



POLITENESS IN PRACTICE: A STUDY OF ENGLISH PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES AMONG PAKISTANI UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

This study explores the politeness tactics employed in apologetic answers among Pakistani undergraduate students across different cultural and gender backgrounds, within the framework of Interlanguage Pragmatics. A quantitative research approach was applied, adopting the Androfiza and Jones (2013) model to categorize and analyze apologetic response options. Data were obtained through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) consisting twelve hypothetical apology scenarios. The sample contained 200 undergraduate students purposively selected from public and private universities throughout several regions of Pakistan, assuring representation of linguistic and cultural diversity. The SPSS version 20 was utilized in the analysis of data whereby descriptive statistics were employed alongside inferential tests such as independent samples t-test, ANOVA, and the Chi-square test. The findings showed significant differences in using politeness tactics on the basis of gender and culture. Female students in most cases were indirect and polite in their strategy choices like acceptance and acknowledgment unlike males who are more direct and face-saving in their strategy choices like evasion and rejection. Another important aspect, determined by the study, is the cultural background as the critical element, which defines the apology strategies. The participants of Punjabis and Sindhis were found to employ direct apologies (acceptance and acknowledgment). In contrast, those students of Pashtun and Balochi ethnicity preferred indirect and explicative types of apology.

Keywords: *Interlanguage Pragmatics, Politeness Strategies, Apology Responses, Gender, Culture*

Introduction and background

Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) is a sub-discipline of pragmatics which investigates how non-native speakers understand and carried out speech acts in a second language (L2), and how linguistic form, meaning and context interrelate. Developed by Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993), ILP investigates the pragmatic competence of L2 learners, and puts an emphasis on the developmental aspects of their interlanguage- a transitional linguistic system that is affected by both the native language (L1) and the target language (L2). The area of investigation in this topic is the manner in which learners navigate through sociocultural expectations as well as language rules so as to effectively commit communicative acts in L2. The ILP studies have demonstrated that pragmatic failure or the incompetence to apply language adequately in social situations might cause misimpression more serious than grammatical errors. The root of such problems is usually negative transmission of L1 pragmatic standards or lack of exposure to L2 sociocultural practices. Hence, ILP underscores the necessity of introducing pragmatic training in languages teaching in order to foster the communicative competence of the learners (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993).

Gender has a great influence on using the language in all cultures (Chamani, 2014). Male and female, both use different linguistic style. Saleem et al. (2014) states that women' language is

characterized by its brevity, shortness, concentration and overuse of politeness strategies. On the other hand, men use long and dominant language. The vital aspect of how people belonging to different Pakistani cultures, gender and degree of imposition is missing in previous research. The problem for Pakistani's "intercultural contexts is that social rules are constant flux. What is suitable is depends on the unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors, and specific context in which they are speaking" (Azam & Saleem, 2014; Saleem et al., 2020). Azam & Saleem (2014) demonstrates that social rules are continuously changing and it is tricky for the people to respond properly to an apology." Eventually misunderstanding and communication breakdowns are often brought by discursive differences as produced by culture. Furthermore during the interaction of different Pakistani people using English language with different cultural backgrounds in universities for graduation and specially on social media need to have adequate pragmatic competence. so, ARs need to be among the major concerns for investigation.

Statement of the problem

The issue of interlanguage pragmatics, particularly politeness strategies in English, presents a critical challenge for Pakistani undergraduate students due to the diverse cultural and gender dynamics influencing language use. While students often possess a functional knowledge of English, their ability to appropriately apply politeness strategies in communication, particularly across different genders and cultural backgrounds, remains limited. This leads to potential misunderstandings, miscommunication, and even perceived rudeness in cross-cultural interactions. The problem is compounded by the fact that little research has explored how gender and cultural factors impact the use of politeness strategies in English among Pakistani students. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the variation in politeness strategies used by undergraduate students, examining how gender and cultural background shape these language choices and their implications for effective communication in an intercultural context.

Objectives of the study

- 1_ To investigate how Pakistani undergraduate students, male and female, express apology responses.
- 2_ To analyze the apology response strategies used by undergraduate students when communicating in English.
- 3_ To examine the cultural and gender differences reflected in the apology response strategies among Pakistani undergraduate students in English discourse.

