitudes towards English as it is not associated with colonialism and does not constitute a threat to national identity. Sadiqi (1991) states that 87% of Moroccans seem to welcome the idea of seeing the spread of English in the country.

3.2. Participants

Data for this study were collected from 120 undergraduate students at major universities in Morocco and London. The sample comprises three groups. Two groups represent Moroccan Undergraduate EFL students from different universities. The Moroccan EFL learners were

compared with baseline data taken from the English native speaker group, namely native speakers of English living in London.

3.2.1. Moroccan Participants

The study comprised 80 Moroccan EFL participants from five universities: Moulay Ismail, Ibn Zohr, Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah, Abdelmalek Essaidi, and Mohammed V University. The participants were distributed by gender, with 50% male and 50% female. Their native languages were 62% Arabic and 38% Tamazight. Data was collected from two groups: one had just completed the first semester (S1), while the other had finished the fifth semester (S5). All participants had received a minimum of five years of formal English instruction, beginning in the third year of high school.

The majority of participants were between 18 and 22 years old, with 10% aged between 23 and 27. In terms of exposure to English, 94% had never attended a language center, and only 6% had studied at one for less than a year. To control external variables, the researcher made sure that none had visited an English-speaking country, indicating their English exposure was predominantly limited to classroom learning.

3.2.2. British participants

British Native participants comprised 40 individuals from various universities in London, including the University of East London, King's College London, Brunel University, Greenwich University, Middlesex University, Queen Mary University, and the London College of Communication. The key characteristics of the NSE participant group are presented below:

Table 1: Characteristics of British Native Participants

Total number of students:	Value Labels	Frequency	Percentage
40			
Gender	Male	20	50%
	Female	20	50%
Native language	English	40	100%
City	London	40	100%

Following Marquez-Reiter (2000), students were chosen as the target population of the current study to ensure as much homogeneity as possible in terms of educational background, age range, social class, and possible future occupation.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Discourse Completion Task

The current study used a Discourse Completion Task consisting of eight scenarios inspired by the studies of Marquez-Reiter (2000), Cohen and Olshtain (1985), and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). Hence, they were carefully designed to represent socially differentiated situations familiar to both English and Moroccan respondents.

3.3.2. Social Variables

Based on Brown and Levinson's politeness model (1987), the apology situations vary according to three variables that play an essential role in the design and analysis of the DCT: the social distance between the speakers (SD), the relative social power of the participants (P), and the severity of the offence (O). As in Marquez-Reiter (2000), social distance, in this study, is represented as the degree of familiarity between the participants. Thus, a 'Friend', 'classmate', and a private instructor frequently meeting the participant' as in situations (3, 4, 5, and 6), are considered as familiar (-SD), whereas 'strangers' and 'new instructors' such as in situations 1, 2, 7, 8 are not familiar (+SD).

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Concerning the second variable, having power is not related to physical power, but is "given to the subject by way of their institutionalized role in society or by something she or he has that others have no access to" (Marquez-Reiter, 2000, p. 62). Hence, an `instructor` or a `restaurant owner`, as in situations (1, 8, 3, 4), has more power than a student.

As for the severity of the offence, the situations have been discussed with participants from the two groups. Based on their feedback, the offences in scenarios (8, 7, 4, 6) are considered high, while offences in situations (1, 2, 3, 5), where the subject is either forgetting a book or stepping on someone, are considered low. Each variable is assigned two values [(S<H, S=H), (S+, S-), (O+, O)]. Due to the nature of the population taking part in this study, the value (S>H) has not been included. Since university students do not often adopt powerful roles, this study did not use scenarios where the described character is of a lower status than the hearer. Moreover, asking students to imagine themselves in other roles of higher status in society like a professor, manager, or police officer... can make participants resort to stereotypes which may reduce the authenticity of the results. Each scenario from the DCT specifies the context, the setting, the social distance, and their status relative to each other as described in the table below:

Table 2: Classification of DCT Scenarios According to Contextual and Social Variables

Scenarios	Gender	Social power	Social distance	Severity of offense
1. Forgetting to return a book to a new lecturer on time	M	S < H	S+	O-
8. Smashing a new teacher's computer	F	S < H	S+	O+
3. Arriving 10 minutes late for a meeting with a friend who owns a restaurant	M	S < H	S-	O-
4. Forgetting an important meeting with a private language instructor for the second time	F	S < H	S-	O+
2. Accidentally stepping on a passenger's foot	M	S = H	S+	O-
7. Bumping into an old woman at the supermarket causing her to drop her packages	F	S = H	S+	O+
5. Forgetting to bring a novel requested by a friend	M	S = H	S-	O-
6. Breaking a friend's expensive camera	F	S = H	S-	O+

3.4. Data Analysis

3.4.1. The coding scheme

The coding scheme used in this study was adopted from the cross-cultural speech act realization project (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Each utterance was assigned an appropriate category and was classified according to the list of subclassifications.

