

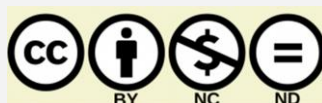


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## The speech Act of Apology in Iraqi Arabic: A Socio-pragmatic Study

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### Abstract

The current research is a study of the number of occurrence, classification, and sequence of apology as a speech act in Iraqi Arabic. The examination depends on a set of 550 natural apology interactions obtained by ethnographic observation method. The findings indicated that the obvious utterance of apology with a 'demand for forgiveness' اسف ('fwan')<sup>1</sup> (sorry) was the most frequent apology speech act in Iraqi Arabic and the above token with 'confession of being guilty' constituted the common set of apologies in Iraqi Arabic. The study also indicated that the same combination of apology speech acts utilized in other examined languages was frequent in Iraqi Arabic; however, the tendencies for employing these speech acts seem to be culturally dependent.

**Keywords:** pragmatic interaction, culture, speech acts, apologies, Iraqi Arabic.

أفعال كلام الاعتذار في العربية العراقية : دراسته تداوليه اجتماعيه

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المستخلص

البحث الحالي عبارة عن دراسة لعدد مرات حدوث الاعتذار وتصنيفه وتسلسله على أنه فعل كلام باللغة العربية العراقية. يعتمد الفحص على مجموعة من ٥٥٠ تفاعل اعتذار طبيعي تم الحصول عليها من خلال طريقة المراقبة الإثنوغرافية. أشارت النتائج إلى أن النطق الواضح بالاعتذار مع "طلب الصفح" اسف كان أكثر خطابات الاعتذار شيوعاً في اللغة العربية العراقية. ما ورد أعلاه مع "الاعتراف بالذنب" يشكل مجموعة مشتركة من الاعتذارات في اللغة العربية

<sup>1</sup>see appendix (1) for transcription and glossing of Arabic characters.

العراقية. نفس المزيج من خطابات الاعتذار المستخدمة في اللغات الأخرى التي تم فحصها كان متكرراً في اللغة العربية العراقية ؛ ومع ذلك ، يبدو أن الميول لاستخدام أفعال الكلام هذه تعتمد على الثقافة. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** التداوليه التفاعليه، الثقافه، افعال الكلام، الاعتذارات، العربيه العراقيه

## 1. Introduction

Various fields of explanation and use of language concerning the pragmatic interactions are discussed under the general topics of pragmatics and semantics. However, in spite of the fact that numerous attempts have been drawn to distinguish between pragmatics and semantics, it appears to be no general consent as to what the distinction really is. While it seems extremely difficult to sharply distinguish between these two fields, most of the headings discussed in these fields are classified under pragmatics.

Speech acts have always been considered to be one of the most interesting fields of sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Utilizing the most comprehensive perspective of speech as a type of interaction, one can begin with analysing speech acts depending on its elements or its use. This could slightly offset the fundamental restrictions of the theoretical linguists previously who regarded the sentence as the largest component of analysis, and the reference meaning as the kind of the only relevant meaning.

As speech acts, nevertheless, work with identical pragmatic function (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975 and Leech, 1983), these acts differ culturally and among different languages (Green, 1975 and Wierzbicka, 2001). Hence, to create common characteristics for them, it sounds essential to verify the ideal way of awareness in various languages. The reason is clarified in the following citation: “If claims for the pragmatic universality are to approximate any type of validity, they should be based on the empirical investigation of many more and diverse languages” (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989:8).

Thus, the current study is an endeavour to investigate the perception of apology as a speech act, which seems to be dependent more on situations and less common than other speech acts (Overfield, 1995). The number of occurrence, classification, and their sequence in Iraqi Arabic will be examined in order to realize how to deal with the universal aspects of apologies in Iraqi Arabic.

## 2. Literature Review

Researchers of sociology and culture in language have paid a lot of attention to apology. Speech act theory determines and categorizes a model apology in reference to the felicity conditions to achieve it , which contains an apologetic performative act and an expression of remorse (Suszczyńska, 1999). Apology is also defined based on the task it may fulfil. For example, it is taken as a therapeutic action utilized to treat a real or hypothetical insult to preserve social harmony (Goffman, 1971), or as a negative politeness strategy indicating the addresser's “reluctance to impinge on H (hearer)’s negative face” to maintain the hearer’s face needs (Brown and Levinson, 1987:187). In addition, it is described as a “speech act set of maximal potential semantic formulas, any one of which can act as a minimal element to represent apology” (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983:20).

