

# Apology Strategies Among Libyan Learners of English at Omar Al-Mukhtar University

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## **Abstract**

A good body of research has been conducted to investigate the realization of apology speech act. Much of the literature investigated focused on western languages. The increase of research on apology has lead other non-western scholars to explore apology in their languages. However, fewer have addressed this issue in Arabic language varieties in general, and Libyan Arabic in particular. This has presented us with a challenge worthy of a deeper investigation. The rationale behind investigating apology as a speech act is to indicate how findings can be used to facilitate the way people of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds interact with each other. The aim of this study is to discuss selected points relating to the type and use of apology strategies in Libyan Arabic. The investigation is based on a corpus of Libyan apologies collected from fifty students at Omar Al-Mukhtar University (OMU). This article uses a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) that comprised 10 situations to elicit apology strategies from the participants. The findings indicated that the informants used the expression of remorse in situations in which the offended person was a friend, an elderly and a teacher/supervisor/boss who has some authority. A reasonable number of informants refused to admit responsibility for the harm and used explanations to put the blame on other sources. Strategies, such as self-blame, reparation, intensification, and use of Allah's name were also used in this study.

The results of this paper, it is hoped, could have profound implications for researchers seeking to address this issue or any other area pertinent to inter-cultural communication further.

**Keywords:** Apology, Apology strategies, Libyan Arabic, Speech acts, University students, DCT

## 1. Introduction

An apology, for Goffman (1971:140), is a remedial action used to restore social relation harmony. For Olshtain and Cohen (1983:20), it is a verbal compensation performed when social norms have been violated. Brown and Levinson (1987) perceive an apology as an act that is face-threatening for the apologizer; performing an apology means that the speaker is obliged to admit to taking responsibility for the infraction, thus damaging the speaker's face. To apologize has a positive effect on the hearer's side; therefore, if the apologizer is unsuccessful in performing an apology when wrong has been done, this will threaten the face of the hearer.

Wouk (2006) believes that as all individuals have the tendency to be part of a group which involves the preservation of a particular amount of harmony, the use of apologies ought to be available within every society to maintain that harmony. As researchers, this will help find universals in the use of apologies. Wouk (2006) further points out that although apology is deemed a social action and people socially can be different in terms of the manner in which societies are organized, "we should expect variation in why, when, and how this social act is carried out" (Wouk, 2006: 1457). Prior studies on apologies have displayed sufficient proof of both the general (what makes apology strategies more common universally) and the specific (what makes it particular to a certain society). From what has been illustrated we can say that there appears to be a common set of apologizing strategies which are performed, individually or combined, to express apology. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) listed the strategies which involved using apology expression, providing an account, acknowledging responsibility, promising forbearance, making an offer of repair, and showing concern for the offended. Nearly all works have considered these strategies sufficient to base their data on, yet sometimes other different strategies seem to be used. Olshtain (1989) further suggested the fact that "at a global level of analysis, we can identify universal manifestations of strategy selection" (Olshtain, 1989:171). Nonetheless, many works have reached interesting outcomes which concluded that differences seem to be found across cultures suggesting the frequency of dissimilar strategies (Garcia, 1989; Kumagai, 1993; Lipson, 1994; Meier, 1996).

It seems likely that cultures can influence the way we express our apologies. Studies have revealed that cultures seem to be different even in the strategies selected to perform an apology in a certain situation; the kind of apology expression chosen; and whether an apology expresses intensification or not.

### *1.1 Problem Statement*

This study is a research into the realization of apology speech act by Libyan university students in Libyan context. There exists a good body of literature on apology speech act; however, most of it has focused on Western Romance languages (Goffman, 1971; Coulmas, 1981; Fraser, 1981; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Trosborg, 1987, 1995; Holmes, 1989; Bergman and Kasper, 1993; Márquez, 2000; Lazare, 2005), with only a few in Arabic language varieties including the Jordanian (Al-Hami, 1993; Bataineh and Bataineh, 2006, 2008; El-Khalil, 1998; Hussein and Hammouri, 1998), the Egyptian (Soliman, 2003), the Sudanese (Nureddeen, 2008), the Yemeni (Alfattah, 2010), and the

Tunisian (Jebahi, 2010)). These Arabic-based studies have explored apology in the light of their socio-cultural norms and rules (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975; Leech, 1983), which may not be the same in Libyan cultural context, because according to Green (1975) and Wierzbicka (1985), speech acts may vary in conceptualization as well as verbalization across cultures and languages.

### *1.2 Question of the Study*

The main research question that this paper investigates is what apology strategies Libyan learners of English at OMU would choose to use in specific situations. It should be noted here that this question focusses on the use of apology speech act of the party representing the speaker/offender; therefore, a discussion of the reaction of the party representing the hearer/offended falls outside the scope of this study.

