

## الاعتذار في اللغة الانكليزية

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### ملخص البحث

إنّ الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو البحث في الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها طلاب اللغة الانكليزية في جامعة البعث من السنة الرابعة ليقدموا الاعتذار. تكمن أهمية هذا البحث في التركيز على أهمية اكتساب الكفاءة التواصلية لدى متعلمي اللغة الثانية وفي تحسين المهارات التواصلية لدى طلاب السنة الرابعة. المنهج المستخدم في جمع البيانات هو الاستبيان المغلق. عدد المشاركين في هذه الدراسة هو خمسين طالبا "جامعيا" في السنة الرابعة من الدراسة. أظهرت النتائج أن أغلب الطلاب استخدموا عدة استراتيجيات معا" في تقديم الاعتذار وأن استراتيجية الاعتذار المباشر هي أكثر استراتيجية استخدمها الطلاب سواء كاستراتيجية مفردة او عند استخدام اكثر من استراتيجية. لكن يوجد بعض القيود فيما يخص العمر، الجنس والعدد. علاوة على ذلك ، أجريت هذه الدراسة بشكل عام وركّزت على فئة عمرية محددة (حوالي 22 سنة) من دون تسليط الضوء على اختلاف الأساليب بين الرجال والنساء في تقديم الاعتذار. كما أن عدد المشتركين محدود لذلك لا يمكن تعميم النتائج. لذلك، على الباحثين في المستقبل أن يأخذوا بعين الاعتبار تأثيرات العوامل الاجتماعية المختلفة على اختيار الاستراتيجيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة التواصلية، استراتيجيات، اعتذار.

# Apology in English

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## Abstract

This research was carried out to have an insight into the strategies fourth-year students of English at Al-Baath University employ to perform the speech act of apology. This study is significant as it increases the awareness of the necessity of achieving good communicative competence in addition to enhancing the communicative skills of fourth-year participants. Closed-ended questionnaire was the method used to collect the data. The sample consists of fifty participants. The analysis of data showed that almost all students tended to combine more than one single strategy and the strategy that was most frequent was the IFID whether as a single strategy or in combinations. However, despite the significance of this study, there were some limitations regarding age, gender and number. Moreover, this study was conducted in general without tackling people of different ages. Rather, it was done dealing only with twenty two years old people. Likewise, it did not shed light on the influence of gender on the choice of strategies. Similarly, the size of the sample is not big enough to generalize the findings. Therefore, future researchers should take into account the effect that different social factors have on the choice of strategies.

**Keywords:** communicative competence, strategies, apology.

## **1. Introduction:**

### **1.1. General background:**

Learning a second language is not as easy as most people think; that is, learners should not take it as adequate to learn the grammar, vocabulary and how to form good sentences in the process of learning a second language. Rather, they should achieve communicative competence. Thus, learners should understand the idea that cultures are different and avoid transferring the cultural rules of their first language into the second language in order not to be misinterpreted. However, achieving communicative competence is not easy, either. Learners should learn the pragmatics of the target language as one of the most important ways of being able to communicate well and express themselves in an appropriate way; that is, they will not be misunderstood. Therefore, learning a second language is not about being able to make good sentences but rather it is about saying them in accordance with the pragmatics and cultural norms of the second language so that native speakers understand their meanings as intended, and here lies the significance of this research since speech acts of all types form one important aspect of pragmatics. Many studies have been conducted on speech acts. However, the current study sheds light on the speech act of

apology aiming to investigate the strategies used to perform it from the point of view of fourth-year students. Performing speech acts is not an easy task as they differ from one culture to another. Hence, in order to be able to perform them successfully, learners have to master the cultural and pragmatic conventions of the target language.

### **1.2. Purpose of this study:**

This study aims at examining the speech act of apology and investigating whether fourth-year students of English at Al-Baath University employ the strategies of giving an account and offering to repair when apologizing or not.

### **1.3. Significance of the study:**

This research is important for various reasons. First of all, it enhances our understanding of human interactions and how, when something goes wrong between interlocutors, interlocutors maintain the harmony and the balance of the relationship between each other; that is, when someone says or does something that hurts another, the offender apologizes to the offended person as a means to correct his/her behavior. Hence, apology plays an important role in re-creating the balance and re-establishing the flow of communication. Secondly, this study focuses on the

necessity of increasing the learners' awareness of the idea that gaining communicative competence is the main aim of learning a second language. Additionally, this research contributes to the communicative and pragmatic competence of fourth-year students and describes their different ways of apologizing.

## **2. Literature review:**

### **2.1. Definitions of pragmatics, sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics:**

Pragmatics is the study of the meaning intended by the speaker in a particular context. Thus, it is about how listeners understand what the speaker intends (Yule, 1996). Pragmatics allows humans into analysis (Yule, p.4). Leech (1983) claims that sociopragmatics has to do with sociology while pragmalinguistics is related to the grammar.

### **2.2. Speech acts:**

There are three types of speech acts (Yule, 1996). The first type is locutionary act which is about producing a meaningful linguistic form (Yule, p.48) such as she has just prepared lunch. The second type is illocutionary act which refers to the function of producing an utterance (Yule). Saying she has just prepared lunch, the speaker might want to make a statement, an offer, an

account of something or some other communicative purpose (Yule). The third kind of speech acts is perlocutionary act which is the effect of the utterance (Yule). When saying she has just prepared lunch, the speaker expects the listener to realize the intention or the effect. The same utterance can have various illocutionary forces. The locutionary act in 'I will see you later' (adapted from Yule, p.49) can be interpreted as a prediction, a promise, or a warning. To take into account how listeners realize the intended illocutionary force, we need to consider the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) and felicity conditions. The IFID is an expression that contains a performative verb (Vp). However, sometimes speakers describe the speech act for listeners. Felicity conditions are particular expected circumstances for the performance of a speech act to be understood by the hearer as intended.

