

USING APOLOGY STRATEGIES BY ARAB POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS: A PROFICIENCY LEVEL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The current study was conducted in English medium of instruction context, to examine the use of apology strategies by Arab postgraduate students in relation to their language proficiency levels. More specifically, it examined speaker's native language (Arabic) transfer when acquiring target language (English) apology vis-à-vis their proficiency levels. The study adopted both language placement test and a discourse completion test questionnaire as data collection tools. Results revealed that Arab participants mostly used Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), explanations and reparations as techniques of apology. However, the relationship between producing apology strategies and participants' proficiency levels was statistically insignificant. Positive impact of the learners' native language apology use was also observed. The current study is important in that it may contribute to raising Arab postgraduates' awareness toward pragmatic concepts such as apology strategies. Moreover, it may call English teachers' attention to the development of socio-pragmatics competence that qualifies Arab students of producing appropriate social/cultural functions related to the English language.

Keywords: pragmatics competence, speech act, apology strategies, Arab postgraduate students, discourse completion test

1. Introduction

Pragmatics is defined as "the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed" (Stalnaker, 1972). It specifically examines the role of social and cultural factors on the process of interaction between speakers (Demirezen, 1991). However, to achieve better goals of a communication process, speakers should master different competences related to the Target Language (TL).

Since 1960, the concept of competence has been strongly emphasized by those who suppose that the acquisition of the grammatical competence qualified learners to be professional TL users (Erton, 2017).

However, learners might be able to producing grammatically sentences, but it might be inaccurate in a certain context. Therefore, Hymes (1972) produced the communicative competence that includes the awareness of using that language appropriately in its contexts. Later, Bachman (1990) emphasized the aspect of pragmatic competence,

which is the speaker's skill of performing relevant cultural expressions related to the TL. Further, Kasper (1992) focused on the acquisition of the interlanguage pragmatics, which examines learners' first language influence on producing different Speech Acts (SA) in the TL based on their pragmatic skills.

SA as a basic part in the field of pragmatics is considered to be verbal acts used by speakers in a certain utterance. According to Hamdani (2019), SA is identified as the effort performed by TL speakers in a particular situations. Certainly, there are different types of SA such as the request, refusal, compliment, apology, etc., (Khalib & Tayeh, 2014). This research particularly focuses on apology as a speech act and is defined as a remedial behavior used by the offenders to mitigate the transgression and maintain a good relationship with the hearers (Goffman, 1971).

However, producing the appropriate act of apology in the TL might be a challenge for many learners (Jassim & Nimehchisalem, 2016), since their unawareness of expressing apology may lead to communication breakdowns with even advanced speakers of English (Khorshidi & Nimchahi, 2013). As a matter of fact, different reasons, including L1

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transfer, could underline this failure (Thomas, 1983). As Al-Khaza'leh (2018) states, EFL learners transfer their speech from Arabic into English because of their limited cultural knowledge. The existing relationship between L1 transfer and proficiency levels has also been mentioned (Han & Burgucu-Tazegül, 2016).

Further, other factors could contribute to the existence of the students' failure in producing the proper act in the English language such as teaching methods. For instance, in some Arab contexts, EFL teachers use the grammar-translation method, which aims to increase learners' repertoire of the English vocabulary, and focus on improving students' grammatical competence (Ashoorpour & Azari, 2014). But the fact is that this method restricts learners' awareness of using the English language in its context. Moreover, there is insufficient focus on teaching cultural concepts related to the language (Khorshidi et al., 2016), which negatively affects students' production of correct SA in different situations.

The mentioned studies were carried out to examine SA production such as apology in contexts where English is the foreign/second language. Consequently, it is significant to highlight its use between Arab students in different settings such as Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), where English is the Medium of Instruction (EMI) as students from more than one hundred countries get their academic degrees. Dearden (2014) defines EMI as "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (p.4). This is of utmost importance since EMI is believed to contribute to raising students' ability in speaking the foreign language from different perspectives such as the pragmatic skills. Consequently, the researchers' aim in this study is to explore Arab Postgraduate Students (APS) pragmatic's competence particularly in their production of Apology Strategies (AS) vis-à-vis their Proficiency Levels (PL). This would enable the researchers to identify the impact of APS native language on their apology production. Therefore, the current study pursues to answer the following questions

1. What is the most commonly used AS by APS?
2. Is there any relationship between the use of AS and the PL of APS?
3. To what extent does APS' native language impact their producing of AS?