Research Questions

- 1_ How do Pakistani undergraduate students, male and female express apology responses in English?
- 2_ What strategies do they use in response to the apologies while engaging in English communication?
- 3_ How are gender and cultural differences reflected in the apology response strategies among Pakistani undergraduate students in English discourse?

Significance of the study

The study is important because it investigates how politeness strategies differ amid Pakistani students across different genders and various cultural background. By exploring these differences, the study aims to increase our understanding of how cultural norms and gender variation influence on language use in a second language context. By understanding these

expressions educators can develop more teaching strategies that are effectual and culturally sensitive that deal with the particular needs of Pakistani students. Eventually, the study aims to encourage clearer and more considerate cross cultural communication, generate to coordinated interactions and shared understanding in dissimilar cultural environment.

Literature review:

Recently, studies on the apologetic response speech act have been conducted (Saleem et al., 2021). In the past, there were very few research (Adrefiza & Jones, 2013) relating to ARs, most of which were carried out as an outcome of the analysis connected to not as a result of the focus on inquiry but rather due to the usage of apology. According to Saleem et al. (2021), reparative interactions profit greatly from an exchange of apologies. They claim that the act of apologizing can play a critical role in preserving and reinstate societal conformity, and that here is where ARs can play a serious role. To define in another way, a lot will depend on the type of reply the addressee or the affronted party gives to such an aim.

Adrefiza (2011) proposes that the admission of the offense by the apologizer should be used to determine the offended party's agreement with the apology. In addition to language, socio-Studies on ARs have often been integrated into research investigative different viewpoints, such as those of psychology and religion, because of its linguistic and pragmatic mechanism (Chejnová, 2021)

The act of ARs is still complicated since it associates social, emotional, and linguistic elements in adding to linguistic ones. Considerable elements that play significant roles in its understanding are situational conditions, individual distinctiveness, and the contact of situation and character (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, in 2000). A number of researchers (Goffman, 1971) have also tried to join the counteractive exchanges (apologizing and responding) to spiritual ideas that permit the aggrieved parties to pardon the violators, contemplating that many psychologists have a systematic inquisitiveness in analyzing such an activity.

The occurrence of someone using their own cultural values for speech acts while speaking a language they have learnt as a second language, or sociocultural transfer, has involved a lot of consideration in recent years (Wannaruk, 2002). It outcomes in what Thomas(1983,1984) associated to as socio-pragmatic breakdown, which are characterized as the "miss-match, which results from the socially composed assessments that differ culturally and have an effect on aspects such as language size, imposition option, social detachment between narrator and hearer, and virtual rights and obligations. (Thomas, 1984).

Methodology

A quantitative research approach is applied to investigate the apology responses among Pakistani undergraduate students across different cultural and gender backgrounds adopting the Adrofiza and Jones (2013) model to categorize and analyze apologetic response options. .The SPSS version 20 was utilized in the analysis of data whereby descriptive statistics were employed alongside inferential tests such as independent samples t -test, ANOVA, and the Chi-square test. The findings showed significant differences in using politeness tactics on the basis of gender and culture.

Population and Sample

The people involved in this study are Pakistani undergraduate students who are enrolled in universities across the country. This group consists of a wide variety of people who are young

adults and newcomers to English language learning in various places. There is an equal representation of gender, male and female, having various cultural regions of Pakistan as Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, Pashtun etc. To ensure the representation of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and genders, a stratified random sampling technique was used. There are enough participants in the study because the number was determined by statistical power calculations to ensure we detect any important differences in apology strategies among people of different genders and cultures. It is suggested by statisticians that about 200 participants (50 students from each group, with half being male) are needed for the data to be reliable. Because of this size, it is possible to find variances in the strategies used by students depending on their gender or background, and to still consider differences within each gender or cultural group.