### **2.2.1. Speech act classification:**

There are five kinds of common roles achieved by speech acts (Yule, 1996). The first one is called declarations which causes a change in the world. By using a declaration, the speaker makes the world different by means of words as in "*I now pronounce you husband and wife*" (from Yule, p.53). The second kind is representatives, and they assert what the speaker feels certain

about. When the speaker uses a representative, s/he makes words fit the world (of belief) as in “*the earth is flat*” (from Yule, 1996, p.53). The third type is expressives which express the speaker’s feeling. When the speaker uses an expressive, s/he makes words suit the world (of feeling) (Yule) as in congratulations. The fourth type is directives and they are used to make someone do something. By using a directive, the speaker tries to make the world suit the words (via the hearer) as in could you lend me a pen, please? (Yule, p. 54). The last type is commissives and they cause the speaker to make promises to do something in the future. When the speaker uses a commissive, s/he promises to make the world suit words (via the speaker) as in “*I will be back*” (Yule, 1996, p.54).

### **2.2.2. Direct and indirect speech acts:**

In fact, we have a direct speech act whenever there is a direct relation between a structure and a function, and we have an indirect speech act whenever there is an indirect relationship between a structure and a function. Therefore, a declarative used to make a request is an indirect speech act, but a declarative used to make a statement is a direct speech act. The utterance ‘The weather is hot’, is a declarative. When it is used to make a statement, it is functioning as a direct speech act. When it is used

to make a command/request, it is functioning as an indirect speech act (Yule, 1996). However, distinct structures can be used to achieve the same main function. The type of indirect speech act that has the form of an interrogative is one of the most general types of indirect speech acts, but it is not used to ask a question; thus, we expect not only an answer but also an action. In English, the relationship between indirect speech acts and politeness is greater than that between direct speech acts and politeness.

### **2.2.3. Definitions of speech acts:**

Austin (1992) was one of the first linguists who defined speech acts. He named speech act a performative. For him, a speech act means doing an action by issuing an utterance. Searle (1969, p.16) defined speech acts as the “basic or minimal units of linguistic communication”. Searle (1969, p.16) suggested that “the unit of linguistic communication is not the symbol, word, or sentence or the token of the symbol, word or sentence in the performance of the speech act”. More exactly, “the production or issuance of a sentence token under certain conditions is a speech act.” (Searle, p.16). In speaking a language, we carry out acts with respect to rules. For Bach and Harnish (1979), speech acts are an association between utterances, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. In issuing an expression, S utters



something to H; in uttering something to H, S carries out something; and by carrying out something, S produces an effect on H, and this is the speech act schema or SAS. Geis (1995) defines a new theory of speech acts claiming that speech act theory must be placed within a general theory of communicative competency able to describe and explain the way we carry out things by using words in talks that occur normally. He proposes the Dynamic Speech Act Theory (DSAT). Wee (2004) argues that linguistic ways of communication are often given much more attention than non-linguistic ones. Therefore, Wee intends to provide a balance by examining a group of non-linguistic communicative acts which he calls extreme communicative acts (ECAS). For Mey (1993), speech acts have to be situated in order to be effectual. They both depend on and make the situation in which they are identified.

### **2.3. Apology speech act:**

#### **2.3.1. The definitions of apology:**

For Leech (1983), apologies are looked at as expressions of remorse for an offense made by the speaker against the hearer—and there is no indication that the speaker has an advantage from doing the offense. For Goffman (1971, p.113) an apology is “a

gesture through which the speaker splits himself into two parts: the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule". Olshtain (1983 cited in Sachie, 1998, p.26) claims that the speech act of apology requires an actions or an utterance 'to set things right'. Holmes (1990 cited in Hua, 2015, p. 3) claims that the apologizer tries to correct the offense and save the hearer's face by taking responsibility for it. However, Fraser (1981 cited in Hua, 2015, p.2) views that the apologizer is required to take responsibility for having committed the offense and express remorse for the offense made. According to Searle (1979 cited in Hua) apology is an expressive act that expresses the speaker's remorse for some state or affairs. Brown and Levinson (1987 cited in Hua, p. 2) state that apology is a face-threatening act for the speaker's positive face. Bergman and Kasper (1993, cited in Kasper and Blum-Kulka, 1993) define apology as a compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which the speaker is without care involved and which damages the hearer. Thomas (1995, p.p. 99, 100) criticizes the Searlean rules (1969) claiming that we cannot relate apologies with regret arguing that when we apologize, it is not necessary that we are expressing regret.

### **2.3.2. Verbal and non-verbal apology:**

Apology can be expressed both verbally and non-verbally. Most people try to apologize indirectly. Speech acts are performed not completely by linguistic ways, but via connection between linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic features. Rost (1990) proposes some non-verbal strategies as follows: the first one is Gaze direction as switching gaze from face to face of many listeners. The second one is Body position as touching listeners or objects, moving towards listener (distance reduction), open arms, arms crossed. The third one is Facial gesture as smile, empathetic expression, head nod, frown, sneer, cry, smirk, shock, angry expression. Similarly, Vocal cues are a class of features which may provide indications of speaker intention such as changes of pitch span, loudness, tempo, articulatory setting and timing that are heard during an utterance. The use of gestural cues such as vocal markings do not help the listener deduce what the speaker means as the use of vocal ones (Rost, 1990, p. 78). Rather, they provide weak inferences. Ability to interpret the speaker's utterances depends on the interaction between vocal, verbal and visual features.