The researchers tend to believe that the contribution of this research might raise the awareness of APS toward pragmatic concepts such

AS. Moreover, it may direct EFL teachers' attention to improve students' socio-pragmatics competence in the English language. According to Leech (1983), the mentioned skill enables the students to produce appropriate social/cultural concepts related to the TL.

2. Review of the Literature

Various SA, including apologies have been widely considered in numerous books, dissertations or journal articles (e.g. Abedi, 2016; Huwari, 2018; Mey, 2001; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). Different contexts, cultures, languages, or interlocutors have served as focal points. The emphasis of this part will be placed on Speech Act Theory (SAT), its applications in various contexts, and the possible relationship between AS uses vis-à-vis PL of the users.

2.1 Speech act theory

The aspect of SA was pioneered by Austin (1962) who dealt with impact the interlocutor or the hearer based on the type of utterance provided. Later Searle and Searle (1969) underscored that the speech produced by the speaker might have varied meanings based on the context and the situation. It was also noted that each speech contained various types of acts and functions, that was the purpose of studying the SA (Searle & Searle, 1969). Moreover, Searle and Searle presented five types of SA based on the semantic categories: representative (e.g. explanations), directive (e.g. request), commissives (e.g. promises), expressive (e.g. apology), and declarative (e.g. marrying). It was also noted that each SA could be performed whether directly or indirectly (Mey, 2001). However, Thomas (1983) supposed that the interlocutors might select the indirect SA to maintain a good speech, and fulfill the purpose of their interaction.

2.2 Apology strategy and its applications in various contexts

Researchers from various cultures have focused on AS in different contexts with emphasis on diverse features. Different classifications or models related to AS have been presented. For instance, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) when dealing types of AS, mention five of them. The first strategy is Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) (e.g. I am sorry, excuse me). The second is confirming the responsibility for the fault (RESP) (e.g. it was my fault). The third is explaining the reasons caused the offense (EXPL) (e.g. I had a work). The fourth is repairing the damage (REPR) (e.g. I will fix your car). While the fifth, it is the promise of forbearance

(FORB) (e.g. it will not happen again). Later on, based on the results of Olshtain and Cohen, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) proposed a framework in their project; having compared AS used by Native Speakers of English (NSE) and Non-Native Speakers of English (NNSE), they specified the similar feature in terms of their SA production. Further, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain underscored the intensifications as a main part of the AS.

Many studies on SA have been carried out during the time that lapsed after this seminal work. This can specifically be observed in various Arab contexts. Applying the above-mentioned framework on apology speech production between NSE (i.e. British or American) and NNSE revealed the comparable results among the groups (Bataineh, 2013; Rabab'ah & Al-Hawamdeh, 2020); however, differences were found in terms of using these techniques (Bataineh, & Bataineh, 2008; Qari, 2019). Abu-Humei (2013) also focused on studying AS used by English language learners and NSE and found the same apology forms were provided between the two groups. However, students with English as a native language were found to produce diverse replies and vocabularies related to apology (Abu-Humei, 2013). Also, they were responsible for their faults, while foreign language learners mainly used IFIDs and repairing as apology techniques (Abedi, 2016). Humeid's (2013) findings are in line with those of Abedi (2016), who further noticed the role of the learners' social status in the choice of apology strategies. More empirical studies was conducted to examine learners' cultural impact on producing apology. Some researchers found the positive correlation between those parties (Rabab'ah & Al-Hawamdeh, 2020), while others stated that learners' culture negatively affected their usages of apology (Al-Ghazalli & Al-Shammary, 2014).

As can be seen in the brief literature review that studies on AS, have been carried out in various Arab countries and diverse results have been obtained. For instance, in the context of Tunis, learners used statement of remorse as the most frequent AS, while self-castigation strategy was the lowest (Jebahi, 2011). Furthermore, Al-Sobh (2013) stated that foreign language learners mostly used feeling of regret, repairing and explaining in the context of Jordan, in alignment with the findings of Huwari (2018). The same context was focused by Bataineh and Bataineh (2006) who found that the most frequently used strategies were explanation, reparation, and promise.