A speaker often issues an apology and intends to calm down the hearer (Trosborg, 1987: 283). Apology is a friendly speech act; it aims to maintain social harmony between addresser and addressee. Olshtain and Cohen (1983:30) point out that an apology is issued to avoid violating social norms whether there is actual or possible offence. In other words, an apology is issued with the intention of “setting things right” when a person fails to accept an offer/request (a hearer beneficial act. In Iraqi Arabic, regret is often expressed with the phrase آسف (’āsif) sorry or اعتذر (’a’tidir) *apologise*.

Apology is a well-known strategy of negative politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987: 187) point out that the best way to meet the recipient's negative face demands is to show that the speaker recognizes and takes them into account when performing the Face Threatening Act. Thus, when the apologizers perform the face threatening act of refusal for instance, they recognize and take into account addressee's face want, and deliver their apology as a compensation, despite the fact that delivering apology may threaten their own face.

Most studies on apology such as Fraser (1981), Owen (1983), Vollmer and Olshtain (1989) and Ide (1998) have always been investigating this speech act in western languages. Coulmas (1981) and (Liebersohn et al., 2004) indicate that these studies have discussed apology performed in western cultures, which might not be similar to other cultures. In addition, ethnographic investigation is less used for data collection while in most studies, DCT and/or role-play are employed.

Hence, this study aims to discover and classify a set of apology strategies employed in Iraqi Arabic language (a middle eastern language). In addition, it intends to find out whether the Iraqi apology was formulated similarly to those in English. In order to explore this, it attempts to answer some questions relying on a set of data obtained naturally through ethnographic observation. The questions are as follows:

1. What are the most common apologies utilised by Iraqi Arabic speakers?
2. What are the most frequent vocabularies Iraqis use in their apology?
3. What are the combinations of apologies that Iraqis use?
4. In which situations do Iraqis employ apology strategies?

### 3. Methodology

Cohen and Olshtain (1981), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Trosborg (1987) and Olshtain (1989) argue that most previous researches on apologies were collected via role plays. The extracted data has been claimed to be invaluable because it shows the texts that non-native speakers and native speakers are aware about, and reveals a set of strategies that recipients believe they might use in certain contexts (Holmes, 1990). Bonikowska (1988), however, thinks that participants may have to produce an apology in hypothetical interaction while in real situations they would decide to withdraw. Cohen and Olshtain (1998:47) add that role-playing may force the speakers to act a role they would not undertake in real-life situations and thus produce unreal performance.

Thus, to overcome the unreliability of the above-mentioned method of data collection, Olshtain and Cohen (1983); Trosborg (1987); Blum-Kulka et al. (1989); Holmes (1990) and Rose (1994) propose that data elicited via ethnographic method may represent the language employed in natural situations, and despite the long time this method consumes, it probably provides views on how people apologize in real situations. However, in the study of speech acts, Wolfson et al. (1989: 194) announce that the

most reliable method for data collection may be based on a combination of regular observation and procedures of eliciting and analyzing data. As a first step, it sounds logical to watch as many observations as possible to determine the scope of apologies utilized, their number of occurrence, classification, and sequence, and the kind of face threats they trigger.

#### **4. Data Collection**

This research relies on a set of 550 apology interactions, in spoken Iraqi Arabic, collated by an ethnographic method, with written data rather than collecting data orally. Such ethnographic observation was also used by Manes and Wolfson (1981), and Holmes (1990). The data was performed by 1320 subjects of various ages and genders in 2019

Due to the fact that obtaining apologies naturally takes a long time, and there were fears that not sufficient samples will be elicited during a certain time period, I decided to request some assistance from some colleagues in collecting apology data. It was ensured that the helpers were well acquainted, and sufficiently interested in the subject matter to accurately follow data collection procedures.

Four MA students in linguistics voluntarily assisted in data collection. They were briefly clarified in advance. I have notified them that I will attempt to seek how Iraqi speakers apologize during their daily-life communication. To be more specific, what lexemes they utilize to make apologies. For instance, what would they say when they intend to apologize for stepping on somebody's foot, breaking down a friend's laptop, or ripping a teacher's book?

The volunteers were then requested to write the interactions containing frequent Iraqi vocabularies of apology in some of the pre-prepared questionnaires. These questionnaires include three parts such as demographic details about the interviewees (age, gender, educational background, profession), contextual information (when and where, who the apology addressed to, and why), and the accurate number of lexemes of the dialogues (see Appendix 2). They were requested to note down the number of lexemes utilized naturally in the interaction of apology, and to avoid prompting the speech act of apology

The volunteers and I were writing down apologies interactions in daily-life communication such as in the streets, factories, schools...etc for about a year and a half in three cities in Iraq (Maysan, Wasit, and Baghdad). We operate as interviewers but not getting involved in apology exchanges .