### **2.3.3. Apology strategies:**

Olshtain and Cohen (1983 cited in Cohen, Olshtain and Rosenstein, 1986, p.52) suggest five strategies. The first one is

an expression that contains a performative verb as “be” sorry. The second one is an account of the reason which incidentally led the offender to make the offense. The third one is to take responsibility for causing the violation. The fourth strategy is to offer to repair the harm his/her offense caused. This strategy is also situation-specific. The last strategy is a promise of forbearance. This strategy is also situation-specific. Nevertheless, the choice of any one of these or of a combination of them will rely on the specific situation within the given language and culture.

Bergman and Kasper (cited in Kasper and Blum-Kulka, 1993) propose some strategies. The first one is the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device. The second one is Upgrader-Element increasing apologetic force. The speaker confesses the offense and agrees that s/he is responsible for it. The third one is minimizing responsibility or weight of offense. This can be done either by using an utterance that lessens the responsibility of the speaker for the offense, using an excuse, giving an account of the reasons that led to the doing that requires an apology, showing lack of information or knowledge, treating something that must happen or done before something else can happen as a problem, or refusal or by using an utterance that lessens the seriousness of an offense. The fourth one is offering to repair. The fifth one is

verbal redress—speaker worrying about the upset or hurt person, making efforts to placate or promise of forbearance.

Goffman (1971) claims that speakers can achieve an apology by expressing the feelings of being embarrassed and annoyed; explaining that one knows the behavior that had been anticipated and feels sorry for applying negative sanction; spoken refusal, rejection, and denial of the incorrect way of behavior together with condemnation of the self that did the behavior; adopting of the right way and a confession from now on to follow that way; performance that shows that one feels sorry for the bad behavior and offering to compensate and pay for the damage made.

Holmes (1990 cited in Hua, 2015) suggests four strategies some of which include sub—strategies. The first strategy is to use an explicit expression. Under this strategy falls three sub—strategies: the first one is to offer an apology, the second one is expressing regret and the last sub—strategy is to request forgiveness. The second strategy is giving explanations (accounts, excuses and justifications). The third strategy is taking responsibility. This strategy includes four sub—strategies: the first one is expressing lack of intent. The second sub—strategy is to explicitly take responsibility. The third one is expressing self—deficiency and the

final sub-strategy is to express explicitly acceptance of blame. The final strategy is promise of forbearance.

Fraser (1981 cited in Prachanant, 2016) suggests a list of strategies. They can perform the speech act of apology by expressing regret, by asking to be forgiven, by acceptance of responsibility, by promising forbearance, or by offering to pay or compensate.

For Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), the first strategy is the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device. The second one is an account of the reason which caused the offense. The third one is taking responsibility for the offense. The fourth one is an offer to repair, and the last one is a promise forbearance.

## **2.4. Overview of politeness and face theories:**

### **2.4.1. Conversational maxims and politeness principles:**

Grice (1989, p.26) differentiates between four groups of which one or another will include some more particular maxims and submaxims. The first category is the category of Quantity under which Grice places the following two maxims (Grice, 1989, p.26):

“Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of exchange).”

“Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.”

The second category is the category of Quality and under it falls a supermaxim\_\_\_\_ “Try to make your contribution one that is true.”\_\_\_\_ and two more specific maxims (Grice, 1989, p.27):

1) “Do not say what you believe to be false.”

2) “Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.”

The third category is the category of Relation under which Grice places just one maxim which is “Be relevant.” (Grice, 1989, p.27)

Finally, under the category of Manner, he places the supermaxim\_\_\_\_”Be perspicuous” \_\_\_\_ and different maxims such as (Grice, 1989, p.27):

“Avoid obscurity of expression.”

“Avoid ambiguity.”

“Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).”

“Be orderly.”

However, sometimes, speakers may violate or do not adhere to the principles (Yule, 1996). For example, when a speaker says something that s/he is not certain of whereas the hearer expects the truth, s/he is violating the quality maxim.

#### 2.4.2. Brown and Levinson theory:

Their theory relies on the concept of face. Brown and Levinson (1987, p.61) define face as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”. They claim that face consists of two types connected with each other: positive and negative face. Negative face: the simple need for independence, freedom of action and freedom from being imposed on by others. (Yule, 1996)

Positive face: the need of every member to be accepted, treated by others as a person who belongs to them i.e. the need to be considered a member of their group and a person who shares their same wants (Yule, 1996, p. 62). Sometimes speakers may perform acts that threaten the addressees’ face. These acts are known as “face threatening acts” or “FTAs” (Abdul-Majeed, 2009, p. 512). For Brown and Levinson, both negative and positive face can be threatened (Longcope, 1995). For example, the hearer’s negative face would be threatened in the case of requests (Fasold, 1990 p. 161 cited in Longcope, p. 4), offers are threatening speech acts for the speaker’s negative face, (Fasold, p.161 cited in Longcope, 1995), in the case of apologies, confessions and admissions of guilt, the speaker’s positive face may be threatened (Fasold, p.161 cited in Longcope). Another



assumption on which they build their theory is “rationality” (Longcope, 1995, p.5). This supposition is essential to the theory because any rational person will either try to stay away from these face-threatening acts, or will use particular strategies to lessen the possible threat. (Brown and Levinson, 1987). There are different strategies for committing FTAs (Abdul-Majeed). These strategies are classified into five superstrategies (Longcope, 1995). If speakers make a choice to commit an FTA, they can do so either on record or off record (Abdul-Majeed). On record are direct address forms, while off record are indirect address forms (Yule, 1996). Off record statement may not always be successful (Yule, 1996). If speakers perform the FTA on record, they can either commit it baldly (without redressive action) or with redressive action (Brown and Levinson, 1987 cited in Abdul-Majeed, 2009). Depending on which aspect of face is being stressed, redressive actions take one or two forms (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Positive politeness is directed towards the hearer’s positive face, while negative politeness has to do with negative face (Yule, 1996). When speakers intend to commit an FTA, they must decide which strategy to employ. Their decision depends on three factors: (Brown and Levinson, 1978 cited in Longcope, 1995) the ‘social distance’, the relative ‘power’ and the absolute ranking.