In Saudi Arabia, Alsulayyi (2016) investigated apology techniques used by EFL teachers in

relation to the social power. The study pointed at the high percentage of IFIDs, taking responsibility, and compensating. The social power also played a part in the participants' choice of apology in different cases. This is in line with Almegren (2018), who further revealed the participants' use of direct and implicit formulas of apologizing in some situations.

On the other hand, Sudanese context was considered by Salih and Elhassan (2016), and repairing was revealed to be highly used AS between the learners. Concerning the context of Iraq, Uglu and Abidin (2016) discovered that EFL respondents used explanations and regrets more than the other strategies in terms of expressing apology to the hearer. At the same time, Alzebaree and Yavuz (2017) witnessed the participants' awareness of selecting the appropriate apology act in different scenarios.

Many other contexts have also been focused on when studying the act of apology from different perspectives. For instance, in the EMI settings, Aboud (2019) examined the gender impact on expressing apology between EFL learners. Her results did not support that idea that there is direct relationship between the speakers' gender and their use of apology strategies. It was found out that both groups preferred using IFIDs, explanations and reparations in diverse social scenarios.

On the other hand, Al-Khaza'leh and Ariff (2015) studied participants' apology production from the social status and solidarity perspective. Findings showed that expressing apology was highly correlated with the two given factors. Al-Rawafi et al (2020) investigated students' politeness level in selecting and using apology formulas. Various expressions were reported to be used, however, the participants particularly preferred IFIDs in a number of social scenarios. Al-Zumor (2011) found that taking responsibility was the most frequently used strategy and it seems that it was to a great extent influenced by the respondents' beliefs.

Various Arab varieties have also been considered regarding the use of apology strategies. Banikalef et al (2015) also found that Arab speakers in Jordan preferred swearing by God and taking on responsibility during producing apology. This is in line with Al-Sallal & Ahmed (2020) who also underlines that the learners use different strategies in a specific situation (Al-Sallal & Ahmed, 2020). Finally, Hrab (2015) examined the use of AS by speakers of three Arabic dialects (Saudi, Jordanian, and Egyptian) and found that IFIDs, offering of repair, and explaining were the most preferred ones used by respondents.

2.3 Apology strategies and level of proficiency

It is widely believed that the speaker's PL plays a considerable part in using and producing AS. This has been supported by some studies. Al Masaeed et al (2018) reported of a significant relationship between the PL and the use of AS and discovered that the advanced level group used the implicit strategies more frequently than the beginning level students. In the same vein, Rastegar and Yasami (2014) found that advanced learners directly employed different and complex norms of apologizing more than learners with a low PL. Similar results have been reported by Banikalef and Maros (2013) who asserted the positive effect of PL on English language learners while performing AS. This view has also been supported in İstifçi (2009).

On the other hand, many other researchers refuted the considerable link between the use of AS and PL of the learners and tried to support their thesis referring to their findings. For instance, Khorshidi et al. (2016) and Ahmadi et al (2014) arrived at a conclusion that the correlation between learners' PL and their uses of AS cannot be considered as a significant variable. In the same vein, Mohebalı and Salehi (2016), and Maibodi and Dehghani (2020) found the relationship between the PL and AS was irrelevant. Analogous view was put forward by Cedar (2017) who found that English language learners with diverse PL used the same AS in the context of Indonesia. Some results obtained in an Iranian context are in the same vein. For instance, Shabani et al (2017) revealed that EFL participants with different levels of proficiency used the same AS. Al-Khaza'leh (2018) also found that even highly proficient Jordanian students were not good at producing the appropriate formulas of apology.

However, as could be seen in the literature review, limited number of studies has been carried out in EMI context. Therefore, there is a humble attempt here to examine the usage of AS by APS in the EMI setting.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

In the current study, SAT was adopted as a theoretical framework to examine the apology as SA between Arab postgraduates. Moreover, discussions were also grounded on politeness theory. As for its methodological framework, the study is based on the assumption that the diversity of realization of SA including apology can be explained by certain variables. In fact, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) framework was used for the data analysis.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current research focuses on the use of AS from a language proficiency aspect. According to the above-mentioned literature, learners' language proficiency level might positively/negatively influence their production of apology. Therefore, to examine the relationship between the given parties, it is necessary to use a language proficiency test as an initial step to determine PL of APS. Based on a permission obtained from Atlas Language School, a Placement Test (PT) was adopted to measure the PL of APS in the English language ("Online Placement Test", 2018). It included 50 questions; the respondents should fill the gap in the first five questions, and then complete the remained sentences by selecting the correct answer. Second, the Discourse Completion Test questionnaire (DCT) was employed as an instrument to investigate the usage of AS between Arab students. It is considered as a proper method for cross-cultural studies (Nurani, 2009) and researches in pragmatics (Labben, 2016). The DCT can be seen as a tool that includes different scenarios related to a particular SA and it requires the participants to respond to each statement (Labben, 2016).