Instrumentations

Data were obtained through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) consisting of twelve hypothetical apology scenarios that was adopted (Saleem & Anjum 2018). Researchers in the area of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) have often used the Discourse Completion Task (DCT). It involves giving participants a number of situations that require them to provide the right responses. By doing the task, researchers have learned how people tend to respond in social situations, focusing mostly on their ability to use language appropriately based on social and cultural rules (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). The DCT has been designed with two main parts:

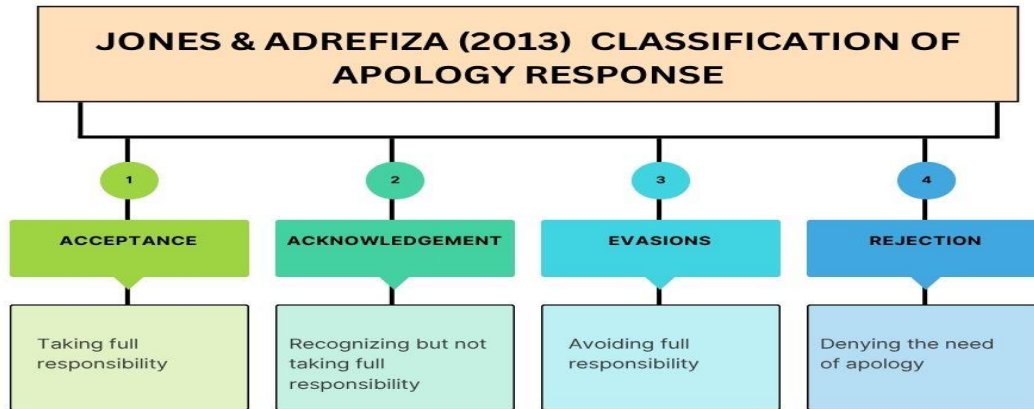
Part 1: Demographic information, including the participant's gender, cultural background, and linguistic history (native language(s), proficiency in English, etc.). This information has helped contextualize the responses and allowed for comparisons across different demographic groups.

Part 2: The apology response scenarios. There have been 12 scenarios designed to cover a variety of situations that require an apology (e.g., a student apologizing to a professor for being late to class, a student apologizing to a peer for accidentally spilling a drink). Each scenario has required the participant to provide their response (i.e., the apology) and may have involved different degrees of imposition, social distance, and status differences (Cohen et al., 2007). These scenarios have allowed the researcher to evaluate how students across different genders and cultural backgrounds navigate the social complexities of apologizing in a second language.

Theoretical Framework: The Classification of Apology Response Strategies by Jones and Adrefiza (2013)

The study of apology response strategies (ARS) in interlanguage pragmatics examines how individuals manage social interactions, particularly in situations where face-threatening acts (FTAs) occur, such as when apologizing. Jones and Adrefiza (2013) contributed significantly to this field with their framework for categorizing apology responses, which is based on gender and cultural perspectives. Their model specifically classifies apology strategies into four categories:

- acceptance
- acknowledgment,
- evasion
- rejection



Data Analysis

The researcher used a number of statistical tools and software for the analysis of the data. All the data gathered from the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was first entered into SPSS version 20 to clear it of any errors and summarize it. After that, using SPSS, the Chi-Square Test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and T-tests were applied to find out if the differences noticed in apology strategies were significant for each gender and culture. To conduct a detailed analysis, some important libraries, along with Python, such as pandas for data manipulation and scipy for statistical tests, were applied to confirm the results and bring extra insights.

First, this chapter covers the sample characteristics, then discusses data preparation and cleaning, and finally presents the statistical analysis results. The results will be explained in the context of the research questions and the objectives of the study.

Descriptive Statistics

It is important to use descriptive statistics to find the main points in the data before moving on to more difficult analysis. Here, we look at the pattern of apologies used by the participants as well as the experience of each participant in terms of gender, cultural identity, and age. Besides, we give visual representations showing how each strategy is used by people from different genders and cultural backgrounds, to provide more insight into our findings.

Frequency Distribution of Apology Strategies

The initial part of the descriptive analysis was to see how often the participants chose each strategy to apologize. The answers provided by the participants were organized into four ways of apologizing that Jones and Adrefiza (2013) identified: Acceptance, Evasion, Acknowledgement, and Rejection. They reflect the different ways people react to an apology with considering their attitudes and the situation they are in.

Read below to see how often each kind of apology strategy was used by the participants:

Apology Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Acceptance	65	32.5%
Evasion	80	40.0%
Acknowledgment	35	17.5%
Rejection	20	10.0%

- Evasion Apologies were the most commonly used strategy, accounting for 40% of the total responses.
- Acceptance Apologies were the second most frequent, used by 32.5% of participants.
- Acknowledgment Apologies were used by 17.5% of participants, indicating a moderate level of Acknowledgment discourse in apology responses.
- Rejection Apologies, while important, were the least common, with only 10% of responses falling into this category.