### 2.4.3. Lakoff politeness theory:

Lakoff (1990, p.34) defines politeness as a system of “interpersonal relations” employed to make communication easy via lessening any possibility for any disagreement between people and showdown that exist in all human interactions. Lakoff proposes two pragmatic rules. The first rule is be clear and the second one is be polite (Al-Duleimi, Rashid and Abdulla, 2016). Lakoff (in Al-Duleimi, Rashid and Abdulla, p.263) includes Grice’s maxims under her first rule be clear. However, Lakoff suggests that her second rule be polite is concerned with social factors (Lakoff, 1973 in Al-Duleimi, Rashid and Abdulla). However, the first rule, be clear, is related to Grice’s maxims, whereas the second rule, be polite, consists of three sub-rules (Lakoff, 1973 in Al-Duleimi, Rashid and Abdulla, p.263). The first sub-rule is do not impose, the second sub-rule is give your hearer an option and the third and last sub-rule is make your hearer feel good and be friendly (Lakoff, 1973 cited in Al-Duleimi, Rashid and Abdulla, p.263). Lakoff (1973 cited in Al-Duleimi, Rashid and Abdulla, p.263) argues that the first sub-rule relates to the distance and formality between interlocutors in a certain interaction, while the second sub-rule has to do with the deference when talking with others, and the last sub-rule is related to the hearer’s feelings

during the interaction in that the speaker should be friendly with his/her hearer.

### **3. Methodology: data collection and procedure:**

#### **3.1. Questionnaires:**

Aiken (1997, cited in Dornyei 2003 , p. 5) states that there are different names that are used to refer to the term “questionnaire” as inventories, tests, forms, batteries, opinionnaires, checklists, scales, surveys, schedules, studies, indexes/indicators, profiles and sheets. For Dornyei (2003, p. 6), there are two rubrics of questionnaire that scholars use. Questionnaires can be used in two meanings: Interview schedules and Self-administered pencil-and-paper questionnaires. According to Brown (2001, cited in Dornyei, 2003), questionnaires are written questions that are given to respondents who are required to produce their response. For Dornyei (2003, p.p. 6, 7), questionnaires are neither tests nor discourse completion tasks. Tests measure the way someone does something and whether this person is doing it well. In questionnaire, we do not judge respondents’ performance. In discourse completion tasks, respondents are required to read a set of situations and respond to them. Thus, tests and discourse completion tasks are not questionnaires. Questionnaires are

written instruments used to elicit language. They test participants' competence through asking them to achieve certain tasks, which makes them relatively close to language tests (Dorneyi, 2003, p.7).

### **3.1.1. What do questionnaires measure?**

The data that can be gathered about the respondents are of three kinds (Dorneyi, 2003). The first one is Factual questions that can be used to know "demographic characteristics" such as gender, residential location, material and socioeconomic status. They also find out information about the second language learners' language learning history, how much time they spend in an environment of L2, level of the parents' proficiency of L2 and the second language book used. The second one is behavioral questions that are used to discover what the respondents are doing or have done in the past. They ask people questions about their actions, life-styles, habits and personal history. The third one is attitudinal questions that are used to figure out what people think. This is a wide category that is about attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests and values.

### **3.1.2. Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires:**

Questionnaires are cheap and do not require as much time and effort from the researcher as other methods. Researchers can gather a great deal of information in a short time. S/he can collect data easily without facing any difficulty in connecting with the informants (Dornyei, 2003, p. 9). However, Dornyei (2003) points out some of the disadvantages of questionnaires. The first one is that questions have to be completely clear and simple; thus, researchers will be unable to deepen and include many details of an issue. As a result, the findings would have no real value i.e. superficial (Moser and Kalton, 1971, cited in Dornyei, 2003, p. 10). The second one is that respondents deal with questionnaire as something which is not interesting or ineffective, the thing which produces results that differ from one respondent to another. Sometimes, carelessness on the part of the respondents lead them not to answer some questions. The third one is that informants do not always give true answers about themselves. Thus, the results will not be about their actual feelings or beliefs as they care for social desirability. The fourth one is that people tend to claim agreement with the ideas or opinions stated in sentences when they are not certain about how they feel or when they have two opposing feelings at the same time. The fifth one is that questions concentrate on the respondents' information. Thus,

the researcher has little chance to examine the answers again to make sure that they are reasonable and correct or not. The last one is that the length of a questionnaire can affect the answers and the results of it because respondents are tired or bored.

### **3.1.3. Closed/open ended questionnaires:**

Closed-ended questionnaire includes rating scales, true-false items, multiple-choice items, rank order items and checklists are the different subtypes of closed-ended questionnaire. In all these types, the respondents are supplied with questions whose answers are already made, and they are required to select one of these options. Informants are not asked to write freely. The main disadvantage of this type is that researchers can easily and directly analyze them since there is no subjectivity. (Dornyei, 2003). Open-ended questionnaire contains questions that are followed by blank lines where the respondents are required to fill out. Questions of this kind do not have stated options. This kind of questionnaire asks for information. However, the disadvantages of these questions are that they require much time from the respondents, and this will affect the choice of topics to be discussed. Further, it is not easy to analyze open-ended questions accurately. (Dornyei)

### **3.2. Method Used in this Study:**

In the current study, the method that is used is questionnaire. There are many reasons for choosing this tool. First of all, questionnaire enables researchers to gather a great amount of information in little time. Secondly, respondents can express themselves freely and easily without being afraid, feeling shy or uncomfortable. Additionally, respondents are familiar with this method. Besides, results are easy to analyze. Likewise, participants will be fully concentrating and will consider their responses carefully without any need to answer straight away. The type employed in this study is close-ended questionnaire. The type of questionnaire that is chosen is multiple-choice items. The choice of this type is based on the fact that respondents do not need much time to complete it since the respondents are asked to choose from pre-selected answers by the researcher along with the easiness of analyzing the findings due to the absence of the item of subjectivity. This type consists of fourteen questions, each question is followed by five options. Respondents are required to choose from the pre-prepared choices the option or options that are similar to their normal reply. The choices are clear, direct and not ambiguous so that participants can easily understand them and face no difficulty in selection.