3.4.2. Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

Two types of analysis were carried out. The responses collected from the three groups have been first codified and analyzed quantitatively in terms of the type and frequency of strategies and sub-strategies across the eight scenarios. The quantitative analysis was done with the help of the excel and the SPSS software. Each semantic formula has been assigned a number between 0 and 6. A single number or a combination of was 43 entered for each response according to the categories used by the respondents. This procedure allowed for the possibility to run both frequencies of each semantic formula, whether it appeared alone or in combination with other strategies. In addition, the mean values of the three groups across scenarios were calculated to determine statistical differences in their use of strategies. Then, the qualitative analysis allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the utterances employed by the three groups.

4. RESULTS

4.1. S1 Moroccan EFL Students' Apology Strategies

Figure 1: The Frequency of Apology Strategies Performed by S1 EFL Learners

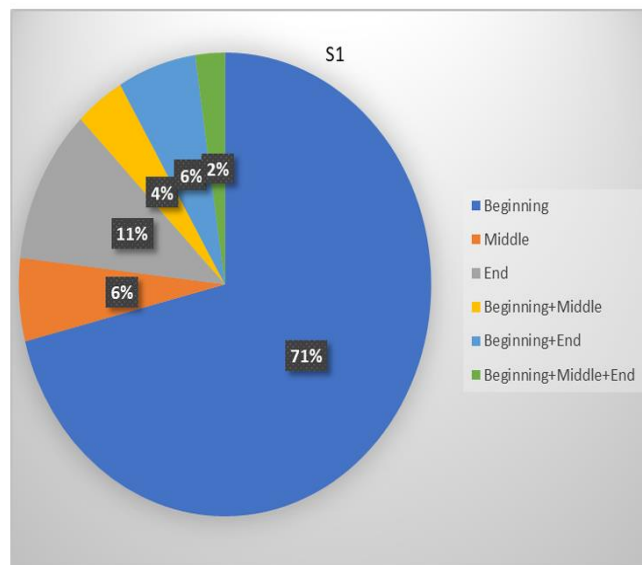


The results indicate that Semester 1 participants employed a variety of semantic formulas in their apologies, with different strategies used at varying frequencies.

1. IFIDs (Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices)

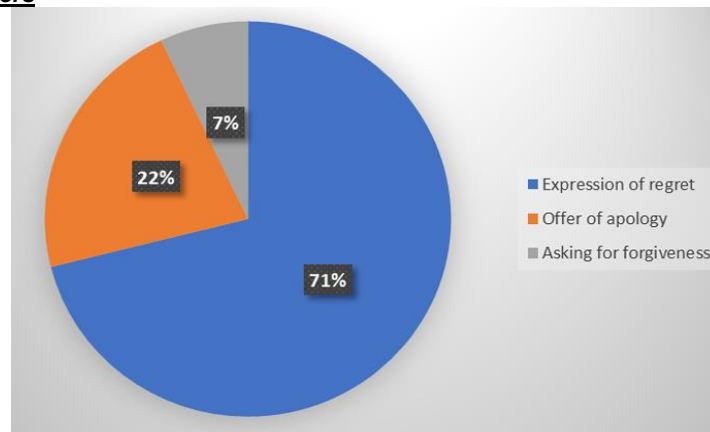
The most frequently used strategy was the IFID, which includes expressions such as "sorry," "I apologize," "forgive me," and "excuse me." IFIDs were used 259 times by Semester 1 participants, making them the most common strategy. Notably, 71% of the IFIDs (184 out of 259) were positioned at the beginning of an utterance, while the remaining 28% appeared in the middle or at the end as presented in Figure 2:

Figure 2: The Occurrence of "IFID" in S1 Apologies



The next figure shows the most used IFID sub-strategies by semester 1 learners:

Figure 3: The Realization of "IFID" by S1 Learners

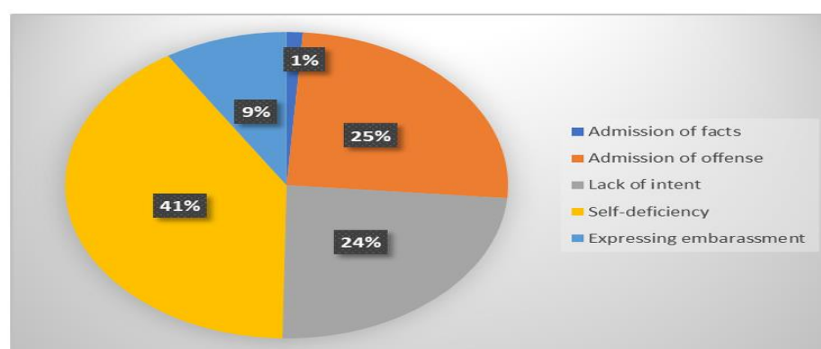


The above figure shows the percentage of IFID sub-strategies within a total of 259 IFIDs. The most frequent IFID sub-strategy that semester 1 EFL learners use is an expression of regret. 22% of the IFIDs employed were expressed using an offer of apology while only 7% were expressed using asking for forgiveness.