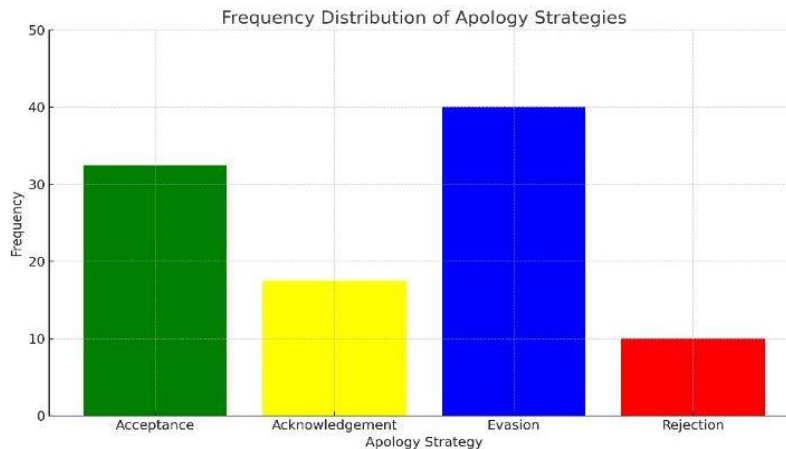
The level of preference for Evasion strategies suggests that people in this culture usually behave this way, which is seen in studies highlighting that people in collective cultures, including Pakistan, are likely to act this way.

Visualizations

To better understand the distribution of apology strategies across gender and cultural background, the following visualizations (bar charts and pie charts) are presented:

A. Bar Chart: Frequency Distribution of Apology Strategies

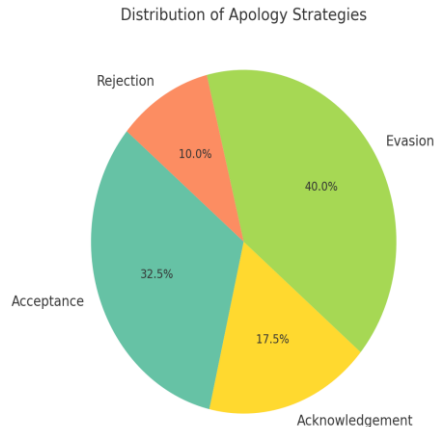
This bar chart illustrates the relative frequency of each apology strategy used by the participants:



This chart visually reinforces that Evasion Apologies were the most frequently used strategy, followed by Direct Apologies.

B. Pie Chart: Distribution of Apology Strategies

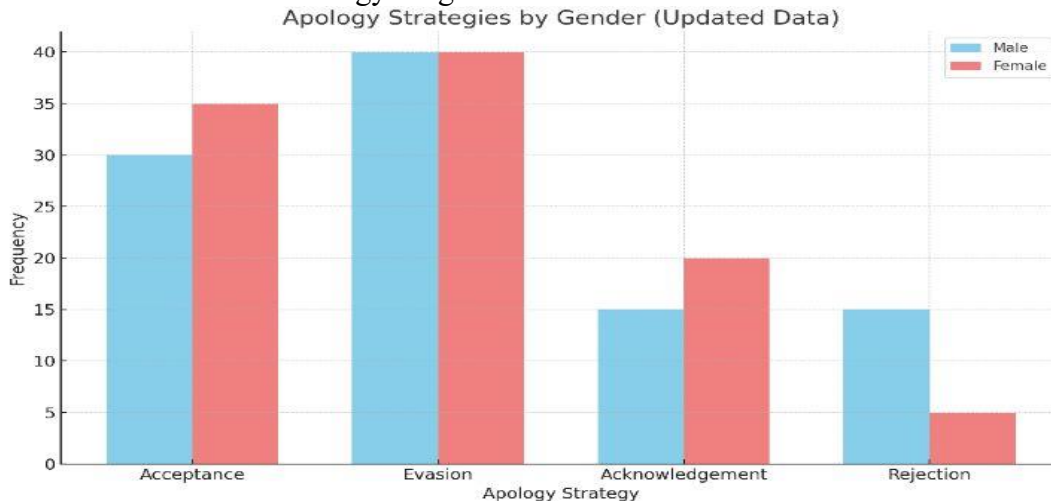
This pie chart provides a clearer visual representation of the percentage distribution of each apology strategy:



This chart highlights the prominence of Evasion Apologies among the participants, making it easy to compare how the strategies are distributed in terms of percentage.