### **3.3. Sample of the Study:**

The sample chosen for this research includes fifty fourth-year students of English at Al-Baath University. The choice of students in their last year of study is based on the belief that they must have accomplished good competence. Moreover, they must have learnt not only the grammar and vocabulary of English but also the rules of pragmatics of the language; therefore, they are assumed to be able to take advantage of English and making use of it by speaking and behaving in accordance with the pragmatics and cultural conventions without transferring their first language cultural rules.

### **3.4. Pilot study:**

The term pilot study refers to what is called feasibility studies which are “small scale versions, or trial runs, done in preparation for the major study.” (Polit, 2001, p. 467 cited in Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). Conducting such a mini-scale study can achieve a variety of significant functions such as testing the validity of the data collection method used; that is, to see whether the participants find the questions clear, interesting and easy to understand. In addition, pilot studies give the researcher valuable insight into the whole data collection process, including time



estimation, method, flexibility and accuracy. Carrying out a pilot study gives the researcher some indication of the success or failure of the study. If the participants taking part in the pilot study point out to some problems, these issues can be dealt with before finalizing the questions and giving them to the participants in the actual study. To carry out the pilot study in the current research, the questionnaire was tested on five fourth-year students of English, and these participants did not take part in the main study. Participants took twenty minutes to answer the questions and gave positive comments. However, one participant claimed that the third option of the first situation was vague. He thought that by saying I know I did it right, the apologizer was saying that s/he did the action as it should have been done in its right way showing that s/he was not to blame. Therefore, the option was clarified by saying that it meant that the apologizer was taking responsibility for the action. In other words, the word right does not mean correct, rather it means I actually did it. As a result of this ambiguity, the option was modified to become I know I did it. You are right.

#### **4. Data analysis and findings:**

##### **4.1. Introduction:**

This section aims to answer the question of whether fourth-year students of English at Al-Baath University use the strategy of giving an account and the strategy of offering to repair when they apologize or not.

#### **4.2. Data analysis:**

The analysis of the findings is divided into two parts. The first part has to do with the analysis of data with respect to the fourteen investigated situations; that is, the focus will be on the size of the offense, and the person to whom the apologizer is apologizing, whereas the second part depends on analyzing the strategies employed by the fourth-year participants who took part in the study. This is done by providing the rate of occurrences and the percentages of each strategy across all of the given situations in addition to mentioning the situations in which they received the highest/lowest percentage and giving the reason of their high/low occurrence.

##### **4.2.1. Analysis of the Apology Strategies Depending on the Situations:**

###### **4.2.1.1. Situation 1:**

You borrowed your sister's oud because you are throwing a party with your friends tonight. After you had finished playing it, you put

it on the chair and one of the children tries to hold it with his hand, so it fell on the ground and got broken. How would you apologize to your sister to whom you promised to return it tomorrow?

A) While I was outside, my friend's child tried to hold it and it fell on the ground.

B) I will repair it or I will buy a new one.

The data collected in this situation revealed that fourth-year participants employed the strategy of offering to repair more than the strategy of giving an explanation in apologizing as it was employed 37 times, whereas the strategy of giving an explanation occurred 16 times. The strategy of an offer to repair is more frequently used in situation 1 than the account strategy because it is more suitable with regard to the weight of the offense. There is a relationship between this strategy and the wrongdoing; that is, the apologizer has to offer to repair since there is real damage or to provide a financial compensation for the offense s/he made to persuade the hearer of accepting the apology as well as to save her face. Despite its suitability to the severity of the situation and its being sufficient to save the hearer's face and make her accept the apology, the offering to repair strategy was accompanied by the strategy of giving an account to support it. Giving an account strategy can also support the apology and promote the sister to

accept it. By apologizing providing a justifiable reason, the apologizer can support his/her apology and save the hearer's face and emotions.

#### **4.2.1.2. Situation 2:**

You rent a house in Homs and your cousin does not know how to come to your house, so you promise him/her to meet him/her at the coach station to pick him/her up but you were 30 minutes late. Now, you meet him/her. How would you apologize to him/her as he/she is very angry?

- A) Forgive me, please.
- B) How can I fix that?

The data for performing the speech act of apology in situation 2 showed that the strategy of giving an explanation was used more than the strategy of offering to repair as it was employed 30 times, while the strategy of offering to repair was used 9 times. Regarding the size of the offense, giving an account strategy received more employment than the other strategy because it is more correct and more acceptable to be used in accordance with making the apology more successful. The offended person in this situation feels upset and insulted because of waiting for a long time, thirty minutes, for his/her cousin at the coach station doing

nothing. Therefore, it is essential for the apologizer to give a reasonable and justifiable account of the reason for not being at the coach station on time which in return will persuade the addressee of forgiveness and save his/her face. The hearer cannot be convinced in case of using offering to repair strategy alone, as there is no real damage, or without employing the account strategy with it. The low rate of occurrence of offering to repair strategy can belong to its ineffectiveness and unsuitability in making the apology successful and in saving the hearer's face; that is, it was sometimes combined with the account strategy to support it.

#### **4.2.1.3. Situation 3:**

You told your neighbor that you were going to visit him/her at 6 o'clock in the afternoon, but you forgot the appointment after receiving the news of the death of one of your relatives who has gone to live abroad. In the evening, s/he calls you and blames you saying: "I waited for you, but you did not come. At least, you could have told me that you could not come". How would you apologize?