### *1.3 Aim and Significance of the Study*

Our aim is to give deeper understanding of the knowledge of speech act performance and apology strategies in general, and the type and use of apology speech act in Libyan Arabic in particular. This work is significant because, to the author's knowledge, no previous study has presented apology strategies in the Libyan societal context. This empty space in literature requires further research, and hence throws "light on the sociocultural attitudes and values of this community" (Nureddeen, 2008:279). Thus, this attempt is useful to gain a better insight into the universality of the speech act as well as further the culture-specific concept of the language use.

## **2. Literature Review**

In this section, the author reviews the literature most pertinent to the present study. It should be added that the majority of information presented here is in relation to the studies on apologies based on western languages for two reasons: (1) the substantial amount of information reported from research on western apologies, (2) research on apology strategies in Arabic is very little.

### *2.1 Background*

Before 1980, studies questioned the competence of linguistics (Ellis, 1985). The strong opinion was that in second language acquisition keen interest seemed to be given to areas of language theory: phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexis. Later, Hymes (1972) suggested the term 'communicative competence' because he asserted that it included other more important aspects: social and referential, that can explain issues most relevant to language use that the linguistic competence fell short of. Between 1980 and 1990, studies into applied linguistics made use of the term 'communicative competence' and decided to organize it into different constituents (Bachman, 1990). As for Canale and Swain (1980), the following constituents underlie 'communicative competence':

- (1). Competence of grammar including phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.
- (2). Sociolinguistic competence focusing on language use based on contextual factors.

(3). Strategic competence concerning the ability to successfully deal with communication problems.

(4). Discourse competence focusing on the close relationship based on grammar and meaning.

However, this approach was not fully appreciated because its subcomponents lacked a clear and direct link between one another (Jorda, 2005) - a link essential to fully grasp the significance of communicative competence. In his approach, Bachman (1990) stressed the importance of pragmatic competence when he explicitly laid it out as an essential class (or sub-category) of communicative competence. He further recommended that pragmatic competence be gained together with the linguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence that constitute communicative competence. Not long ago, a seminal study has put forward a well-argued case in favour of “the mutual dependence between cultural competence and pragmatic competence” (Meir, 2003: 185) suggesting that a cultural understanding is essential in talking when meaning is likely to be misinterpreted. The point the author would like to draw your attention to is that failing to understand in intercultural communications seems to be caused by differences in ways of communication. This gap can lead to conducting research on speech act performances (i.e. apologizing, requesting, refusal, etc.) relating to an area of inter-cultural and cross-cultural pragmatics.

## 2.2 Apologies

Like other speech act types, apologies are frequently acted using utterances which exhibit more ritual or conventional usage. Hudson (1980:52) believes that the manner in which a linguistic form is conventionalized seems to be attributed to a historical accident. Such forms are repeatedly used than others, thus referred to as conventional. A typical example of a conventional form is ‘I’m sorry’ in English (Blum- Kulka and Olshtain, 1984:206). According to Blum-Kulka and Kasper (1993:59), speech act realizations seem to vary with regard to the usage of some conventionalized linguistic forms; whilst all speech act realizations seem to exhibit conventionalized linguistic forms, apologizing and thanking speech acts exhibit conventionalized linguistics forms to a greater extent than others.

Apology acts are laid out according to distinct classes. Linguists believe that classifications may be caused by outside influences such as situations or objects expressing the sense of guilt. Goffman (1971), on the other hand, considers apology a smaller category included in a more general one which deals with making a bad situation better ‘remedial work’. This remedy work, for him, may be performed across a number of distinct strategies: making accounts, requesting and apologizing. With an account the wrongdoer uses an excuse or an explanation to tell of the offense, in a way to avoid being responsible. Making requests involves “asking license of a potentially offended person to engage in what could be considered a violation of his rights” (Goffman, 1971:112). Similar to account is apologizing which is performed when wrong is done; however, in apologies, unlike accounts, the offender is admitting the offense and expressing regret via apologizing.

Goffman's (1971) view on the manner apologies are classified is regarded amongst the strongest views. In his view, the classification divides compensation into ritualistic and substantive. Based on this distinction, Fraser (1981:265) gives two reasons related to ritual and substantive. In the first, which is ritual, the apologizer attempts to repair the damage when wrong is done while in the second, the substantive, the apology seems to be associated with habits or routines in which in this type no harm is committed for the respondent to be responsible.