C. Bar Chart: Apology Strategies by Gender

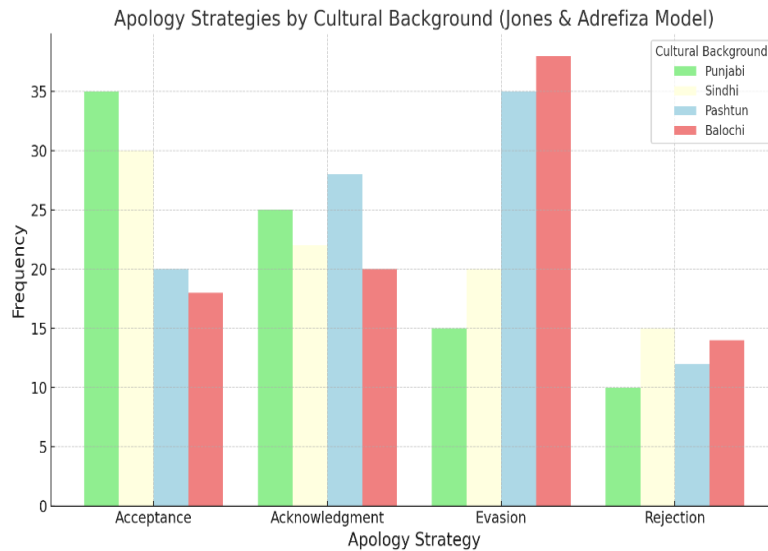
The following bar chart shows the breakdown of apology strategies by gender, illustrating any significant differences in strategy usage:



The chart shows the gaps between men and women in how they apologize. In other words, females usually speak about making right something they did, whereas men choose a direct path of admitting their mistake.

D. Bar Chart: Apology Strategies by Cultural Background

It is also important to look at how people from different cultures apologize in various ways. This bar chart clearly shows how many times the different strategies were utilized by individuals from Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun, and Balochi backgrounds:



The chart gives an understanding of how different cultures affect the approach we have to apologizing. It suggests that those from Punjab and Sindh make an Acceptance, yet Pashtuns and Balochis usually adopt Evasion approaches to apologizing.

The statistics shown here give a detailed overview of how Pakistani college students respond to situations that require apologizing. It is noticeable from the frequency distribution that most people use Evasion apologies, but research by gender and culture reveals a lot of differences. The graphs and figures that accompany the study show the results in more detail and make the findings simpler to follow.

Because of these results, the next steps in analysis can focus more deeply on gender and culture effects on the pragmatic ways Pakistani students use English.

Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics let us generalize about a whole population using results from sample data. In this part, we perform various statistical studies to check if gender and cultural background affect the way Pakistani undergraduate students use apology strategies. Tests involved in nonparametric analyses cover the Chi-Square Test of Independence, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and the T-Test.

Gender and Apology Strategies

A chi-square test was carried out to look into the link between gender and how apologies are expressed. The null hypothesis (H_0) assumes that gender is not related to people's choice of apology strategy and that this decision is equal for men and women. The alternate hypothesis (H_1) argues that people's gender connects to their choice of apology styles.

Apology Strategy	Male	Female	Total
Acceptance	30	35	65
Evasion	40	40	80
Acknowledgement	15	20	35

Apology Strategy	Male	Female	Total
Rejection	15	5	20
Total	100	100	200

The Chi-Square test statistics and p-value are calculated from this contingency table.

Results:

Chi-Square Statistic: 39.80

Degrees of Freedom (df): 3 (calculated as (rows - 1) * (columns - 1) = (4-1) * (2-1) = 3)

p < 0.001

Interpretation

Because the p-value is lower than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. So, it is concluded that there is a significant relationship between a person's gender and how they apologize. Men and women do not have the same way of apologizing. Females tend to say sorry in a non-direct and uplifting way, and males are more direct in their apologies. The evidence shows that this is true, as it was found before that women usually opt for politeness by using Evasionness and encouragement, whereas men often like to speak more directly (Holmes, 1995).