2. Taking on Responsibility

The following figure summarizes the distribution of “taking on responsibility”:

Figure 4: The Realization of “Taking on Responsibility” by S1 Learners



Taking responsibility was the second most common strategy, occurring in 53% of the utterances. Learners used various sub-strategies, including self-deficiency (69 instances), admission of offence, and lack of intent. The following are some examples from students' utterances:

- **Self-deficiency:** *"Sorry, I forgot it. I beg your pardon. I didn't pay attention to your foot."*
- **Lack of intent:** *"Oh sorry, sir, I didn't mean it. Sorry, I accidentally dropped your camera."*
- **Admission of offence:** *"I take full responsibility for breaking your camera. It was my fault, and I promise I won't repeat the mistake."*

3. Expressing Embarrassment

This strategy was used to convey personal embarrassment over the offence. For instance, one S1 learner said: *"Hey Emma, I really don't know what to say to you except that I'm sorry. I feel embarrassed and I should be. I'm such an irresponsible person, I hope you forgive me this time. It will be the last time."*

4. Explanation

Explanations were less common, appearing in only 69 out of 314 apologies. Learners tended to use this strategy in scenarios 3 and 4. One example from scenario 4 is:

"Emma, I know you warned me about this, but last night I didn't sleep well. I am really sorry if I upset you, but you know me very well. Sleeping is my biggest problem, and I'm trying to find a solution to this."

5. Concern for the Hearer

This strategy, reflecting empathy towards the offended party, was used only 22 times. It was mostly observed in scenarios where learners accidentally stepped on someone (20%) or bumped into an elderly woman (18%). Example of utterances include:

- *"I'm really sorry for stepping on your foot. Are you okay?"*
- *"Oh no, I'm so sorry for bumping into you. I hope you're not hurt."*

6. Offer of Repair

Offers to repair damage appeared in about one-third of the responses. For example, 30% of learners in scenario 6 offered to repair a friend's broken camera, while only 8% offered to fix a teacher's computer in scenario 8, e.g.,

- *"I'm sorry for breaking your camera. Let me fix it for you."*
- *"I broke the teacher's computer. I can help repair it if needed."*

7. Promise for Forbearance

This strategy, which involves making a promise not to repeat the offence, occurred in 38 instances. It was most common in scenarios such as forgetting to return a book (15%) or missing a meeting (18%). Examples include:

- *"I promise I won't forget the book next time. It won't happen again."*
- *"I'm really sorry for missing the meeting. I won't let it happen again, I swear."*

8. New strategies:

Interestingly, Semester 1 learners introduced new strategies not identified in previous taxonomies. Taxonomy proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). These include:

- **Praising and showing gratitude:** Learners often expressed appreciation alongside their apologies. For example, *"Sorry and thank you for being so sweet. It's really rare behaviour to see in someone."*
- **Minimization of the offence:** This strategy involved downplaying the severity of the offence. An example is, *"It's only 10 minutes, I would appreciate it if you can wait."*
- **Asking the offended not to be angry:** Learners sometimes pre-empted the apology with a request for the listener to stay calm. For instance, *"Emily, I'll tell you something, but please don't be angry. I accidentally broke your camera."*
- **Irony:** Some learners used irony to deflect or soften the impact of their apology, such as, *"What a lucky day!"*

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- **Determinism:** This strategy involved attributing the offense to fate or an uncontrollable event. An example is, "It was meant to be broken."

Additionally, Semester 1 learners were characterized by their use of two intensifiers that rarely appeared in other groups:

- **Double intensifier:** Learners repeated intensifying adverbials, as seen in, "I am very, very sorry."
- **Swearing:** This was used to emphasize sincerity, often with phrases like, "I swear to God it wasn't on purpose."