### 2.3 Apology Strategies

It is essential that the apologizer uses a variety of apology techniques, for apologies to be more convincing. As for Fraser (1981:263), apologies are classified into nine strategies of different levels of explicitness from most obvious (I am sorry. . .) to least obvious (this is my mistake). However, Olshtain and Cohen (1983:22–23) lowered the list into five. Trosborg (1987:150–152; 1995:395–399) offered another list of apology strategies. Below are lists of apology strategies suggested by the above-mentioned researchers:

List of apology strategies by Fraser (1981)

- Stating the apology
- Announcing one's moral duty to apologize
- Asking for acceptance
- Offering to apologize
- Admitting responsibility
- Asking for forgiveness
- Showing remorse
- Promising forbearance
- Offering compensation

List of apology strategies by Olshtain and Cohen (1983)

- A group of words expressing an apology and containing verbs like *be sorry*, *forgive*, *apologize*, *pardon*, or *excuse*.
- An explanation of the situation
- An acknowledgement of responsibility
- An offer of repair
- A promise of forbearance

List of apology strategies by Trosborg (1987)

- Reducing the level of wrongdoing by holding someone else responsible

- An acknowledgement of responsibility
- Explicit or implicit explanation of what occurred
- Offering reparation
- Promising forbearance
- Expressing concern

*List of apology strategies by Trosborg (1995)*

- Reducing the level of offense
- Acknowledgement of responsibility
- Account or explanation
- Expressing apology

*2.4 Research Done on Apology in Arabic*

In Arabic, unlike the considerable body of knowledge in western languages, a little research has been done on apology. It has been examined in Egyptian dialect (Soliman, 2003), Yemeni dialect (Alfattah, 2010), Jordanian dialect (Hussein and Hammouri, 1998; El-Khalil, 1998; Bataineh and Bataineh, 2006; Bataineh and Bataineh, 2008), and Sudanese dialect (Nureddeen, 2008). All this research based its data on discourse completion tests constructed in nonstandard Arabic used mainly when speaking, not in Classical Quranic Arabic. According to El-Khalil (1998), the apologizers' selection of apology expressions of high degree of explicitness was to relieve pain (e.g. I am sorry, and I apologize); usually stressed by an explanation of what happened. Based on him, speakers of Jordanian dialect tended to perform certain strategies such as accounts and justifications for the wrongdoing basically because they seemed to believe that both strategies were necessary in easing the pain or offense. He also claimed that male subjects preferred to use explicit apologies. Hussein and Hammouri (1998) reported that Jordanians used more strategies than Americans did, such as praising Allah for the occurrence, criticizing the victim, the level of the offense and minimizing. Both Bataineh and Bataineh (2006) and Soliman (2003) reported that there were differences in apology strategies used by Jordanians (males and females) and Egyptians (males and females). They both claimed that some male wrong-doers seemed to lay the blame on the victim, and that some female wrong-doers seemed not to discuss the offence. Bataineh and Bataineh (2008) concluded, in another study, the same findings relating the male-female difference. Nureddeen (2008), claimed that in Sudanese certain apology strategies such as promising forbearance and taking blame which intended to damage the hearer's face seemed not to be used, but speakers tended to use instead explanations to avoid denial and self-blame. Alfattah (2010) reported that Yemeni offenders replaced explicit apology strategies intended to offer some compensation or reparation with a group of other strategies.

This is a careful examination of some of the knowledge on apology strategies based on DCT, which requires participants to provide apologies they imagine they would say in particular

situations. It is not at all thorough, yet the concentration was on the literature relevant to the present study.

### **3. Methodology of the Study**

This section of the study provides detailed information on the research design. It includes the participants involved. It describes the instruments used and the procedures followed in collecting data.

#### *3.1 Population and Sample*

Fifty Libyan participants took part in the study, who then provided written responses in the same 10 situations relating to social distance and power.

These participants were first to fourth year university students of English at OMU/Derna, Libya. Their age ranged between eighteen and 24 years of age. The sample consists of two groups of 25 male and 25 female respondents.

#### *3.2 Instrumentation*

The method seen as appropriate for this study was the discourse completion test (DCT), originally developed by Blum-Kulka (1982). The DCT is probably the most widely used approach in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics in general (Mackey and Gass, 2005) and speech acts such as requests, refusals, apologies, etc. in particular. The importance of its data is widely regarded, especially for the purpose of making up “an initial classification of semantic formulas and strategies that will occur in natural speech” (Beebe, 1985:10, cited in Wolfson et al., 1989).

Some of the DCT method’s main advantages is that the data collected and processed are usually very quick and less difficult. In addition, with DCT, a large number of respondents can be questioned relatively easily, thus ensuring the feasibility of statistical analysis. There are, however, many main drawbacks to DCT data. It is not based on naturally occurring situations. An accurate description of it would be an account based on what audience think they would say, or what they would like the author to think they would say, rather than an account based on actual behaviour.