- A) I am terribly sorry.
- B) How can I fix that?

The findings for this situation exhibited the use of the strategy of giving an account more than the strategy of offering to repair as it was employed 35 times, whereas the strategy of offering to repair occurred just twice. The strategy of giving an account formed a higher occurring strategy than the other one due to the severity of the offense which is forgetting the appointment of visiting a neighbor who is doing nothing other than waiting uselessly for the neighbor who forgot the appointment and did not even tell him/her. This offense can be interpreted by the neighbor and his/her family as an insult. Hence, in order for the apologizer to save his/her neighbor's face and to keep the harmony in the relationship between them, s/he needs to provide the neighbor with the reason/s that lead him/her to forget the appointment. Moreover, for this function to be achieved, the apologizer should use the strategy of giving a justification. The low occurrence of the strategy of offering to repair as a common one in apologizing can belong to the fact that it is neither acceptable nor proper to be used in this situation as there is no real damage. Using it would not change things. It would not save the hearer's face and would not promote him/her to accept the apology either. However, the reason that two participants used it with the strategy of giving an

account strategy can belong to the fact that it will support the apology and promote the neighbor to accept it.

#### **4.2.1.4. Situation 4:**

Your teacher told you to hand your work by a certain date, you are unable to meet that deadline because of some family circumstances. What would you say?

- A) My brother got tired and we called the doctor.
- B) How can I fix that? Could you give me another chance to hand it?

In apologizing to a person of a higher status, it was found that the strategy of giving an account was ranked as being more employed strategy than the strategy of offering to repair as it was employed 32 times, while offering to repair strategy was used 20 times. Due to the size of the offense, being unable to meet the deadline the teacher set, the apologizer should apologize to his/her teacher by giving priority to the strategy of giving an explanation because there must have been an urgent matter for being unable to meet that deadline. Thus, in order for the apologizer to save his/her teacher's face and convince the teacher to give him/her another chance to hand the work in, s/he has to give the teacher persuasive justifications and reasonable reasons for not meeting

that deadline the thing which cannot be done by offering to repair without employing the account strategy either on its own or with it. Therefore, providing convincing explanation would convince the teacher of accepting the apology and of giving the student another chance. However, the strategy of justifying was accompanied by the strategy of offering to repair that was used to support it and to correct the situation via requesting permission to have another opportunity, and this will assure the teacher that the student will respect and stick to the time that will be set.

#### **4.2.1.5. Situation 5:**

While absent-minded walking in a park, you accidentally bump into somebody so s/he falls on the ground. How would you apologize to him/her?

- A) I was absent-minded. I did not pay attention. I was thinking about something else.
- B) No harm done; how can I fix it?

The results in this situation revealed that the giving an account recorded a higher rate of occurrence than the offering to repair as it occurred 22 times. Offering to repair occurred 2 times only. Giving an account can be useful due to the weight of the offense; in that, the offended person fell on the ground. Thus, it would be



important for the apologizer to justify to the hearer and provide the reason that led him/her not to pay attention to people while walking in the street, and this in return will maintain the hearer's face regarding the offense made, cure his/her sincere feelings as an honest person who was walking in the right path to be surprised by someone who bumped into him/her and suddenly find himself/herself on the ground and lead him/her to forgive this behavior. Offering to repair is not regarded as a significant strategy because it is an improper strategy since there is no real damage. Using it would not save the hearer's face and would not lead him/her to accept the apology either.

#### **4.2.1.6. Situation 6:**

While getting off the bus, you stepped on someone's toe. What would you say to apologize to him/her?

- A) I was absent-minded. I did not pay attention.
- B) No harm done; how can I fix that?

The findings for this situation showed that both strategies were ranked as having low occurrences. The strategy of giving an account was used 7 times, whereas the other strategy was used only once. Regarding the severity of the offense, both strategies are not suitable concerning the place, the time and the size of the

offense. It is not necessary for the apologizer to provide an account of the reason that led him to step on the hearer's toe or to offer to repair. The action is not extremely bad to the extent that requires to give any justifications for not paying attention. The hearer's face can be saved without providing any explanation. Similarly, there is no real damage; that is, using offering to repair strategy is not likely to be effective.

#### **4.2.1.7. Situation 7:**

You were late for an important meeting so you were driving very fast. The traffic light turned red so you have to slow down and stop. Because of going so fast without even leaving a short distance between your car and the one in front of you, you applied the foot brake but failed to stop in time and your car crashed into the car in front of you and seriously damaged it. How would you apologize?

- A) I was in a hurry. I have an urgent matter. I put the brakes on but failed to stop in time.
- B) I promise I will repair it.

Data exhibited that the strategy of offering to repair was used 37 times and the strategy of giving a justification 18 times. The strategy of offering to repair appeared to be more commonly used

than the account strategy because of the severity of the offense (crashing into someone's car on the motorway) and due to its suitability to this situation. The apologizer has to offer to repair or to provide a financial compensation for the offense s/he committed. In this situation, there is a real damage; thus, it is necessary for the wrongdoer to use an offer to repair which is the most proper and acceptable strategy. Giving a justification can also be important as the apologizer has to provide the hearer with reasonable reasons of why s/he did the offence.

#### **4.2.1.8. Situation 8:**

You are a waiter/waitress in a restaurant. As you were laying the cups of cappuccino on the table that ordered it, you accidentally dropped a cup on a guest who was wearing white clothes. What would you say?

- A) I do not know how it fell. Maybe because my hands are wet.
- B) How can I fix that? I will clean your clothes.