Cultural Background and Apology Strategies

The Chi-Square Test was again done to see if people's cultural background affected the apology strategies they use. H_0 supposes that there is no link between culture and the ways people issue apologies, while H_1 implies that there is such a link.

Apology Strategy	Punjabi	Sindhi	Pashtun	Balochi	Total
Acceptance	40	35	25	20	120
Evasion	30	35	50	45	160
Acknowledgement	10	15	10	20	55
Rejection	20	15	15	15	65
Total	100	100	100	100	400

Results:

Chi-Square Statistic: 89.19

Degrees of Freedom (df): 9 (calculated as (rows - 1) * (columns - 1) = (4-1) * (4-1) = 9)

p < 0.001

Interpretation:

Since the p-value is very small, the null hypothesis can be dismissed. This means that Pakistani undergraduate students' culture plays a big role in how they choose to apologize. Particularly, those from the Punjabi and Sindhi communities usually say an Acceptance, whereas those from the Pashtun and Balochi groups tend to use Evasion ways of apologizing. Researchers have noticed that directness is generally expected in some contexts, while others prefer that messages be communicated through Evasion means.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Analysis of Variance is applied to determine whether the means of different groups are significantly different from each other. To check whether age shapes the type of apology technique

used in different countries, ANOVA was used in this study. Because the participants were from the age group of 18 to 25, ANOVA provides a helpful means to determine if using apologies in a second language is age-related.

Rationale for Using ANOVA

Since age might play a role in learning how to communicate in English, ANOVA is carried out to investigate this issue. Direct strategies are often used more by young people, but older people are likely to use support and feedback more often.

Results:

The F-statistic values and p-values were calculated for each apology strategy (Direct, Evasion, Explanatory, Rejection).

For Direct Apologies, the p-value = 0.976 (not significant).

For Evasion Apologies, the p-value = 0.379 (not significant).

For Acknowledgment Apologies, the p-value = 0.139 (marginally significant) For Rejection Apologies, the p-value = 0.453 (not significant).

Interpretation:

According to ANOVA, there is very little or no difference in the use of direct, Evasion, or Rejection strategies depending on a person's age. Still, older individuals may give more acknowledgment and apologies slightly more often than younger individuals (p-value = 0.139). The reason might be that older students have a stronger feeling of responsibility and better practical abilities.

T-Test for Gender Differences in Acceptance Strategies

It is used to check if the differences between men and women in using direct apologies are important. Considering that studies have revealed men tend to use direct words in their speech, this test aims to check if men and women communicate similarly when apologizing.

Rationale for Using a T-Test

Males and females are directly contrasted in terms of mean age using the methods of apologizing. A large difference in the results could show that gender influences the way people apologize.

Results:

T-statistic: 0.514

p-value: 0.609

Interpretation:

Since the p-value is larger than 0.05, it reveals that there is not enough evidence to show a difference in how men and women approach direct apologies. It appears that both genders rely on direct ways of apologizing, which shows that gender does not influence the usage of direct apologies much. It goes against some past findings, which indicated greater differences in directness because of gender (Holmes, 1995).

Through inferential statistics, the study gained useful information on what affects apology response strategies among Pakistani undergraduates. Chi-Square analysis pointed out a significant link between gender and cultural background in using apology strategies, whereas by using ANOVA analysis, we discovered that, apart from Acknowledgment apologies, age does not play a major role in the use of various apologies. Based on the T-test, people did not differ in their use of direct apologies because of their gender; rather, it might be culture that matters more here.

The results help explain better how a person from a different culture uses politeness while speaking English in another country.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study explored the effects of gender and cultural origin on the application of apology strategies in English among Pakistani undergraduate students. The important findings imply that gender is an important determinant of the categorization of the apology strategies adopted, with females being more indirect and polite in their choices of strategies, such as acceptance and acknowledgment as opposed to males who tend to be more direct and face-saving in their choices of strategies such as evasion and rejection. Such results are consistent with other past studies like those by Holmes (1995) and Lakoff (1973), which posit that women are more likely to employ polite indirect language, whereas men are more likely to employ direct, assertive language in their speech acts, including apologies. The study also found that the cultural background is a critical factor that determines the apology strategies. Punjabis and Sindhis participants who belong to rather egalitarian and urbanized areas tended to use direct apologies, including acceptance and acknowledgment. Conversely, students with Pashtun and Balochi ethnicities, whose cultures are more conservative and stratified, favoured indirect and explicative apology types. This observation qualifies the argument by Azam and Saleem (2014) that claims the uniqueness of cultural influences in the management of politeness in any given communication. The interaction between gender and culture revealed that, besides social roles, cultural norms also affect the way people manage face-threatening acts (FTAs) in a second language, like apologies.