The findings it provides are not reasonably accurate, and the responses are broadly shorter than natural talk (Beebe, 1985:11, cited in Wolfson et al., 1989; Eisenstein and Bodman, 1993). Despite the disadvantages, choosing DCT, I believe, is a useful preliminary for cultural preferences in speech act performances including apology, which is the focus of this study, even though more focus based on natural data will be recommended to acquire a very clear and accurate picture of the matter.

This elicitation technique is simply a written questionnaire of ten apology situational scenarios that represent different social contexts (see Appendix A) to allow for the use of various strategies. Each scenario is basically a short dialogue with an empty space for the study respondents to complete. In order for the responses to be as realistic as possible, the

subjects of the study are requested to imagine what they would most probably say when they are engaged in specific roles.

### *3.3 The Use of Libyan Colloquial Arabic*

Arabic in Libya is of two varieties: a ‘standard variety’ (fairly similar to Classical (or Quranic) Arabic (‘Fus’ha’ /fʊshə/)) and is commonly used in writing, and a ‘non-standard variety’ (‘Derja’ /dæridʒə/) which is used in everyday talk but not common in writing. There are various dialects in Libya, yet which dialect is used is basically based on the region. Since this work based its data on the responses that closely approximate what the respondent would say in actual conversation, it seemed more realistic to encourage the respondents to supply answers in the nonstandard dialect. To make this idea more valid, the scenarios themselves were written in non-standard Arabic. All respondents, who were residents of Derna city in eastern Libya, gave their responses using the dialect of the east where the study was conducted and where OMU is located. (See Appendix B for the original DCT).

### *3.4 Data Collection*

The survey data were collected in February of the academic year 2018/2019. Both the researcher and the lecturer were at class during the administration of the questionnaire. The questionnaire is basically of two parts. The first part is an introduction of the study with some instructions on how to respond to the situations, whereas the second part consists of ten situational descriptions requiring an apology. The researcher followed Beebe and Waring (2004) by explaining the instructions to the participants before they started. The time suggested for filling each situation was 3 min and 30 min for the whole task. The questionnaire was written in Libyan Arabic. The instructions were explained to students in Libyan Arabic to avoid language barriers. The translated version of all of the situations and that of the apologies to the situations were conducted by the author of this article, who then checked for validity with his colleagues who have degree in linguistics and translation.

## **4. Findings of the Study**

This section reports the findings that relate to the apology strategies respondents were found to use in response to the questionnaire situations. They are as follows:

### *4.1 Expression of Remorse*

The respondents showed remorse in their responses in all of the situations given from one to ten with percentages ranging between 28% and 94%. The situations that received high percentages of apologies were situations 1 (damaging something valuable), 4 (forgetting my supervisor’s book), 7 (a colleague having a surgery), 8 (the elderly neighbour) and 9 (coming late for a job interview) with 78% ( $n = 39$ ), 78% ( $n = 39$ ), 78% ( $n = 39$ ), 94% ( $n = 47$ ) and 82% ( $n = 41$ ) respectively. There are many explanations to the rise in the percentages of apologies in these situations. One possible explanation could be due to the kind of relationship between the offender and the recipient of the offence. In situation 1 (damaging something valuable), many respondents used the expression ‘forgive me’ twice in their response because they felt guilty of doing something wrong to a close friend. Looking at



situation 4 (forgetting my supervisor's book), we can see that the relationship between supervisors and learners is not as equal as is the relationship between a student and another student as in situation 5 (helping another student). Therefore, the reasons that led to the big rise of apologies expressed in situation 4 is due to the fact that supervisors have high power over students which means that they will affect them academically if any kind of offence was committed against them. Situation 8 (the elderly neighbour carrying bags) has also seen a high percentage of apologies. Two possible explanations for this: the first is being a neighbour and the second is attributed to the great respect devoted to elderly people.

Looking at table 1 it is worth noting that fewer offenders showed remorse with situations of relatively more distant relationships, such as in situation 2 (the damaged book: 62%), situation 3 (bumping into someone: 58%), situation 5 (helping another student: 58%), and situation 9 (coming late for a job interview: 54%). Situation 6 (forgetting to pay in a shop) and 7 (a colleague having a surgery) received the lowest percentages of apologies with 28% ( $n = 14$ ), and 16% ( $n = 08$ ) respectively. An important fact that is worthy of note with respect to the percentage data displayed in the present study. In table 1, for example, the percentage of expressions of remorse in situation 1 has reached 94%. This means that 47 out of 50 of the participants performed statements of remorse on the DCT. This number suggests that 94% of the apologies performed in situation 1 comprised at least one expression of remorse. Instances of the responses that the informants used were like the following:

- *For the sake of your father's and mother's head I beg you to forgive. (S 1)*
- *Please forgive me! (S 3)*
- *O brother! I'm whole-heartedly sorry I couldn't pay you a visit. (S 7)*
- *Uncle! I'm so sorry I'm late about the rent. (S 10)*