Data exhibited that the strategy of giving an account was more commonly used than the offering to repair strategy as it was used 23 times whereas the latter occurred 12 times. Due to the size of the offense, spilling the cappuccino on the clothes of a guest at a

restaurant, some participants found it crucial to give a rational justification of the cause that led him/her to do the offense; otherwise, neither the hearer's face will be maintained nor the genuine feelings will be healed. Similarly, other participants found it essential to use an offer to repair strategy to solve the problem s/he made and save the hearer's face.

#### **4.2.1.9. Situation 9:**

You are in university. Forgetting your phone at home, you took your colleague's mobile to make an urgent call and, by mistake, you drop it and seriously damage it. How would you apologize to your friend?

- A) I do not know how it fell from my hand while I was phoning my mum.
- B) If there is any damage, I will repair it.

The data for this situation exhibited that participants used the offering to repair strategy more than the account one as it occurred 44 times whereas the latter was used 15 times. The strategy of offering to repair was more often used due to the influence of the degree of severity of the offense which is using a friend's mobile phone and damaging it by dropping it on the ground, and due to its being the most acceptable strategy to be

employed to apologize; that is, there is a relationship between this strategy and the wrongdoing which is damaging a friend's mobile. The apologizer has to offer to repair or to compensate for the offense s/he made since there is a real damage; thus, it is crucial for the wrongdoer to use an offer to repair strategy which proved to be the more suitable and proper strategy. Similarly, this strategy was supported by the account strategy. By apologizing providing a convincing reason, the apologizer can support his/her apology, save the hearer's face and feelings and promote him/her to accept it.

#### **4.2.1.10. Situation 10:**

You are invited to your best friend's birthday party. Your friend asks you to come to his/her house since the morning to help him/her with the preparations. After laying the table, you went to the kitchen to bring the birthday cake to the lounge. However, while getting the cake out of the fridge, you accidentally drop it and it fell upside down on the floor. What would you say to your friend who freaked out and kept saying "only 20 minutes still remain for the beginning of the party. This will lead to the party's downfall"? How would you apologize to your friend and his/her mother?

- A) I have never dropped a cake or a dish. I lost feeling in my hand and I could not grab it before it flipped.
- B) I promise I will soon order another cake with the same design.

The data concerning this situation showed that the strategy of giving a justification was more commonly used as it was employed 48 times by fourth-year participants whereas the strategy of offering to repair was employed 15 times. The reason behind the high occurrence of the account strategy belongs to its being more proper and suitable strategy to save the hearer's face regarding the size of the offense of dropping your friend's birthday cake on the floor just twenty minutes before the beginning of the party at his/her house. Therefore, to save the hearer's face, the apologizer has to provide an account of the reason that made the cake fall from his/her hand and get completely destroyed. The strategy of offering to repair was used because there is real damage. Moreover, in order for correcting the situation, it is essential for the wrongdoer to offer to repair; for example, to suggest to buy another cake.

#### **4.2.1.11. Situation 11:**

You had an appointment for the first time with your future boss, but unfortunately you had some family circumstances so you were late for 30 minutes or so. How would you apologize to him/her?

A) I had some family circumstances.

B) How can I fix that?

The data regarding this situation displayed that the account strategy was used 37 times whereas the offering to repair strategy recorded no occurrence. Being late for the first appointment with his/her boss, the apologizer should apologize to his/her boss by using the strategy of providing an account of the reason that made him/her unable to come to the appointment on time because there must have been an important matter that prevented him/her from being on time. Thus, in order for the apologizer to save his/her boss's face and convince him/her to accept the apology, s/he has to give reasonable justifications and convincing reasons. In this situation, there is no real damage; that is, there is no employment of the strategy of offering to repair.

#### **4.2.1.12. Situation 12:**

Your friend and you live in the same house. Your friend, who is not in now, has forgotten his/her phone at home. His/her phone rang several times so you answered it. The call was from a

company to which s/he has applied for a job. The person on the phone asks you to tell him/her to come to the company after four hours to sign the contract of employment since his/her application was accepted. In the evening, you remember it and feel sorry for him/her because s/he has been looking for a job for long and now s/he has missed the opportunity because of your fault. Now, you tell him/her the message so s/he gets angry with you. What would you say?

- A) I was very busy. There has been a lot going on in my mind and I did not know how I forgot to tell you.
- B) I promise to help you find a better job.

The data regarding this situation displayed that the strategy of providing a justification was used 46 times and the strategy of offering to repair occurred 32 times. In apologizing to an annoyed friend, the account strategy was used by most students because of the weight of the offense which is forgetting to tell a friend about the call. It is more proper and suitable strategy in this situation. In order for the apologizer to save his/her friend's face and his/her sincere feelings and maintain the harmony in their friendship, s/he has to give his/her friend convincing justifications for not remembering such an important matter especially regarding the fact that his/her friend has been looking for a job for a long



time. Thus, to convince his/her friend to accept the apology and forgive his/her wrong and extremely bad behavior, the wrongdoer has to employ the strategy of giving an account when apologizing. Likewise, an offer to repair strategy received a high rate of occurrence since it can be an appropriate and effective strategy in this situation. Due to feeling sorry because of being the cause of making his/her friend lose the chance of getting the job, the wrong doer found it essential to correct his/her behavior by offering to repair and helping his/her friend find a better job.

#### **4.2.1.13. Situation 13:**

You have an appointment with the dentist but you have to buy some injections and tablets before having an operation on your wisdom tooth. Being late for the appointment for twenty minutes with your punctual dentist, you open the door of the pharmacy with effort. The door hits on the nose of a person who was coming out of the pharmacy. His/her nose started to bleed heavily so s/he shouted out and wept in pain. You apologize to him/her saying:

- A) I was in a hurry and I did not imagine that you were coming out. I am late for my appointment with the dentist.
- B) I will buy some antiseptic and a packet of plasters.