Upon permission acquired from Harb (2015), the researchers adopted his DCT in both the English and its Arabic translation as an instrument to collect the data. For APS, the DCT was used in the English language, and they were requested to react to varied situations. It consisted of two parts; the first included questions concerning participants' background information. Whereas the second part included different situations related to apology, for example, the statement number one represented the case of 'damaging a friend's book.' Since the present research adopted the instrument, which had already been validated by Harb (2015), the researchers applied it to achieve the study's objectives.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

This research was carried out in EMU, which can be characterized as EMI context. The interlanguage data were collected from APS majoring in various fields. The total number of the respondents who took the proficiency test was 150, however, only 120 students were equally distributed into three groups on the bases of their PL (namely: intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced). The students' selection was based on the judgmental sampling technique, according to Karatepe (2013); this method permits choosing the

representative respondents of the population on the basis of particular norms.

Further, in this research, the baseline data were involved to see to what extent responses provided by APS relate to AS provided by Arab-only and English-only respondents, which served as criteria. Therefore, the data were collected from two additional groups of participants: the first involved ten postgraduate Arab speakers who were not proficient in English. The second included ten postgraduate participants with American English as a native language who did not speak Arabic.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Over the fall semester 2018, the researchers collected the data from Arab students classified into three groups of language proficiency based on their results in the PT. Later, each group was required to respond to DCT that included a number of social situations containing apology. The students were from different faculties. The researchers provided an informed consent form in both the PT and DCT. It stated the purpose of the study and vowed that the participants' identity will be kept anonymous. The responding time of PT and DCT lasted between 25 to 35 minutes.

In regards to collecting the baseline data, a DCT in the English and its Arabic translation was distributed to the respondents. The researchers met with some of them, while the others were reached via e-mail.

4. Data Analysis

To obtain the data concerning the correlation between the use of AS and the PL, the initial step was to distribute APS into three groups of PL based on results obtained in the PT. Then, the given groups were asked to answer ten statements related to apology. After the data collection, they were classified following Olshtain and Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) model. First, the frequency and percentage were calculated to figure out the most reported answers related to AS among the three groups. As Finnegan (2006) notes

that numbers and percentages might contribute to interpreting and comparing the data simply. Second, the mean and standard deviation were measured, and then one-way ANOVA was used to examine the relationship between the PL and the use of AS among the three groups.

4.1 Results

The descriptive analysis of the data obtained for the first question (What is the most commonly used AS by APS?) is summarized in Table 1. In fact, the highest percentage was scored in IFIDs and EXPL (42.5% and 39.6%, respectively). Whereas the average of the REPR technique was 12.8%, however, the participants reported the least percentage of AS used in both RESP and FORB (3.1% and 1.8%, respectively).

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of AS Provided by APS

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage %
IFIDs	952	42.5
EXPL	887	39.6
REPR	287	12.8
RESP	70	3.1
FORB	42	1.8

As for the second question (Is there any relationship between the use of AS and the PL of APS?), the participants were found to be of three levels of language proficiency as previously mentioned. The intermediate group was found to use apology techniques such as IFIDs and EXPL most frequently (44.4% and 36.8%, respectively). On the other hand, the percentage for the REPR technique was 12.4%. However, the insignificant percentages were reported in the two remained techniques that were RESP (4.6%) and FORB (1.6%) (See Table 2 for the percentage of AS used among the groups). For the percentage of the intensification usage, more than twenty-one percent was reported by the intermediate group, specifically in a case of 'being late to return a friend's CD', as shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Percentages of AS Used among the Groups

Strategy	Groups' percentage		
	Intermediate %	Upper-intermediate %	Advanced %
IFIDs	44.4	43.9	39.2
EXPL	36.8	40.5	41.3
REPR	12.4	12.5	13.4
RESP	4.6	1.6	3.1
FORB	1.6	1.2	2.7