Table 1. A summary of the number and percentages of responses with a statement of remorse

Situations	S1: Damaging something valuable	S2: The damaged book	S3: Bumping into someone	S4: Forgetting my supervisor's book	S5: Helping another student	S6: Forgetting to pay in a shop	S7: A colleague having a surgery	S8: The elderly neighbour	S9: Coming late for a job interview	S10: Not paying the debt
No. of	47	31	29	39	29	14	08	36	27	36
(statements of remorse)	(94%)	(62%)	(58%)	(78%)	(58%)	(28%)	(16%)	(72%)	(54%)	(72%)

#### 4.2 Explanations

Explanations in this study are reflexive accounts intended to remedy an offense. They are used to explain the cause of the offense or state why such offense has occurred. Explanations can be used to express an apology but in order for an apology to be seen as effective the apologizer needs to persuade the offended that s/he is not responsible for the damage caused in a way to transfer responsibility to another party than the offender (Fraser, 1981). Explanations are of two kinds: those that may come together with explicit apologies, and those that do not. The latter, the explanation may be viewed as a report of an event not

intended to express an apology (Nureddeen, 2008). Hence, due to its relevance to the present study, only explanations intended to provide an apology were studied. According to the questionnaire, explanations were used in nine situations with varying percentages in a way to say sorry to the offended except situation 3 (bumping into someone). Situations that received the highest level of percentage were situations 1 (damaging something valuable), 4 (forgetting my supervisor's book), and 8 (the elderly neighbour), with 82%, 86%, and 92%, respectively. Table 2 below displays the percentages of explanations in each situation. Those explanations were deemed to be conducted when the relationship was thought to be in trouble. As regards situation 3 (bumping into someone), respondents used apologetic expressions but no explanations were given, so they were ignored. Instances of the responses that the informants used were like the following:

- *Forgive me bro! The sun blocked my view and I couldn't see him coming. (S 1)*
- *I'm so sorry! I forgot to keep it away from my little son. (S 2)*
- *Sorry! I thought I'd paid you. (S 6)*
- *Forgive me! I'm in a hurry aunt! (S 8)*

Table 2. A summary of the number and percentage of responses with explanations

Situations	S1: Damaging something valuable	S2: The damaged book	S3: Bumping into someone	S4: Forgetting my supervisor's book	S5: Helping another student	S6: Forgetting to pay in a shop	S7: A colleague having a surgery	S8: The elderly neighbour	S9: Coming late for a job interview	S10: Not paying the debt
No. of (accounts)	41 (82%)	24 (48%)	0 (0%)	43 (86%)	32 (64%)	9 (18%)	37 (74%)	46 (92%)	47 (94%)	16 (32%)

### 4.3 Taking Responsibility

In assuming responsibility, the wrongdoer normally apologizes and assumes some responsibility for the harm caused by experiencing regret and suffering a high level of embarrassment. Table 3 shows the relatively low percentages of informants performing this strategy, especially in situations such as 2 (the damaged book), 6 (forgetting to pay in a shop), 8 (the elderly neighbour), 9 (coming late for a job interview), and 10 (not paying the debt). Situation 1 reveals a high percentage with 66% mainly because it is a serious offense context. Instances of the responses that the informants used were like the following:

- *I made an unforgivable mistake. (S 1)*
- *I promised to bring it in perfect condition though. (S 1 & 2)*
- *It was my fault that I arrived a bit late. (S 9)*
- *I'm the one to blame! (S 10)*

Table 3. A summary of the number and percentage of responses assuming responsibility

Situations	S1: Damaging something valuable	S2: The damaged book	S3: Bumping into someone	S4: Forgetting my supervisor's book	S5: Helping another student	S6: Forgetting to pay in a shop	S7: A colleague having a surgery	S8: The elderly neighbour	S9: Coming late for a job interview	S10: Not paying the debt
No. of (assuming responsibility)	33 (66%)	19 (38%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	4 (8%)	8 (16%)	8 (16%)

#### 4.4 Denying Responsibility

In denying responsibility, the offender refuses to admit that s/he has a role in or is responsible for the offense caused. Table 4 clearly shows the relatively low percentages of respondents using this strategy, especially in situations such as 1 (damaging something valuable), 3 (bumping into someone), 4 (forgetting my supervisor's book), 7 (a colleague having a surgery), 9 (coming late...) and 10 (not paying the debt) in which this strategy had zero response. This zero explains how relatively serious those offense contexts seem to be, and hence it is deemed socially inappropriate to deny responsibility in such cases. Instances of the responses that the informants used were like the following:

- *I did not damage your book. It was old anyway. (S 2)*
- *My car broke down, so it was not my fault. (S 5)*
- *I was stuck in the traffic jam so I'm not to blame. (S 5)*