4.2. S5 Moroccan EFL Students Apology Strategies

Figure 5: The Frequency of Apology Strategies Performed by S5 EFL Learners

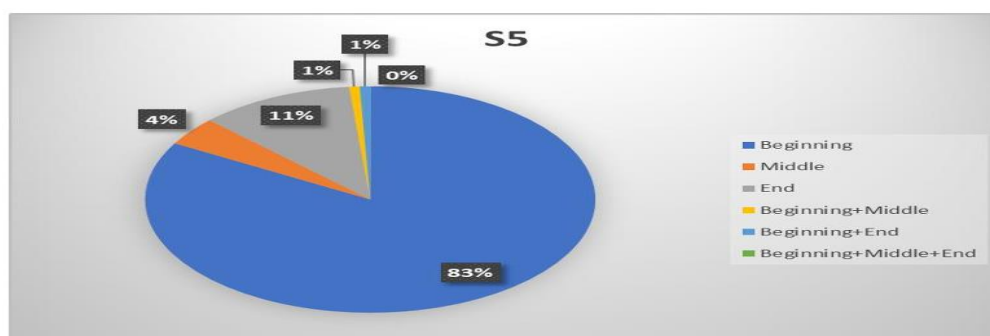


The results from Semester 5 (S5) participants demonstrate different frequency use of apology strategies, with fewer instances of new strategies compared to Semester 1 learners.

1. IFIDs (Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices)

The most frequent strategy used by S5 learners was IFIDs, with 83% of them positioned at the beginning of the utterance (224 out of 273). A smaller number (11%) occurred at the end, and only 4% were placed in the middle as the table shows:

The Occurrence of IFIDs in S5 EFL Strategies

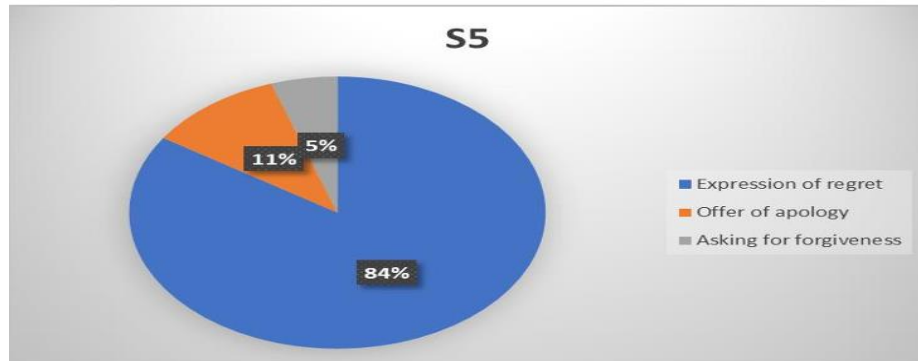


S5 learners employed various sub-strategies to express IFIDs. The majority of these (230 out of 273) were simple expressions of regret. Additionally, 29 apologies used an offer of apology, while only 14 included asking for forgiveness. Examples include:

- **Expression of regret:** "I am sorry."

- **Offer of apology:** "Hi Emma, I apologize for not coming for the second time. I overslept again."
- **Asking for forgiveness:** "I hope you can forgive me."

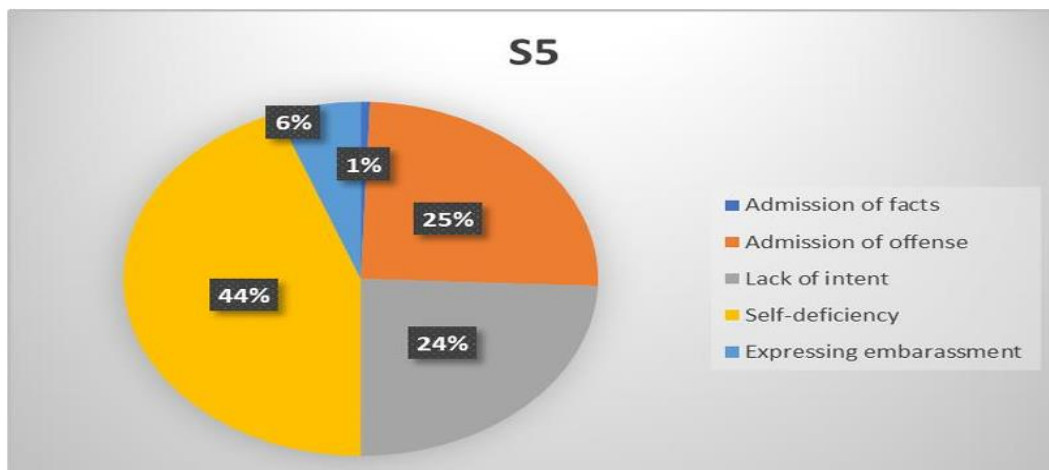
Figure 6: The Realization of "IFID" by S5 Learners



2. Taking on Responsibility

Taking responsibility was the second most common strategy, used 156 times. S5 learners employed different sub-strategies to take responsibility.

Figure 7: The Realization of "Taking on Responsibility" by S5 Learners



About 44% of these responses used self-deficiency (69 out of 156), while 25% showed a lack of intent, and the remaining 25% involved admission of offense. Examples include:

- **Self-deficiency:** "I'm afraid I forgot to bring back the book you gave me."
- **Lack of intent:** "Oh sorry sir, I didn't do it on purpose."
- **Admission of offense:** "It was my mistake."
- **Expressing embarrassment:** "I'm ashamed, professor. I will fix this as soon as possible."