The results showed that the he strategy of giving an explanation was employed 48 times whereas the offering to repair strategy was used 15 times. The high employment of the account strategy belongs to the degree of the severity of the offense which is pushing the door violently without paying attention or thinking that there might be someone coming out. Therefore, to save the offended person's face and remedy his/her feelings, the apologizer has to give a reasonable justification to persuade him/her of forgiveness. Offering to repair was employed as a means for the apologizer to correct his/her violence by offering to buy some antiseptic and a packet of plasters since there is real damage.

#### **4.2.1.14. Situation 14:**

You borrowed a book from your teacher. At home, your neighbor's child destroyed it by pulling some pages apart and tearing them into small pieces. What would you say to your teacher?

The child is a pain in the neck; he tore some pages.

I promise I will buy you a new copy of the book.

The results showed that the account strategy was used 46 times while the strategy of an offer to repair occurred 42 times. The account strategy received a high rate of occurrence because it is

more suitable concerning this situation and due to the size of the offense. There is a relationship between the offense of not keeping a borrowed material and the account strategy. Hence, it is crucial for the apologizer to provide his/her teacher with convincing justifications and reasons to accept the apology and to save his/her face. Therefore, the account strategy is the most acceptable strategy to be employed in this situation. Similarly, the strategy of an offer to repair proved to be an effective strategy for this situation in saving the hearer's face since there is a real damage. Hence, the apologizer has to offer to repair or to compensate for the offense s/he made by offering, for instance, to buy his/her teacher a new copy of the book.

#### **4.2.2. Data analysis depending on strategies:**

##### **4.2.2.1. The strategy of providing an account:**

The strategy of giving an account received a percentage of 60% in the fourteen situations. The results of the account strategy exhibited that situations 10 and 13 received the highest percentages (96%) as it occurred 48 times. The second highest percentage was given to situations 12 and 14 (92%) as it was employed 46 times by the participants. The third highest percentage was found in situation 11 (74%) as it occurred 37

times. The fourth highest percentage was 70% in situation 3 as it was used 35 times. This strategy received the fifth highest percentage in situation 4 (64%) since it was used 32 times. The sixth highest percentage was in situation 2 (60%) as it was employed 30 times. The seventh and eighth highest percentages were found in situations 8 and 5 (46%) and (44%) as they were employed 23 times and 22 times, respectively. The account strategy in situation 7 received the ninth highest percentage (36%) as it occurred 18 times. Situations 1 and 9 exhibited the tenth and eleventh highest percentages (32%) and (30%) as they were used 16 times and 15 times, respectively. The situation in which the account strategy recorded the lowest percentage was situation 6 (14%) as it occurred 7 times. The account strategy received the highest percentages in all situations except situations 1 (32%), 5(44%), 6(14%), 7(36%), 8(46%), and 9 (30%). The reason behind the high percentage of this strategy belongs to the weight and severity of the offense. Most of the participants employed it as a means to convince the offended person of accepting the apology. However, using it proved not to be effective in all situations and when employed, it did not have the same rate of occurrence, the thing which indicates that the account strategy is situation-specific.

#### 4.2.2.2. The strategy of an offer to repair:

The findings for this strategy revealed that it received a percentage of (36%) as it was used 268 times across all given fourteen situations. The results of the strategy of offering to repair exhibited that situation 9 was ranked as having the highest percentage (88 %) as it was employed by 44 participants. Situation 14 received the second highest percentage (84%) as it was used by 42 participants. The strategy of an offer to repair in situations 1 and 7 had the same percentage (74%) and formed the third highest percentage as in both of them, it occurred 37 times. The fourth highest percentage was found in situation 12 (64%) as it was used by 32 participants. The results showed that the fifth highest percentage was found in situation 4 (40%) since it was employed by 20 participants. The sixth highest percentage of this strategy was in situations 10 and 13. This strategy in both situations had the same percentage (30%) as it was employed by 15 participants. Situation 8 appeared to have the seventh highest percentage (24%) as it occurred 12 times. Situation 2 assigned the eighth highest percentage (18%) since it was employed 9 times. Although not very high, the percentage in situations 3 and 5 (4%), as it occurred twice, and the percentage in situation 6 (2%), as it was used just once, formed the lowest percentages of the

strategy of an offer to repair, respectively. With respect to the use of this strategy, it can be noticed that it was not employed at all in situation 11 by any of the participants. The absence of this strategy in situation 11 belongs to the fact that there is no real damage. This strategy received the highest percentage in situations 1 and 7, with the same percentage, (74%) and in situation 9 (88%). The situation in which the account strategy recorded the lowest percentage was situation 6 (14%) as it occurred 7 times. It was not ranked as having the second highest percentage in any of the fourteen situations. The situations in which this strategy recorded the lowest percentage were situations 6 (2%) and 3 (4%). From analyzing the data, the strategy of offering to repair proved to be a successful strategy to use in situations where there was a real damage and where the remedy depended on financial compensation. Like the strategy of giving an account, the strategy of offering to repair is a situation-specific strategy as it was employed in different situations with different rates and was completely absent in others.

##### **5: Conclusion:**

The first section is a general background of this study. It focuses on the idea that second language learners need to achieve communicative competence, and learning the pragmatics of the

second language is one way of having communicative competence. This section also sheds light on the aim and the importance of this research. The second section of this study examines the literature related to this topic including speech acts paying more attention to the speech act of apology. The third section is the section of collecting data as it provides information about the method used to gather data, namely questionnaire, the sample participated in the study and the pilot study conducted before the main study. Data were analyzed in the fourth section. The results showed that most participants tended to use multiple strategies and that the IFID was the most commonly used strategy whether as a single strategy or in combination. In addition to reflecting the awareness of students of the maxims of the cooperative principle in conversations.

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