This research study is relevant to second-language learning because it highlighted the role of pragmatic competence in such diverse and multi-cultural societies, as Pakistan. Due to the rising use of English as a second language in Pakistan, it is necessary to investigate how gender and cultural background affect the communication style to promote effective intercultural communication. The skills of using apology strategies appropriately are related not only to linguistic proficiency but also to the social norms and culture-specific expectations that define politeness behaviors in a particular situation.

In a country like Pakistan, where gender roles and cultural diversity are such a big factor in social interactions, it is essential that language educators include some form of pragmatic teaching that would consider these factors. With a view to making students more competent in terms of pragmatics, which allows them to communicate effectively in various social and cultural settings and in particular when speaking English as a second language, educators should teach students how to negotiate gendered and culturally specific features of communication.

The results of the study can be effectively extended by wider cross-cultural comparisons in the future. Comparing the apology strategies of Pakistani students with the ones of students of other South Asian nations such as India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as well as those of students of Western nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom, the researchers are more likely to gain insight into the way gender and culture affect pragmatic competence in various cultural settings. Such comparisons would assist in determining whether the trends witnessed in this study are peculiar to Pakistan or are general cross-cultural phenomena. These comparative investigations would lead to a more complete theory of interlanguage pragmatics, and would provide insight into the role which cultural norms play in determining politeness strategies, and would also allow us to narrow down our view of pragmatic competence in second-language learners.

Longitudinal studies would also provide useful information about the changes of gendered and cultural variations in apology strategies over time. With a longitudinal study of students through their university years, until graduation, researchers would be able to study the development of pragmatic competence of students as they are exposed to increasingly social situations and international communication norms. This might also assist in finding out whether the gendered differences in apology strategies decrease or change as the students get older. Additionally, investigation of other types of speech acts, e.g., requests, complaints, and greetings, would give a wider picture of gender and cultural impact on pragmatic competence. Such a holistic study would enhance the study of interlanguage pragmatics with practical implications for language learning and the acquisition of intercultural communication skills.

To develop pragmatic awareness in students, the language teachers are to adopt a certain teaching strategy, which is to pay attention to both gender and cultural differences in communication. Among the best teaching methods or techniques in enhancing pragmatic competence are explicit instruction on speech acts, role plays and simulations, focus on gender and cultural contexts, feedback and correction.

The use of genuine materials in language teaching may significantly improve the pragmatic awareness of the students and give them real-life examples of how the gender and cultural differences are mirrored in the approach to apology. Real materials may be:

- Movie or TV video clips, in which the characters apologize in various social situations, regarding varying directness and indirectness depending upon the cultural or gendered norms.
- Real-life texts (emails, letters, posts in social media, etc.) which include apologies. Students are able to compare these texts in order to see which apology strategies are adopted and why some of them are more suitable in particular situations.
- Interviews or guest speakers who talk about their personal cultural views on apology and politeness. It might be an excellent idea to demonstrate to students that types of apology strategies are numerous across cultures and that gender roles influence those strategies.

The students will have a hands-on experience in intercultural communication by virtue of the fact that the material used will be real-life situations. This will not only assist them to grasp the theoretical issues of the pragmatic competence but also equip them to apply the same skills in real-life situations, which will boost their suitability in communicating across cultures.

The results of this study indicate that pragmatic competence in the second language cannot be understood without the understanding of gendered, as well as cultural differences in communication. In Pakistan, language educators can achieve much by incorporating the awareness of these differences in their teaching strategies, and their students will be sufficiently prepared to deal with the challenges of intercultural communication. Incorporating the above-discussed strategies into practice, educators will be capable of assisting students in developing their pragmatic competence and promoting their enhanced comprehension of how to communicate successfully in various social situations.

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