3. Offer of Repair

An offer of repair was the third most frequent strategy, appearing in 38% of the apologies. S5

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learners used this strategy mainly when they had caused damage or inconvenience. Examples include:

- *"I'm so sorry for breaking it, I will repair it immediately."*

4. Explanation

Explanations were used in 22% of apologies, usually combined with another strategy, most often an IFID. Explanations were especially common in scenarios involving arriving late or forgetting a meeting. Example:

- *"Hey Emma! Please don't get mad at me. I overslept again, but it's because I spent the whole night doing homework."*

5. Promise for Forbearance

Promises to avoid repeating the offence were less frequent but were used occasionally by S5 learners. This strategy appeared in a small percentage of apologies, often in situations involving failure to meet commitments. Example :

- *"I promise it won't happen again."*

6. Concern for the Hearer

This strategy was rarely used, S5 learners showed concern for the hearer when the situation called for empathy, but this was not a dominant strategy.

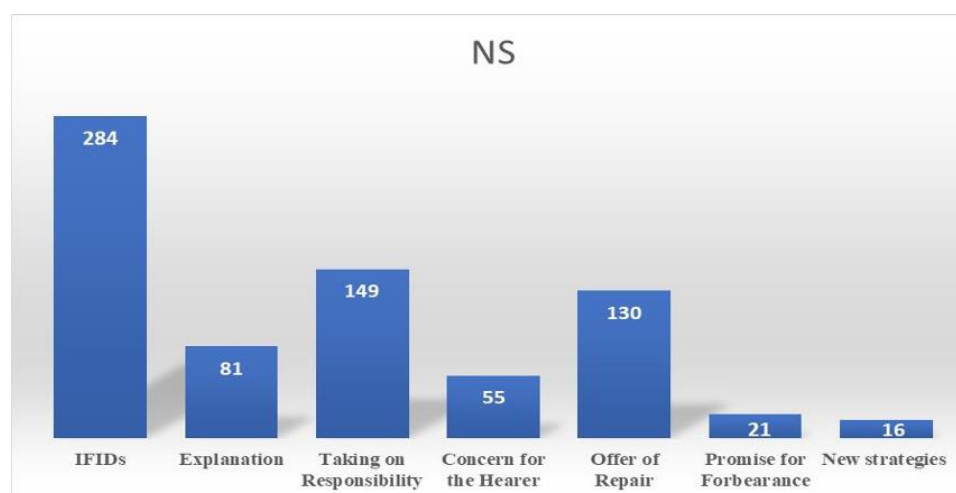
7. New Strategies

Unlike S1 learners, S5 students used fewer new strategies. Only two new strategies were observed in S5 utterances.

- **Asking the offended not to be angry:** *"Please don't get mad at me."*
- **Irony:** *"What a perfect day for this to happen!"*

4.2. Results of British Native Speakers' Apologies

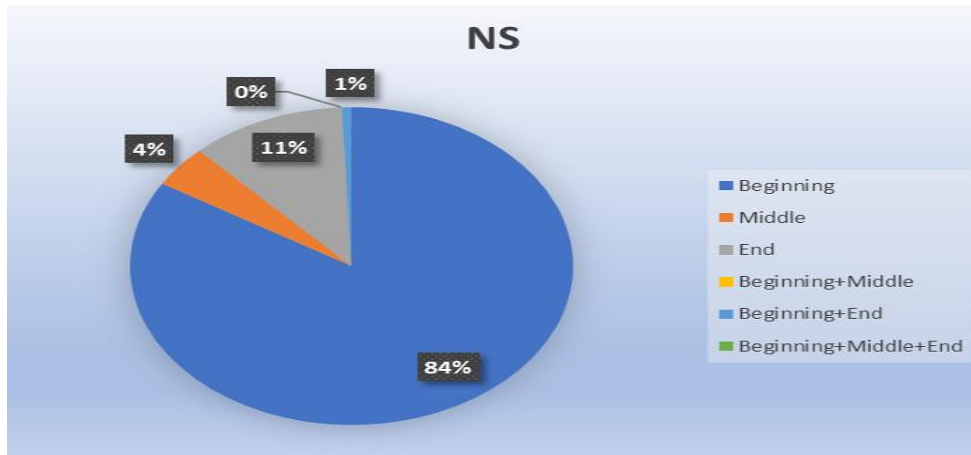
Figure 8: The Frequency of Apology Strategies Used by British Native Participants



This section presents the results from British native speakers (NSs) following the same procedure as used for the other groups. It describes the overall strategies employed.