Table 4. A summary of the number and percentage of responses denying responsibility

Situations	S1: Damaging something valuable	S2: The damaged book	S3: Bumping into someone	S4: Forgetting my supervisor's book	S5: Helping another student	S6: Forgetting to pay in a shop	S7: A colleague having a surgery	S8: The elderly neighbour	S9: Coming late for a job interview	S10: Not paying the debt
No. of (denying responsibility)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	18 (36%)	13 (26%)	0 (0%)	4 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

#### 4.5 Reparation

Reparation, or offer of repair as is sometimes called, is conducted either literally in that the wrongdoer informs the offended person that s/he will get paid for the harm, or materially where the offended person is compensated in an attempt to remedy the offense. In table 5, the informants who offered reparation were relatively few, and they were in situation 1 (damaging something valuable), situation 2 (the damaged book), and situation 5 (helping another student) with 54%, 18%, and 46% respectively. Not even one informant, however, used this strategy in the remaining offense contexts. This low level of percentage may suggest the fact that reparation could be achieved on the basis of the ability to offer material compensation or on the belief that the harm could be fixed. Instances of the responses that the informants used were like the following:

- *I will pay you to repair it. (S 1)*
- *I will buy you a new one. (S 2)*
- *I will help you with the lesson tomorrow. (S 5)*

Table 5. A summary of the number and percentage of responses involving reparation

Situations	S1: Damaging something valuable	S2: The damaged book	S3: Bumping into someone	S4: Forgetting my supervisor's book	S5: Helping another student	S6: Forgetting to pay in a shop	S7: A colleague having a surgery	S8: The elderly neighbour	S9: Coming late for a job interview	S10: Not paying the debt
No. of (offer of repair)	27 (54%)	9 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	23 (46%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

#### 4.6 Self-Blame

Self-blame occurs when those who committed an offense disapprove of what they did and begin to acknowledge their errors. As shown in Table 6, the expression of self-blaming had zero presence in all of the situations but situation 1 (damaging something valuable: 22%) and situation 8 (the elderly woman crossing the street: 14%). Looking at the type of relationship of both interlocutors in both situations (1 and 8), we conclude that self-blame in this study appeared in specific situations where the relationship was not formal. Both offense contexts had some kind of close connection, either as friends (as in situation 1) or as neighbours (as in situation 8). In this case the relationship will be at stake if the wrongdoer does not do what should be done to remedy the offense. Instances of the responses that the informants used were like the following:

- *No words can describe how irresponsible I am. (S 1)*
- *I should have taken much care with your car. (S 1)*
- *It was mean of me, aunt. You must be so upset with me. (S 8)*

Table 6. A summary of the number and percentage of responses involving self-blame

Situations	S1: Damaging something valuable	S2: The damaged book	S3: Bumping into someone	S4: Forgetting my supervisor's book	S5: Helping another student	S6: Forgetting to pay in a shop	S7: A colleague having a surgery	S8: The elderly neighbour	S9: Coming late for a job interview	S10: Not paying the debt
No. of (self-blame)	11 (22%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

#### 4.7 Use of Intensification

Intensification in English is basically accomplished via the use of intensifiers or intensifying adverbs (utterly, really, very, incredibly, extremely) to strengthen the emphasis of the apologies on the second party (the offended). Intensification appeared in all situations ranging between 4% and 86%. Situations with the highest percentages of intensification were

situation 1 (damaging something valuable: 86%) and situation 2 (the damaged book: 58%), where the sincerity of the offender seemed at high risk so much so that s/he may be thought of as being dishonest. The third highest percentage was in situation 8 (the elderly neighbour). The reason behind this rise is because in Libya we consider elderly people as family members who should be treated with care and courtesy. In the present study, intensification was basically accomplished via the repetition of certain phrases such as ‘ya xaly ya xaly’ (o uncle o uncle) in situation 1 (damaging something valuable), 2 (the damaged book), and 4 (forgetting my supervisor’s book). Instances of the responses that the informants used were like the following:

- *O brother! O brother! (S 1, 5 & 7)*
- *Please Please! (S 1, 2 & 7)*
- *O uncle! O uncle! (S 10)*
- *O aunt! O aunt! (S 8)*

Table 7. A summary of the number and percentage of responses involving the use of intensification

Situations	S1: Damaging something valuable	S2: The damaged book	S3: Bumping into someone	S4: Forgetting my supervisor’s book	S5: Helping another student	S6: Forgetting to pay in a shop	S7: A colleague having a surgery	S8: The elderly a neighbour	S9: Coming late for a job	S10: Not paying the debt interview
No. of (intensification)	43 (86%)	41 (82%)	2 (4%)	16 (32%)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	7 (14%)	37 (74%)	10 (20%)	5 (10%)