Table 3. Groups' Percentages of the Intensification Use

	Groups' percentage		
	Intermediate %	Upper-intermediate %	Advanced %
Intensification	21.6	34.9	43.3

Also, the data analysis revealed that students with upper-intermediate level of proficiency mostly used IFIDs and EXPL to express their apology (43.9% and 40.5%, respectively), whereas, the REPR ranked third (12.5%). On the other hand, RESP and FORB were found to be least used AS (1.6% and 1.2% respectively). As for the use of intensification by the upper-intermediate group, the percentage was 34.9%; it was found in the situations of 'pushing a lady' and 'forgetting to return a friend's CD.'

Further, the advanced students preferred using apology techniques such as EXPL and IFIDs (41.3% and 39.2%, respectively), while the percentage of the REPR was more than thirteen. However, the participants showed the lowest percentage of AS use in RESP and FORB, (3.1% and 2.7%, respectively). Considering the use of intensification, it was greater than forty-three percent, particularly, in the cases of 'being late to meet a

teacher' and 'pushing a lady.'

To increase the reliability of the groups' qualitative results regarding their use of AS, the mean and standard deviation were measured. As can be seen in Table 4, very similar results were obtained for the mean of intermediate, the upper-intermediate, and the advanced groups (19.96, 19.94, and 19.94, respectively). However, the standard deviation of the upper-intermediate was greater than the intermediate and the advanced group (20.8548, 19.4363, and 19.0445, respectively). In the same vein, one-way ANOVA was employed to examine the usage of AS between and within the three groups as stated in Table 5. The f-ratio was ($F = 0$) and P-value was ($P = .999998$). Consequently, the correlation between PL of the learners and their usage of AS was statistically insignificant at $p < .05$.

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Intermediate, Upper-intermediate, and Advanced Groups

Participants	Number of strategies	Mean	Std. Dev.
Intermediate	5	19.96	19.4363
Upper-intermediate	5	19.94	20.8548
Advanced	5	19.94	19.0445

Table 5. One-way ANOVA Results for the Use of AS between and within the Three Groups

The use of AS	Sum of Squares SS	degree of freedom df	Mean Squares MS	F	p
Between-groups	0.0013	2	0.0007	$F = 0$.999998
Within-groups	4701.536	12	391.7947		
Total	4701.5373	14			

Note: The relationship between the use of AS and PL is not significant at $p < .05$.

Considering the third research question (To what extent does APS' native language impact their producing of AS?) The DCT in the English and its Arabic translation was distributed to the baseline data, and then the apology expressions provided by them were categorized following Olshain and Cohen (1983) and Blum-Kulka and Olshain (1984) model. For Arab speakers who were not proficient in English, their answers were provided in the native language, translated into English, and the accuracy was checked by an EFL teacher. Through comparing the responses of Arab speakers and the interlanguage study, significant differences were existed between them regarding expressing apology. For instance, the native speakers of Arabic

performed apology formulas such as 'I apologize strongly' and 'I apologize from you.' While APS simply expressed their apology using such forms 'I am sorry' and 'I apologize.' Their responses were comparable to native American participants. Consequently, the current research proved the insignificant impact of APS native language on the apology production in the English language.

5. Discussion

The qualitative analysis revealed that APS mainly used three types of AS, which were IFIDs, explanation, and reparation. This result was in alignment with Aboud (2019), Al-Rawafi et al (2020), Al-Sobh (2013) and Huwari (2018), who

illustrated similar findings in different cultural contexts. The respondents proved their use of IFIDs with a percentage of 42.5% to offer their apology and minimize the level of the offense. Besides, they provided some examples of IFIDs use (e.g. sorry, excuse me, pardon me, etc.) in different social statements. In addition to use the IFIDs, APS produced their explanations with a percentage of 39.6% as an attempt to clarify the reasons behind the transgression. For example, in a scenario of the 'inability of attending the exam' all respondents stated that their illness prevented them from attending the class. Also, the reparation with more than twelve percent was used between them as endeavor to compensate for the damage. For instance, in the case of 'damaging a friend's book' APS showed their desire to buy a new book as a technique of apology to compensate for the damage. However, they reported less than four percent in RESP; it was clearly marked in the case of 'forgetting to return a book to the library.' For example, some APS mentioned they would pay the fees as a strategy to show their responsibility of the lateness. This finding was dissimilar to Al-Zumor (2011), who found that learners' greater percentage of apology usage was shown in taking responsibility. While the analysis revealed that they used FORB with insignificant percentage (less than two). For example, in a situation of 'being late to meeting a classmate' some of the participants stated that they would not be late again as to express their apology to the hearer.

Also, the results of One-way ANOVA proved to be statistically insignificant in the correlation between the use of AS and the PL. This conclusion was in line with Ahmadi et al (2014), Al-Khaza'leh (2018), Cedar (2017) Khorshidi et al. (2016), Maibodi and Dehghani (2020), Mohebali and Salehi (2016), and Shabani et al (2017). In fact, they refute the possible relationship between the proficiency level and the use of apology strategies. In other words, learners with different language proficiency levels may prefer using the same apology strategy in various cases. For instance, IFIDs, explanations and reparations were mostly AS applied among the three groups. Also, the percentages of AS usage between the participants with different PL were comparable, in some strategies. However, the intermediate (44.4%) and upper-intermediate students (43.9%) were more capable of using and producing IFIDs comparing to the advanced group (39.2%). On the other hand, the advanced (41.3%) and upper-intermediate (40.5%) participants were more able to explain their reasons for the transgression than the intermediate group (36.8%).

Further, the percentage of REPR was as following intermediate (12.4%), upper-intermediate (12.5%), and advanced (13.4%). But, RESP and FORB were less used by all groups.

Considering the usage of the intensification among the three groups, the students with intermediate PL provided simple intensifications with a percentage of 21.6% (e.g. very sorry, really sorry, etc.); it was clearly reported in the case of 'being late to return a friend's CD'. While the upper-intermediate group used different intensifications with more than thirty-four percent, such as 'I am so sorry', 'quite sorry', and 'sincerely apologize', more specifically in the scenario of 'pushing a lady'. As for the advanced students, they employed varied intensifications with a great percentage of 43.3% (e.g. extremely sorry, truly sorry, terribly sorry, deeply apologize). In particular, they used it most frequently in 'being late to meet a teacher' and 'pushing a lady' situations.

Moreover, the results revealed that there was not a native language impact on APS in their apology production. In fact, this is in conformity with Rabab'ah and Al-Hawamdeh (2020). At the same time, the participants were able to perform the appropriate apology expressions in the English language, which is in line with Alzeebaree and Yavuz (2017). However, the students with intermediate level of proficiency used short sentences and simple apology responses to each situation. While the upper-intermediate and advanced students presented extensive explanations and different apology expressions in varied social scenarios. The apology formulas were to some extent similar to phrases provided by the participants with American English as a native language. In short, students with advanced PL used varied and complex apology expressions comparing to students with intermediate PL. This finding was in congruence with Rastegar and Yasami (2014) and İstifçi (2009), who asserted the positive role of learners' language proficiency on using and expressing apology in different social situations.

6. Conclusion

This study was conducted in the EMI setting to examine the usage of AS among APS from PL perspective. Students with intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency were involved. Also, the study investigated the participants' native language effect on the production of AS. The findings revealed that APS mainly used three techniques of apology: IFIDs, explanations and reparations. Further, the use of AS and the PL of participants were negatively

associated. Besides, the findings showed the inconsiderable influence of respondents' native language on producing apology.

In the light of the given results, APS to some extent proved their capability of producing apology in different scenarios. Therefore, English language teachers should not only put emphasis on increasing learners' grammatical skills. However, they should focus on increasing their pragmatic competence in the foreign language learning. For example, English teachers should teach Arab students how to apologize similar to the advanced language users. Also, syllabus designers should provide some lessons related to the speech act of apology and offer practical examples of how to use it in real life situations.

In regards to the limitations, the researchers found some points that needed to be reconsidered by future researchers. First, the DCT was employed as a qualitative method to gather the data from APS. For future researchers, using an additional instrument such as the semi-structure interviews would be more beneficial. In that, interviewing the participants would allow the researchers to discover more in-depth data related to expressing apology. Second, the current study contained participants with different Arabic cultures and proficiency levels. The future studies might want to focus on studying a particular culture and a specific language proficiency level such as the advanced group to explore new patterns and different expressions concerning apology.

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