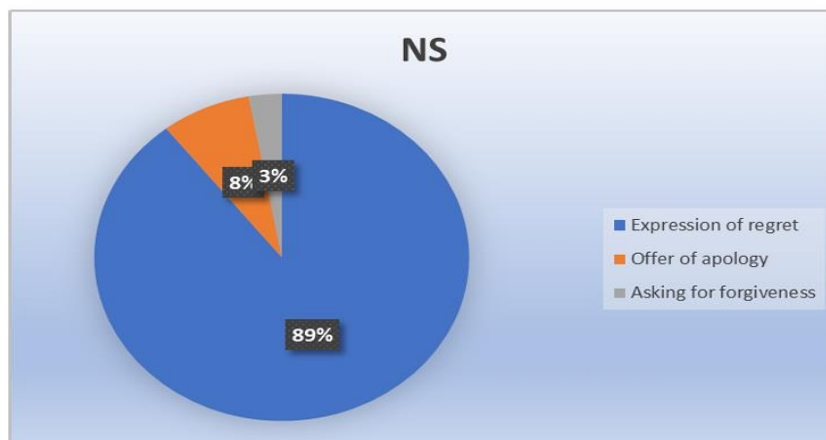
1. IFIDs (Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices)

Figure 9 The Position of “IFID” in NS Apologies



Similar to other groups, IFID was the most frequent strategy used by native speakers, appearing 284 times across all scenarios. Most native speakers placed the IFID at the beginning of their apologies.

Figure 10 : The Realization of “IFID” by NS Participants



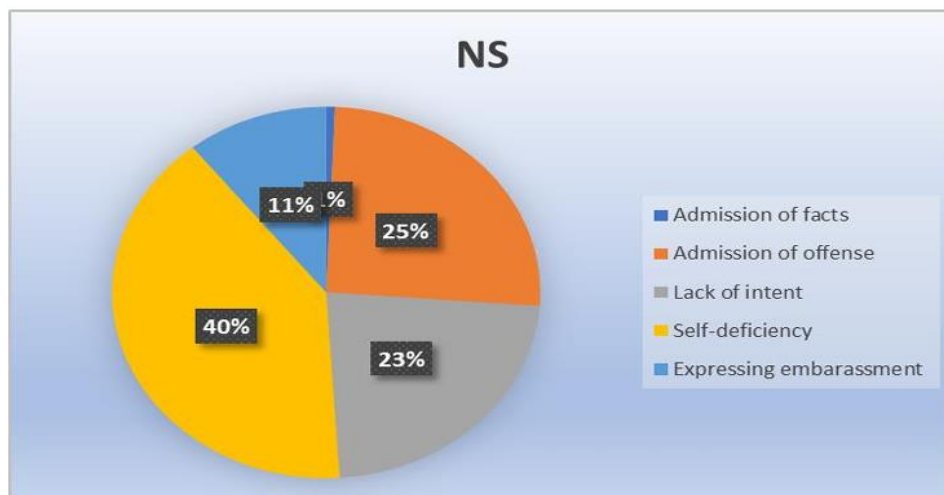
The most common sub-strategy was an expression of regret (89%), followed by an offer of apology (8%), and only 3% of NSs used expressions asking for forgiveness. The most frequent expression in the data was:

- "I am sorry" / "Sorry" (Expression of regret)
Examples of offers of apology include:
- "I sincerely apologize for being late again."
- "I apologize for the inconvenience caused."

2. Taking on Responsibility

Taking responsibility was the second most common strategy. Native speakers varied in their realization of this strategy.

Figure 11: The Realization of “Taking on Responsibility” by Native Speakers



Around 40% of responses included self-deficiency, while 25% used admission of offence. Another 25% used lack of intent, and a small portion (2%) used admission of facts. Examples include:

- **Self-deficiency:** *"I'm sorry, Dr. Thompson, I forgot to bring the book with me today."*
- **Lack of intent:** *"Sorry, I didn't mean to break your camera, but I will pay for the repair."*
- **Admission of offence:** *"It's my fault. I will fix it for you."*
- **Expressing embarrassment:** *"I am so sorry and embarrassed to have damaged your camera. can you give me time to fix it and bring it back to you."*

3. Explanation

Explanations were used more frequently by native speakers compared to Moroccan respondents, appearing in 81 out of 314 apologies. Explanations were typically used in scenarios such as arriving late or forgetting a meeting. Example:

- *"I'm sorry for missing the session. I had an emergency at home that I couldn't avoid."*

4. Concern for the Hearer

This strategy occurred less frequently, used in about 17% of apologies, particularly in more personal scenarios like bumping into someone. Example:

- *"Oh my Gosh, I am so sorry. Are you okay? I hope I didn't hurt you."*

5. Offer of Repair

Native speakers used offers of repair 130 times, not only for physical damage but also in other types of situations, such as forgetting a meeting. For example:

- *"I'm sorry for missing our meeting. How can I make it up to you?"*
- *"I'll replace the camera as soon as possible. I'm really sorry."*

6. Promise for Forbearance

Promises of forbearance were less common, occurring mostly in scenarios like forgetting a meeting. About 57% of NSs made a promise not to repeat the offense. For instance:

- *"I promise this will never happen again."*

7. Intensifiers

British native speakers frequently used three types of intensifiers in their apologies: emotional expressions, intensifying adverbials, and appeasers.