#### 4.8 Use of Allah’s Name

This strategy was heavily used in most of the offense contexts to ask the second party for forgiveness, to promise the offense will not recur in the future and to offer compensation of the object damaged, lost, etc. The gist communicated by the offenders was that the offense was not of their choice. Therefore, there could be no alteration in the series of events and consequently wrongdoers were to be free from guilt or blame. There exists a strong belief among Muslims that all events are under Allah’s control and that no matter what happens is determined in advance by Allah’s will could, in the wrongdoer’s opinion, free them from responsibility. A familiar term like ‘insha’Allah’, meaning God willing and that nothing occurs without Allah’s will, tends to be one instance of the language devices suggesting the notion of predestination among Muslim speakers in general, and Libyan speakers in particular. The expression ‘insha’Allah’ may also be used to say something that brings comfort, or as a response to a request unwilling to fulfill. Expressions such as ‘weather permitting’ and ‘let’s hope so’, less common in British and American English nowadays, are used as a substitute for the Muslim expression ‘insha’Allah’. However, in British and American English conversations ‘inshallah’ has no counterpart and the space in which this term fits tends to be left blank mostly (Table 8). Instances of the responses that the informants used were like the following:

- *Allah has decreed it and what He willed has happened. (S 1 & 2)*

- *Forgive me if you love Allah. (S 5 & 7)*
- *May Allah be with us in dangerous moments! (S 1)*

Table 8. A summary of the number and percentage of responses involving the use of Allah's name

Situations	S1:	S2:	S3:	S4:	S5:	S6:	S7:	S8:	S9:	S10:
	Damaging something valuable	The damaged book	Bumping into someone	Forgetting my supervisor's book	Helping another student	Forgetting to pay in a shop	A colleague having a surgery	The elderly neighbour	Coming late for a job interview	Not paying the debt
No. of (invoking Allah's name)	47 (94%)	8 (16%)	0 (0%)	9 (18%)	24 (48%)	4 (8%)	22 (44%)	17 (34%)	7 (14%)	9 (18%)

## 5. Conclusion

More recently, there has been a growing interest in the study of apologies in the western world and in the Arab world. This focus was because of the move from the linguistic competence, which lacked significant aspects related to language use, to communicative or pragmatic competence that dealt with various subjects bearing in mind four main components: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic. Encouraged by low amount of research on apology speech act among Libyan people, this current study intended to examine the apology strategies used by Libyan students at OMU.

Basing our findings on a corpora obtained employing DCT, we conclude that Libyan learners of English expressed their apologies, via the Libyan colloquial Arabic, using remorse expression heavily in three main offense contexts in which the offended was an elderly, close friend, or powerful enough to influence the wrongdoer's future. Using apologies to assume responsibility for the wrongdoing, however, was less frequently used and a high number of respondents either used explanations to implicitly state it is not their fault or explicitly rejected it. Other strategies that seemed to be less commonly used were reparation, self-blame, intensification and using names of Allah. The results of this work may not be applicable to all Libyan Arabic speakers, however, they give us a real insight into the universal view of politeness in the Libyan society and therefore indicate implications for intercultural (mis)understanding. Such studies into these domains are of enormous importance for understanding differences in language use and successful intercultural communication. They can help lead to a deeper understanding of social values, and thus can minimize stereotypes and increase knowledge of variation and even encourage an understanding of the meaning of otherness.

## 6. Recommendations

As apologies belong to a field that plays a part in the study of language and may present some difficulties for ESL or EFL learners, the next FOUR recommendations are suggested:

- i). Additional research in pragmatics is recommended for the purpose of gaining a deeper grasp of different cultures and to stay away from stereotypes.

ii). Acquiring English as an L2 or FL, studies suggest that school curriculums ought to pay special attention to topics most pertinent to language functions such as apologizing, making refusals, requests, invitations, etc.

iii). As speech acts and, by extension, apologies are culture-specific, speakers of English as a second/foreign language must gain a better understanding of the culture affecting those acts, which would play a key role in making communication simple but effective.

vi). L2 learners should be aware of the fact that speech acts differ because social relations in L1 may not be the same as in L2 and, thus, there is always a possibility that the addressee may fail to understand.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A. The Situations and Types of Relationships

Situation	Relationship type
Situation 1: Damaging something valuable	Close friends
Situation 2: The damaged book	2 students
Situation 3: Bumping into someone	Two persons in a cafe
Situation 4: Forgetting the supervisor's book	A student and a supervisor
Situation 5: Helping another student	2 students
Situation 6: Forgetting to pay in a shop	A customer and a shop assistant
Situation 7: A colleague having a surgery	2 colleagues
Situation 8: An elderly neighbour	A young and an elderly neighbour
Situation 9: Coming late for an interview	A young and a manager
Situation 10: Not paying the debt	A tenant and a renter

### Appendix B. The DCT in Arabic

اقرأ الوقائع التالية جيداً، ثم اكتب ردة فعلك على كل منها باللغة العامية. حاول أن تكون واقعياً في إجابتك قدر الإمكان

1. صديقك العزيز عطاك سيارته عشان توصل بيها خوك للمدرسة، لكن وانت تسوق خبطك واحد من لاورا. لما جيت تبي تردها له :

- صديقك: نهيت مشوارك بالسيارة ؟

- أنت : .....

2. أسلفت مذكرة زميلك في الفصل عشان اتصورها، لكن يوم لي جيت تبي تردها له لقيت خوك الصغير امشطر الصفحة الأولى:

- صاحبك: جيت معاك المذكرة؟

- أنت : .....

3. و انت خاش لكافيتيرية الجامعة خبطت في واحد طالع و في يده مشروب قهوة .

- الشاب: أفطن!

- أنت :

4. طلبت من استاذ المقرر ان يعطيك كتاب مادة Introduction to Phonetics عشان تصوره ووصاك ترده له بكره عشان المحاضرة. جا وقت المحاضرة و تفاجئت ان الكتاب مش معاك و خش الاستاذ للقاعة:

- استاذك: جيت الكتاب؟

- أنت :

5. زميلك في الفصل طلب منك تشرحه كم درس وانت وعدته. جا الموعد لكن أنت خالفت بوعدك و مجيتش. تلاقيتوا يوم الامتحان:

- صاحبك: معقولة توعدني و متجيش؟

- أنت :

6. شريت كم حاجة من محل البقال و خذيتهن و طلعت تحساب روحك خلصته:

- صاحب المحل: لو سمحت راك مخلصتنيش؟

- أنت :

7. زميلك في العمل كان جدا مريض لدرجة قرروله على عملية مستعجله لكن بعد العملية مازرتش , ولا اتصلت بيه بيش تحمدله بالسلامة. بعد كم يوم تلاقيتوا في العمل:

- زميلك: مرحبا كيف حالك؟

- أنت :

8. راجل كبير في السن (جارك) كان شايل شكاير ثقال و باين عليه التعب، طلب منك اتساعده لكن انت كنت مستعجل و داير روحك ما سمعتش. روجت للحوش لقيت الشايب يشكي لبوك.

- جارك: كلك ما بيتش تشيل معاي الشكاير؟

- أنت :

9. قدمت على وظيفة مترجم في شركة (ليبيا للتأمين) و كان عندك موعد مع المدير لكن الطريق كانت زحمة و وصلت متأخر نص ساعة. خشيت على مكتب المدير:

- المدير: عارف توا الساعة كم؟

- أنت :

10. واخذ شقة بالإيجار، و كمل الشهر ومادفعتش قيمة الإيجار:

- صاحب الشقة: راك ما دفعتليش قيمة الإيجار!

- أنت :

#### Appendix C. The English Version of the DCT (in Appendix B)

**Read the following situations and complete the dialogues using Libyan Arabic. Your responses need to be as realistic as possible.**

1. A close friend gave you his car so you can pick up your brother from school, but you had a car crash. Shortly after, you met him.

-Your friend: You picked up your brother?

- You: .....

2. Your classmate lent you his/her textbook, but, unfortunately, before you returned it your small sister spilled water on it.

- Your classmate: Did you bring my book?

- You: .....

3. You accidentally nudged a gentleman with a cup of coffee, while you were walking in to the cafe.

- The gentleman: Watch out!!

- You: .....

4. You borrowed a book (Introduction to Phonetics) from your supervisor and he asked to bring it back the next day, but you forgot. When he walked in he came to you.

- Your supervisor: Did you bring my book?

- You: .....

5. You promised to help another student with his lessons. The exam period was upon you but you could not find time to keep to your promise.

- The student: Why did you not help me?

- You: .....

6. You bought some items from the grocery store, but you forgot to pay and the shop assistant thought you tried to cheat him.

- The shop assistant: Hey! You did not pay me!!

- You: .....

7. Your colleague was so ill that he was taken in for surgery, but you neither visited nor gave him a call to say you were sorry as you did not know about it on time. A few days later your colleague was back to work.

- Your colleague: Hi!

- You: .....

8. An elderly man asked you to help him with what he was carrying. You were in a hurry so you ignored him. When you were back home you found your old neighbour talking about it with your father.

- The elderly man: Why didn't you help me with the bags?

- You: .....

9. You applied for a job at the Libyan Insurance Co. and they booked you an appointment to meet the manager, but you were stuck in traffic and half an hour late. You arrived.

- The manager: Do you know what the time is?

- You: .....

10. You are renting a flat, the month is over and you could not pay your rent.

- The landlord: You have not yet paid the rent!!

- You: .....

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