The aim of this study was to grasp an idea of the scope of apologies in Iraqi Arabic, and due to the fact that it was not possible to predict the number of apologies presented during a certain time period, random sampling was made to obtain the data. The volunteers and I were waiting for apologies to be produced to take notes.

With regard to research ethics, participants were informed that their apologies would be written down as part of a socio-pragmatic research and their personal details will remain anonymous during this study.

#### **5. Data Analysis and coding-scheme**

Various classification schemes were designed for speech acts of apology (Fraser, 1981; Owen, 1983; Trosborg, 1987; Meier, 1992; Sugimoto, 1997; and Brown and Attardo, 2000). In the current research, the data will be discussed according to the coding scheme presented



by Olshtain and Cohen (1983). Their framework is believed to be experimentally developed and has been universally tested for applicability on different languages (Olshtain, 1989). Based on Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) theory, if the wrongdoer accepts their responsibility for the guilt made, they probably choose from five apologies, they are as follows:

1. Statement of Apologies

A. Regret, e.g., sorry اسف ('āsif)

B. Offers of apologies, e.g., apologize اعتذر ('a'tidīr)

C. A demand for forgiveness, e.g., forgive me سامحني ('adīrni)

2. Statement of the Impeding Event, e.g., I had an examination عندي امتحان ('aīnd-i imtiḥān)

3. A Confession of Responsibility

A. Interlocutor's blame of themselves, e.g., It is my mistake هذا خطاي (hāi ḡaliṭṭi)

B. Self defence expressions, e.g., I have been embarrassed كنت محرج (kinit muḥraj)

C. Acknowledging the other person worth an apology, e.g., you are correct انت صح (inta saḥīḥ)

D. Avoidance, e.g., I do not intend to ما انوي (mā 'nwi)

4. Offers to rectify, e.g., I will make it up to you راح اعوضك (rāḥ 'a'wḍak)

5. A word of refrain, I will not do it again ما راح اسويها بعد (mā rāḥ 'asawīha ba'ad)

However, if the wrongdoer refuses to apologize, they might not respond at all, but when they do, it could be:

1. Denying the necessity for an apology, for example, I don't think you were humiliated ما اعتقد هنتك (mā 'a'tiqid hintak)

2. Deny responsibility

A: Refusing the blame, for example, It am not guilty انا ما غلطان ('na mā ḡalṭān).

B. Putting the blame on a third party, for example, It was your mistake كان خطاك (kan ḥaṭa'ak).

## 6. Results

Prior to discussing the apologies exist in Iraqi Arabic, as the aim of the current research paper, it sounds significant to provide a short description of what Iraqis are apologizing for (the types of insults), and the people these apologies were implemented to. As Norrick (1978: 281) explains, further to demonstrating the addresser's regret for the mistake made, an apology usually helps in various social roles such as "to evince good manners, to assuage the addressee's wrath, or simply to get off the hook and be on one's way". Thus, apology strategies could assist in various illocutionary force in different contexts.

The current study concentrates on the form of apology strategies and its function might be discussed in some studies in the future. It only shows an overview of what people have apologized for in the data, based on Holmes' (1990: 177) strategies. It is worth mentioning that this is not a robust categorization of offence in Iraqi Arabic and what is shown here is neither comprehensive nor conclusive. However, my statistical description starts with the table below that illustrates the number of occurrence of offences exist in the data.

**Table 1: Types of offense found in the data**

	Type	Number	percentage
1.	Insufficient service or procedure	191	33.7
2.	Space, for example, infringement on someone's privacy	129	23.4
3.	Damaging someone's properties	101	18.3
4.	Impoliteness in speech	75	13.6
5.	Wasting time	54	9.8
Total		550	100

Table 1 above demonstrates that the vast majority of apology strategies (57.1%) in the data were implemented due to committing offenses related to insufficient service or space. However, apologies performed because of time were the less frequent in the obtained data (9.8%). Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the data showed that 75% of apology strategies were genuine and implemented in connection to the conception of 'paradigm' apology (i.e., a statement of genuine regret for seriously offensive actions). The other apologies took place for minor offenses.

## 7. Apology statements in the study

Within 550 apology interactions in the current study, 1100 instances of strategy statements were observed. In some exchanges more than one strategy of explicit statement and 'confession of responsibility' have been utilized, each one was separately considered. In addition, in many interactions a range of various apology expressions have been employed. Table 2 below shows the number of occurrence of various apology expressions in the data.