- **Emotional expressions:** NSs often used emotional phrases such as "Oh," "Oh Gosh," or "Oops" to intensify the severity of their apology.
- **Intensifying adverbials:** Examples include "I am very sorry" and "I am so sorry."
- **Appeasers:** This strategy involved offering a small token or treat, unrelated to the offense, to modify the apology. For example:
 - *"I am so sorry for wasting your day. Please accept this gift card as an apology."*
 - *"I feel so bad for missing the session. Here's a Starbucks card for you."*

4.3. Results of The Comparative Analysis Across the Eight Scenarios

Table 3: A Comparison Between the Means of the Moroccan and the British Native Speakers Across the Eight Scenarios

	Sc1	Sc2	Sc3	Sc4	Sc5	Sc6	Sc7	Sc8
S1	2.21	2.02	1.85	3.05	2.72	2.3	1.95	1.97
S5	2.05	1.77	1.82	2.8	2.22	2.32	1.97	1.95
NS	1.95	1.6	1.72	2.22	2.2	2.25	1.9	1.92

The table presents a comparison of the mean values for apology strategies used by three groups: Semester 1 (S1) learners, Semester 5 (S5) learners, and native speakers (NS) across eight different scenarios (Sc1 to Sc8). The means represent the average number of apology strategies used by each group in each scenario.

- **Scenario 1:** S1 has the highest mean (2.21), followed by S5 (2.05) and NS (1.95). This suggests that S1 learners used more apology strategies than both S5 learners and native speakers.
- **Scenario 2 :** S1 learners also have the highest mean (2.02), with S5 at 1.77 and NS significantly lower at 1.6. This shows a higher use of strategies by Moroccan learners compared to native speakers.
- **Scenario 3:** The means are quite similar across all groups, with S1 at 1.85, S5 at 1.82, and NS at 1.72. This indicates that all three groups used a similar number of apology strategies in this scenario.

- **Scenario 4:** There is a notable difference between the groups, with S1 having the highest mean (3.05), followed by S5 (2.8), and NS (2.2). This shows that Moroccan learners (both S1 and S5) used significantly more strategies compared to native speakers in this scenario.
- **Scenario 5:** S1 has the highest mean (2.72), followed by NS (2.2) and S5 (2.22), indicating that S1 learners used more apology strategies than the other two groups in this scenario.
- **Scenario 6:** All three groups are closely aligned, with S5 slightly higher (2.32), followed by S1 (2.3), and NS (2.25). This suggests a similar strategy used across groups.
- **Scenario 7:** The means for all three groups are quite close, with S1 at 1.95, S5 at 1.97, and NS at 1.9, indicating similar usage of apology strategies.
- **Scenario 8:** S1 has a slightly higher mean (1.97), followed by NS (1.92) and S5 (1.95), showing minimal variation in the use of strategies between the groups. Moroccan learners, particularly those in Semester 1, tend to use more apology strategies than both Semester 5 learners and native speakers, especially in scenarios like Sc1, Sc2, and Sc4.

Overall, semester 5 learners show a closer alignment with native speakers compared to Semester 1 learners in most scenarios, suggesting more refined strategy use as their English proficiency increases. In scenarios like Sc3, Sc6, Sc7, and Sc8, the three groups show similar patterns in strategy use, indicating consistency in how they approach certain apology situations.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings indicated that both Moroccan and British native speakers use the six strategies provided by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984): IFIDs, taking on responsibility, explanation, offer of repair, concern for the hearer, and promise for forbearance. The two most frequent strategies in both groups are IFIDs and taking on responsibility. These are the only strategies that appeared in all scenarios. This finding is in line with previous studies (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Olshtain, 1989; Reiter, 2002), which found that IFIDs and taking on responsibility figure in all scenarios, whereas the other apology strategies appear to be situation-dependent. Surprisingly, some new semantic formulas emerged in Moroccan EFL respondents' corpora. They consist of asking the offended not to be angry, praising and showing gratitude to the offended, minimizing the offense, determinism, swearing, and irony. It could be said that participants' use of these strategies reflects the influence of their native language and culture. Determinism, for instance, is rooted in Arabic and religious beliefs. Some may believe that if something happens or an item is broken, it was meant to be broken; it just happened in someone's hand.

Additionally, further cross-cultural differences were observed. For instance, the British use less taking on responsibility than Moroccan respondents from the two groups. This demonstrates that Moroccans are less embarrassed by the offences they cause than the British and ready to accept responsibility for their fault in order to rectify the situation. Unlike the British, the Moroccan respondents pay more significant concern for the addressee's positive face. This concern towards the apologizer was reflected in the use of many strategies and exaggerated expressions of apology. The excessive use of apology strategies shows the apologizer's choice to convince the offended person and maintain social harmony.

Concerning the similarities and differences between the two groups and the British native speakers, findings indicated that the respondents from the three groups of participants displayed similarities in their choice of strategies: they all regularly use IFIDs, explain the reasons, take on responsibility, concern for the hearer, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance. However,

when utterances were analyzed at a more detailed and specific level of content and description, each group's linguistic-specific preference, tendency, and style were different. The findings demonstrated that S5 shared more similarities than differences with native speakers than the S1, which illustrates some development of Moroccan EFL apologies. The significant similarities between the S5 and native speakers reveal that S5 students generally have more pragmatic knowledge of L2 than students from the first semester. The latter, however, seemed to rely more on pragmatic knowledge from their L1. This was demonstrated through their excessive use of strategies and employment of different new strategies found in the Arabic language and culture, such as positive swearing and determinism.

As for the influence of educational level, findings showed that it didn't have considerable influence on strategy selection, while the effect was evident in the style of apologies, the strategies emerged. Besides, statistical analysis showed little significant difference in the use of IFIDs, explanation, concern for the hearer, offer of repair, and taking on responsibility. To further elaborate, findings obtained from the results indicated that students gradually start to rely on pragmatic knowledge and norms in the target language and culture. The effect of the educational level was also apparent in the use of combinations. Students from S1 were not consistent and used a variety of combinations. In s5, however, students started to decrease the combinations and the number of apologies they employed in one utterance.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Practical Implications

In conclusion, this research highlights the significant differences and similarities in the use of apology strategies between Moroccan EFL learners and British native speakers. The findings reveal that despite spending three years studying English, Moroccan undergraduate EFL students show only minor improvement in their performance of apologies. Many learners continue to rely on their L1 socio-pragmatic norms when apologizing, without considering the pragmatic differences between their own culture and the target culture. This reliance on L1 norms will likely cause miscommunication in the second language, particularly in situations requiring apologies. Therefore, the main pedagogical implication of this study is that language teachers and professors should focus on developing both linguistic and pragmatic competence in second language learners to ensure that their students can produce not only grammatically correct expressions but also pragmatically appropriate ones.

Below are some examples of activities that can be incorporated into the classroom to develop pragmatic competence:

- **Contextualized Role-plays:** Students use English for different functions (apologizing, requesting, greeting, giving compliments, handling conflicts) in various cultural contexts.
- **Discussions and Debates:** Students compare their own cultural norms with those of the target language or other cultures through guided discussions or debates on different cultural topics.
- **Pragmatic Awareness Quizzes:** Students take quizzes that test their knowledge of different cultural practices and norms, followed by group discussions to deepen their understanding.
- **Listening and Analyzing Authentic Conversations:** Students listen to native speakers' conversations and analyze how they perform speech acts.

Like any research, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The first limitation is related to the research design employed. Cross-sectional studies typically require

a larger sample size, and the sample used in this study may not be sufficient to generalize the research findings. The second limitation concerns the research instrument. Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) may sometimes not reflect what participants would actually say in real-life situations.

6.2. Recommendations for future research

Additionally, the current study opens up several avenues for future research. First, since learners' language proficiency was not considered, future research should examine its impact on students' pragmatic competence. Administering a language proficiency test before filling out the DCTs could allow for grouping students by proficiency level, facilitating a comparison between low and high-proficiency learners to measure the influence of language proficiency on their pragmatic competence. Second, the findings revealed the emergence of new strategies in EFL learners' apologies. Future research could investigate the realization of apologies in Moroccan Arabic or Tamazight to explore whether these new strategies stem from negative transfer from learners' L1. Third, research in ELT can focus on the teaching of pragmatics in Morocco by addressing key questions such as: To what extent is pragmatics taught in Moroccan EFL classrooms? Are teachers trained to teach pragmatics? Are teachers and students aware of cross-cultural differences and socio-pragmatic norms in the target culture? What are students' perceptions of native speaker norms? What challenges do EFL teachers face in teaching pragmatics? And to what extent do Moroccan textbooks promote pragmatic competence?

Finally, it is important to clarify that this study does not aim to promote the native speaker model or suggest that teachers should train students to speak like native speakers. As David Crystal emphasizes in his book on "English as a Global Language", English is now owned and spoken by many people worldwide. Instead, the focus is on raising students' awareness of pragmatic differences across cultures. The belief here is that linguistic competence alone is insufficient; developing students' pragmatic competence will enable them to communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings, not only with native speakers but with speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

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