**Table 2: Apologies utilized in the data**

Apology strategies	Number	percentage
IFIDs	676	61.4
Confession of responsibility	215	19.5
Statement of the Impeding Event (SIE)	92	8.3

Offers to rectify	75	6.8
A word of refrain	42	3.8
Total	1100	100

The table above demonstrates that IFID is the most frequent apology in the data with 676 instances (61.4%). A word of refrain, however, was the least apology utilised in the corpus (3.8%). The findings are consistent with Holmes (1990) who found out that IFID and confession of responsibility as the most common apology formulae in New Zealand English that rated 94% of the formulae used in her data.

However, In a study conducted in German language, Vollmer and Olshtain (1989) observed that 'confession of responsibility' was the most frequent strategy and 'word of refrain' as the least common. Furthermore, Trosborg (1987) also reported similar findings in Danish. In same line, Olshtain (1989) claimed that 'IFID' and 'confession of responsibility' are the most common strategy and SIE is the least strategy used in Hebrew, Canadian French, and Australian English. Hence, it seems that tendencies for employing apology strategies differ across languages, probably due to the different social and cultural values that monitor using language in these cultures.

## 8. Conclusion

The current study intended to find out and explore apologies in spoken Iraqi Arabic, relying on a set of 550 apology interactions. The findings demonstrated that Iraqi interlocutors apologize by utilizing the same formulae included in the speech act group, while they employed 'IFID' with 'demand for forgiveness' عفوا ('fwan) more than any other formulae. Thus, it sounds that apologies in Iraqi Arabic are formulaic as in other languages discussed, but it seems that the tendencies for utilizing apologies are culturally specific.

Furthermore, I found out that Iraqi participants combined more than one apology strategy in their interactions and this constituted 80.9% of the apologies exist in the data. IFID and a confession of responsibility strategies were the most common combination occurred in all situations where a genuine offence took place (see table 2). In addition, the findings coincide with previous results that discovered the universality of apologies, and enhance researchers who emphasize the concept that apology strategies are culturally determined.

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#### Appendix (1): Transcription and glossing of Arabic characters as cited from Versteegh (2014:xiv)

Name	Arabic script	Transcription	IPA sign
'alf	ا	'	[ʔ]
bā'	ب	b	[b]
tā'	ت	t	[t]
tā'	ث	t̤	[θ]
jīm	ج	j	[dʒ]

ḥā'	ح	ḥ	[h]
ḥā'	خ	ḥ	[x]
dāl	د	d	[d]
ḍāl	ذ	ḍ	[ð]
rā'	ر	r	[r]
zāy	ز		z [z]
sīn	س	s	[s]
šīn	ش	š	[ʃ]
ṣād	ص	ṣ	[s <sup>ʕ</sup> ]
ḍād	ض	ḍ	[d <sup>ʕ</sup> ]
ṭā'	ط	ṭ	[t <sup>ʕ</sup> ]
ḍā'	ظ	ḍ	[ð]
‘ayn	ع	‘	[ʕ]
ḡayn	غ	ḡ	[ɣ]
fā'	ف	f	[f]
qāf	ق	q	[q]
kāf	ك	k	[k]
lām	ل	l	[l]
mīm	م	m	[m]
nūn	ن	n	[n]
hā'	ه	h	[h]
wāw	و	w	[w]
yā'	ي	y	[j]

### Additional signs used in transcription

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Transcription sign

IPA sign

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g [g]

ž [ʒ]

ǵ

[dʒ]

č [tʃ]

## Vowels

Symbol	Description
i	High front short
ī	High front long
e	Mid central short
ē	Mid-front long
a	Low front short
ā	Low back long
u	High back short
ū	High back long
ɑ:	Low back long
ay	Diphthong
aw	Diphthong
iə	Diphthong
īə	Diphthong

## Appendix (2): Data Collection Form

### 1. Iraqi Arabic version of Data Collection Form

1. صفات من اعتذر



- العمر: الجنس: الشهادة: الوظيفة: اللهجة  
2. صفات من اعتذر منه  
العمر: الجنس: الشهادة: الوظيفة: اللهجة  
3. العلاقة بين المحاورين  
4. المكان الذي حدث فيه الاعتذار: التاريخ: سبب الاعتذار  
5. العدد الدقيق لكلمات الاعتذار

2. English version of data collection form

1. Characteristics of the person who apologizes:

Age: Gender: Degree: Occupation: Language Accent:

2. Characteristics of the person who is apologized:

Age: Gender: Degree: Occupation: Language Accent:

3. The relationship between the interlocutors:

4. The place in which apology occurs: Date: The reason for apologizing:

5. The exact word for apology exchange: