

Students' Apologizing in Arabic:

A Case Study at an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia

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Abstract—Apologies are the most fundamental strategies for remedying offences and reflecting the degree of the speakers' politeness. This study aims to investigate the language of apologizing in the Arabic language as used by students of an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia. The study follows a descriptive approach. The participants are 101 male students who recruited to fill a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) that consists of eight situations about the boarding school rules. The findings show that the students of the Islamic boarding school employed apology strategies that vary from the Arabic standards of apologizing to some extent. The study concludes that to enhance the BSS's realization of the speech acts of apologizing in Arabic, teachers must develop the current textbooks that may help in developing the students' pragmatic competence.

Keywords: *apologizing, pragmatic competence, speech acts, boarding school students BSSs*

I. INTRODUCTION

Apologies, in all cultures, are admissions of wrongdoing and forgiveness [1–8]. They are one of the remedial devices that might work to eliminate the offensive work in most societies and religious events. A remedial work usually comes after “worst possible readings” or “virtual offence”; acts. Since the emergence of the pragmatic studies, there were many theoretical and empirical studies concerning the study of the speech acts of apologizing, such as comparing native with non-native speakers apology strategies [8–12], gender and apologizing [13–14], apologies in emails [15], and apologies in criminal justice setting [16]. All these studies are highly important concerning the apology strategies of students of higher education who enrolled in public institutions.

Goffman [17] claims that apology is a ‘ritual work’ used to remedy an offence. In line with Goffman’s work, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain [18] developed a massive project of a Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Acts realization Patterns (CCSARP), which is the fundamental of the empirical studies of the apology strategies by comparing the similarities and differences between native and non-native speakers’ realization of specific speech acts like apologies. These five universal strategies are conceptualized again by Leech [19] as Speech Events Seen as Prototype Categories in (SEPC), which consists of Head Acts and Supportive Moves. The apology consists of

four basic elements. They are the offender who takes responsibility for the offence but did not necessarily cause it, the offended who is perceived to have suffered as a result of the offence, offence real, potential, or perceived as such by the offender or the offended, and the remedy recognition of the offence, acceptance, of responsibility, and a display of regret.

In line with this breakthrough, there are huge imperial research on apologizing in different cultures, languages, and contexts, such as [8,9,13,20–26]. Koutsantoni [2] on his study about apologies as remedial interchanges in natural conversations taken from TV shows in the Greek language looks for the elements of an offence and the factors that determine its weightiness such as the face, power and social distance on the recipients’ responses and how do those elements are culturally determined. They concluded that the cultural values and relations of power and solidarity between discourse holders determine the offences of apologizing, the used strategies and their response, and the degree of politeness of the remedial interchange.

The main aim of this study is to investigate the male students’ realization of the apology strategies in the Arabic language as part of their pragmatic competence as a non-native language. Boarding schools in Indonesia concentrate to develop the pragmatic competence of the students in two languages, Arabic and English. Specifically, the scope of this study was to determine whether students of Islamic Boarding Schools maintain to develop the students’ pragmatic competence in the speech acts of apologizing in the Arabic language, hence, little research is found in this regard. The following question is directing this study.

- What are the apology strategies used by male students of an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia in the Arabic language?

II. METHODS

This study used a descriptive approach to describe the students’ realization of the speech acts of apologies in the Arabic language as a nonnative language. The data of this study were collected at an Islamic Boarding School in Subang, Indonesia. The reason behind the selection of this school is the fact that it is a modern school, which serves multilingual

teaching and learning. Hence, the students' daily conversations must be either in the Arabic and English languages.

A. Instrument

The instrument to collect the data for this study is a discourse completion task (DCT). The DCT consists of eight situations about the students' violation of the rules of the Islamic Boarding School under investigation. The situations are designed carefully to fit within context-internal (e.g., the type of offence, the severity of the offence) and context-external (e.g., social power and social distance). These situations are followed by a blank line in which the informants wrote their responses regarding the eight offences. To avoid the bias of written answers, the informants are recruited to write their responses as they are in real situations. These eight situations consist of the following themes *late to school, late to class, smoke at school, having a mobile phone, bothering a younger student at school, using the belongings of the older student at school, through trash in an improper place, and communication with the opposite sex*. To support the students' written responses, the researcher designed a semi-interview that consists of some questions regarding the offences of the eight situations. This technique helps in providing authentic data and eliminating the bias of written responses "written elicitation are inadequate when researching language in use and naturally occurring everyday interaction should be gathered" [27].

B. Participants

The study involved 202 students enrolling in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia. The study employed a purposive sampling technique in which the researcher selected the participants based on specific linguistic criteria such as the students' pragmatic competence in Arabic or English languages. The students' pragmatic competence has been observed based on the students' academic scores in the academic year 2018-2019 and direct observation by the researcher himself as a volunteer teacher of English and a native speaker of Arabic. They are chosen equally to fit gender differences; 101 male students and 101 female students. Each participant volunteered to write responses to the eight

situations and participated in the semi-interview in the Arabic language.

C. The procedure of Data Analysis

The instrument formulated for eliciting the data for this study was not pilot-tested because such the instrument is already tested in previous research. The analysis of the collected data is based on the apology strategies developed by Blum-kulka and Olshtain [18] and recently by Leech [19]. The following strategies are the base of our analysis.

1) Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs):

- An expression of regret, e.g. I am sorry.
- Offer an apology, e.g., I apologize.
- Request for forgiveness, e.g., forgive me.

2) Explanation or account:

- Explicit, e.g., the Traffic was terrible,
- Implicit, e.g., traffic is always so heavy in the morning.

3) Taking on responsibility:

- Accepting the blame, e.g., It is my fault/my mistake,
- Lack of intent, e.g., I didn't mean it,
- Expressing self-deficiency, I was confused/I didn't see you/forgot,
- Expression of embarrassment, e.g., I feel awful about it, Self-dispraise, e.g., I'm such a dimwit!, Justify hearer, e.g., You're right to be angry,
- Refusal to acknowledge guilt, e.g., It was not my fault.
- Blame the offended party, e.g., it is your fault.

4) Promise for Forbearance, e.g., I promise I will not do it again.

5) An offer of repair, e.g. I'll pay for the damage.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the students' apology strategies in the Arabic language in eight situations.

TABLE I. FREQUENCIES OF THE MALE STUDENTS' APOLOGY STRATEGIES IN THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

No	Strategies	Situations								Sum	%
		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8		
	Head Act (IFID)	106	93	103	100	125	108	96	96	827	50
Supportive Moves	EXPL.	20	48	11	11	22	18	7	17	154	9
	RESP.	10	17	44	41	18	28	17	29	204	12
	REP.	1	2	1	2	14	8	18	24	70	4
	FORBE.	56	17	57	44	36	43	58	41	355	22
	Blame	0	0	0	2	0	9	1	0	12	1
	Non-verbal	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Total	199	178	216	201	220	215	200	209	1638	100

Table I shows that the male students used 1638 apology occurrences in the Arabic language. The implementation of these strategies is relatively different. In this regard, the **Head Act** semantic formula represents the most frequently used

strategy with 827 (50%). The second frequently used semantic formula is the *promise for forbearance* with 355 (22%) occurrences. Lower is the semantic formula *taking on responsibility* with 204 (12%). Lower than that would be the

giving an explanation or account semantic formula with 154 (9%). Other semantic formulas with few frequencies are the *offered repair* with 70 (4%), the *blaming the offended party* with 12 (1%), and *non-verbal* with only one occurrence.

The distribution of the apology occurrences in the eight situations is relatively different too. For example, high identical occurrences were found in situations 3 'mobile phone' with 216 occurrences, situation 4 'smoking' with 201 occurrences, situation 5 'bothering a younger student' with 220 occurrences, situation 6 'using the belongings of the older student' with 215, situation 7 'through trash in improper place', and situation 8 'impolite communication' with 209 occurrences. On the contrary, low occurrences were found in situation 1 'late to school' with 199 occurrences and 2 'late to class' with 178 occurrences. The highest frequency was given for situation 5 'bothering a younger friend' with 220 apology strategy occurrences and the lowest frequency was given for situation 2 'late to class' with 187 apology strategy occurrences. These findings raised the question of why do students apologized for more for their friends than for their academic teachers.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Illucationar Force Indivating Devices (IFIDs)

Based on the data given in Table I, the male students used 827 head acts in the Arabic language for the eight situations divided into three sub-strategies, namely *regret* with 61%, *offer an apology* 24%, and *request for forgiveness* 12%. The frequency distribution of these occurrences in the eight situations is ranging from 11% to 15%. In the Arabic language, the words *asif* (sorry), *samhni* (forgive me), *au'thurni* (forgive me) are the most explicit expressions of apologizing to remedy different wrongdoings.

1) *Expression of regret*: The current study found that the *Expression of regret* is the most frequently used strategy with 506 (61%) occurrences compared to the other two IFIDs strategies. This finding supports the idea that the apologetic strategy *Expression of regret* is the most common used by wrongdoers [5,7,28]. There are various types of words and expressions used to express regret in the Arabic language. However, due to the students' lack of pragmatic knowledge in the Arabic language, they tend to use three forms, namely the adjective *asif*, (sorry); the noun *asaf* (sorry); and the noun phrase *ana asif* (I am sorry) with 550 occurrences (based on AntCon software) distributed fairly consistent in the eight situations.

The distribution of these occurrences is situation-dependent. Situation 1 'late to school' represents the highest with the most occurrences 14%, whereas the male students used identical frequencies in six situations out of eight. Hence, situation 2 'late to class', 5 'bothering a young student', 6 'using the belongings of the older friend' with 13% occurrences each, and situations 3 'having a mobile phone', 4 'smoking', and 7 'throw trash in improper place' with 12% occurrences each. The least frequency distribution is found in situation 8 'impolite communication', which represents the least frequent occurrences of 10%. Regarding the distant

relation situations, it seems that the male students believe in the idea that makes the apology fits the situation. For example, in situation 8, where the offence is high, the students used fewer occurrences of the *Expressions of regret* strategy. Meanwhile, they used another strategy that they believe it can remedy the offence, i.e., promise for forbearance. The same interpretation fits situation 1 'late to school'.

In the Arabic language, the regret strategy might not remedy offences with a high degree of imposition [29]. However, the strategy *request for forgiveness* (e.g., *samihni* 'forgive me') does. In line with this fact, the male students strengthen their regret by elaborating the IFIDs to Supportive moves or to another IFIDs to enhance the offended face, known as 'face-enhancing act' [19].

2) *Offer an apology*: In this strategy, the distribution of the apology occurrences in the eight situations is situation-dependent. The frequency distribution of the performative strategy is relatively different ranged from 10% to 15% in the eight situations. For example, situation 1 'late to school' and 5 'bothering a younger student' represent the least frequencies with 10% each. Higher than that is situation 2 'late to class' with 11% occurrences. Higher are situations 4 'smoking' and 8 'impolite communication' with 13% occurrences. Then, situations 6 'using the belongings of older student' and 7 'throw trash in improper place' with 14% occurrences. Finally, the highest frequency is found in situation 3 'having a mobile phone' with 15% occurrences. To this end, the male students used the offer an apology mainly to remedy severe offences due to the formality of the strategy. Out of this generalization, this distribution attributes to other external and internal factors such as social distance and social power, as in situations 6 and 8.

Interestingly, the *offer an apology* holds two positions in a sentence, namely initial and post-position. The expression *afa* is the most common expression used as a performative strategy compared to the performative verb *athar* (apologize). In their real daily interactions, according to the researcher's observation in a boarding school under investigation, the male students prefer to use the word *afwan* 'apologize' than *asif* 'sorry' to apologize for light and medium wrongdoings. To this end, due to the formality of the strategy, the male students used the *offer an apology* mainly to remedy severe offences. Out of this generalization, this distribution might be attributed to other external and internal factors such as social distance and social power, as in situations 6 and 8.

3) *Request for forgiveness*: Arabs and Indonesians use the *request for forgiveness* strategy more often [29,30]. Students of boarding schools, however, used the request for forgiveness strategy with fewer frequencies compared to the regret strategy and offer (performative) apology strategies. Male students prefer to ask for forgiveness from their younger friends and prefer to regret and offer an apology for their teachers. This similar finding matches with Batainah [5] that 'elderly people do not apologize to children but they ask them

for forgiveness' [p.1909]. The Male students used the performative verbs **samihni** and **iqfirli** to construe the forgiveness strategy in the Arabic language, which hold initial and post-positions in a sentence. In the initial and post-positions, the two performative verbs come as an imperative and interrogative mood.

It is obvious that the distribution of the *request for forgiveness* is inconsistent, and also situation-dependent. For example, situations 2 and 7 exhibits low frequency with 5 (5%) and 4 (4%) occurrences respectively. On the contrary, situations 1, 4, and 6 exhibit consistent frequencies with 11 (11%) occurrences, each. Higher would be situation 3 and 8 with 12 (12%) and 14 (14%) occurrences, respectively. The highest frequency is found in situation 5, which represents the most frequency with 30 (31%) occurrences. It seems to the researcher that the male students request extensively in situation 5 to show their sympathy and solidarity towards the young students as they in a powerless status.

Extension or elaboration of the IFIDs or the use of multiple strategies utterances indicates the students' intensifying of their Head Act strategies to "placate and show remorse towards the offended parties and to express the graveness of the situation" [5,18]. The elaboration is not going to be discussed in this article.

B. Explanation

Previous research suggests that the strategy *Explanation* is "an account or explain used by the offender to involve internal and external factors that may offend" [18]. It is an indirect strategy in Holmes [14], direct in Anna [31], and it can be explicit and implicit [18,29]. In this research, this strategy is of explicit and implicit. It can be claimed that the explanation strategy is the third essential apologetic formula the male students tend to use to avoid the consequences of the offence. Thus, it is a situation-dependent related to the offence type.

The male students exhibited 154 (19%) occurrences distributed across the eight situations. Looking throughout the eight situations, situation 5 'late to class' represents the highest frequency with 48 occurrences and situation 7 'through trash in a wrong place' represents the least frequency occurrences with 7 occurrences. This situation is marked as situation-specific. Thus, the male students believe that giving a reasonable explanation to situation 2 to their teachers may help them to remedy their offence, lessen the consequences, and increase the possibility of forgiveness. On the contrary, in situation 7, the students accounted less because the offence of throwing trash in the improper place requires repair than account.

More specifically, the male students provide long and short explanations to claim, deny, clarify, and/or justify the internal and external factors caused the offence, as in situation 2. It has been found that to be able to explain or give an account of wrongdoing, the offender has an adequate linguistic strength [31], otherwise, they provide fewer explanations and the apologetic formula might not be accepted by the offended party.

C. Taking on Responsibility

It is the second used strategy by male students in the Arabic language. There are three sub-strategies within this strategy with high frequencies and three strategies with low frequencies. The high frequent sub-strategies are accepting the blame with 112 (55%), expressing self-deficiency with 33 (16%), and expressing a lack of intent with 26 (13%). The low-frequency strategies are expressing embarrassment 6 (3%), refusal to acknowledge the guilt 15 (7%), and blame the offended 12 (6%). Situation 3 'smoke cigarette' exhibits the highest frequency of 44 occurrences and situation 1 'late to school' exhibits the least frequency of 10 occurrences.

The selection and production of this strategy is situation-dependent: based on the type of violation of the school rules. Therefore, the male students used this strategy to show their self-humbling and to placate the offended parties. This finding is consistent with the findings of Blum-kulka [18] who claimed that such "recognition of one's fault is face-threatening to S and intend to appease H" [p. 207]. Previous research claimed that it is adequate to distinguish statistically the frequency of sub-strategy to another, rather it is more adequate to observe the combination of strategies in which the strategy occurred: high number vs. low number [31]. Building on this quotation, the male students used the sub-strategy *Accepting the blame* with most occurrences to blame themselves as they are responsible for the fault, such as *hatah khata'i* 'this my mistake'. This sub-strategy represents the highest number of occurrences, which might be attributed to the fact that the students maintain the social power and social distance between them, as 'wrongdoers', and the offended parties. In other words, the students showed self-humbling to avoid further discourse. Overall, the findings regarding this sub-strategy is not encouraging to support previous research, which found that this sub-strategy "allows people 'especially Arabs' to avoid the self-humbling, face threat of a direct apology" [29], acceptance of blame [6], and recognition of H's entailment to an apology [32].

D. Offer of Repair

What is considering being a repair in this research is the repair of damage resulted from the violation of the boarding school rules, such as a damage of possession, damage to ethical behaviour, etc). Situations with high frequencies consist of infractions of ethical behaviour that require an inner change from the offender himself. For example, the offence in situation 5 requires a change in the behaviour of the older student towards the younger student (e.g., bullying). The offence in situation 7 requires the students to pay more respect to the cleaning service (e.g., place trash properly). The offence in situation 8 requires a true or real change of bad behaviour that copes with the Islamic rules and education (e.g., the prohibition of having a girlfriend).

The repair strategy has different functions. They are: (a) accepting the punishment or the consequences, as in (*sa aqbal al-jumlah* #S4, 'I will accept the sentence'). (b) Offering a compensation, as in (*sa ashtari al-ta'am lahiqan* #S5, 'I will buy you food'). (c) Fixing the damage, as in (*sa armihee baidan* #S7, 'I will throw it away'). (d) Change ethical

behavior, as in (*sawfa anfasil ma'ahu* #S8, 'I will break up with him').

Therefore, the male students offered high frequencies of an explicit repair for the offence in situation 8, which contains a kind of an ethical offence of 'conducting impolite communication with a girlfriend'. Repair of this kind required the male student to fix their character and behaviour to fit with the Islamic values that are the basic principles of the boarding schools in Indonesia. Besides, the male students offered a considerable number of repairs for the offences in situations 5 'bothering a younger student' and 7 'throw trash in improper place'.

E. Promise for Forbearance

It is the most used strategy by the male students in the Arabic data with 335 (44%). The distribution of the *promise for forbearance strategy* is situation-dependent. Meaning that in situations with offences requiring forbearance, the students used promise speech acts more often. Thus, situation 3 'smoking' and situation 7 'throw trash in a wrong place' exhibited identical frequency occurrences of the promise speech act with 16%. At a somewhat lower level would be situation 4 'having a mobile phone', situation 6 'using older friend's belongings', and situation 8 'impolite communication' exhibit identical frequencies with 44, 43, 41 (12%) occurrences, respectively. On the contrary, situations in which the students believe that they do not require promise for forbearance exhibited fewer frequency occurrences. For example, situation 2 'late to class' and situation 5 'bothering younger friend' exhibited fewer frequencies ranging from 17 to 36 (5% & 10%) respectively. Therefore, situation 2 'late to class' exhibits the lowest frequency of 17 (5%) occurrences whereas situation 1 'late to school' exhibits the highest frequency of 60 (17%).

The eight situations exhibited higher numbers of promises exhibit situation 2 in which the male students provide more explanation or account. However, these findings do not support previous research that promise for forbearance is the least frequently used [6,20]. The data analysis of this strategy showed that male students used different performative verbs and markers to perform the act of promising. Such expressions are the use of the performative verbs *a'iduka* 'promise', the negation marker *lan+verb* 'not+verb', swearing words (e.g., *wallahi* 'by god'), and expressions refer to *Allah* such as the conditional marker *insha'Allah*, the expression *astagfurullah*. In the Arabic culture, swearing is a strategy commonly used in different kinds of speech acts such as invitations [33] and apologies [34] and it is combined with other strategies to 'set things right' and to intensify the apology [28]. However, in this study swearing is just intensifier used to strengthen the promise.

F. Blaming the Offended Party

It is found in fewer frequencies in the eight situations compared to other supportive moves. This strategy is only found only in situation 4, 6, and 7 with the following frequencies 2, 9, and 1 respectively. It is a newfound strategy in the sense that the students refused to acknowledge the guilt

and blaming the offended parties are the only responsible for the fault occurred.

G. Non-verbal Strategy

It is the least used strategy and is considered as a silence strategy [35]. This strategy is cultural and boarding school-specified: students kiss the hands of their teachers to show respect. In this study, one respondent (student) used the strategy of kissing the teachers' hands to intensify his apology and placate the offended party (his teacher).

H. Intensification

In this research, alerts/addressing are linguistic "opening elements preceding" or following the actual apologies [36]. Addressing the offended parties by 'specific nominal, pronominal, or verbal forms' [37] indicates the social relationship between the interlocutors. In addition, the use of definite alerts/addressees shows the degree of the offender's politeness towards the offended party.

The findings of this research are consistent with the findings of previous research that non-native speakers intensify their apologies more often [31], and to friends than strangers [31]. By intensification, the offender shows sympathy to the offended party [38], would make the apology stronger, and/or create even more support for the hearer and more humiliation for the speaker [39]. This research found that the amount of intensification varied according to the situation and the intensifier itself: situation-specific. More specifically, situations with a high degree of imposition and severe offences exhibit more numbers of intensifiers and certain intensifier is used more often than another.

Based on the findings of this research, the researcher could argue that intensification determines the degree of politeness of the offenders. Therefore, the male students used different types of intensifications, namely adverbs, concern for the hearer, and addressing/alerts.

Regarding the adverbial intensification, there are found 77 occurrences of adverbial intensifiers achieved with six different adverbs with purpose, such as the adverbs *jiddan* 'very', *haqqan* 'really'. The most frequent adverb is adverb *jiddan* 'very' 53 (69%). Intensifying the apology by expressions of swearing such as *wallahi* 'by God' is unavoidable in the Islamic culture "it is inherited in the social domain of the discourse participants in Muslim societies in all types of speech acts"[40]. For example, in the Arabic context "it is considered as a significance device in the social life of Arabic context as it has genuine power in confirming the truth among the Hs and Ss," [41]. In line with these findings, the male students intensify their apology in the Arabic language by expressions of swearing mainly to confirm the truth of their promises speech act. The present findings seem to be consistent with other research which found that swearing is a device used by "lower social status" [41]. Few occurrences of the concern for the hearer have been found in the male responses with 14 occurrences.

Regarding the addressees/alerts, the findings show that there have been found 352 occurrences divided into six sub-

categories: “title, first name, pronoun, attention getter, apology and greetings” [36]. These alerts functions to “draw the hearer’s attention to the ensuring speech act” Blum-kulka, (1989) as cited in Salgado [36] and “a way of beginning the establishment of a social encounter” [36]. The male students used these alerts not only to attract the attention of the offended parties but also to convey their politeness attitude. Thus, the male students used the title *sayidi* ‘sir’ with 201 occurrences in the entire situations except for situation 5 and 6 in which the offended parties are younger and elder students.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the data analysis and the discussion it is clear that the male students used the IFID strategy more frequently when they apologize in Arabic. Even though the male students of boarding schools deemed to use the IFID regret *asif* ‘sorry’ strategy in high rates, Arab themselves treat the regret strategy as weak strategy and cannot remedy an offence with high-degree of imposition.

Based on the researchers’ observation in boarding schools in Indonesia, the strategy offers an apology *afwan* ‘I apologize’ is commonly used in the formal and informal interactions in boarding schools in Indonesia. In this research, the male students used offer an apology *afwan* ‘I apologize’ less than the apology strategy of regret *asif* ‘sorry’. Offer an apology is common in Arabic conversation and functions to remedy slight medium and light offences. In addition, male students use different supportive moves to intensify the head act strategies. The male students used the strategy *Promise for forbearance* with most occurrences.

In line with the eight situations, situation 2 ‘*late to class*’ exhibits the lowest apology strategies and notably promise for forbearance. On the contrary, situation 7 ‘*bothering a younger friend*’ exhibits the highest frequency. Even though the students are not being thought how to perform the apology strategies in the Arabic language, the findings show that male students are likely to pay apology strategies to some extent. However, they still transfer some apology strategies from their L1 because they lack proficiency in the pragmatic competence of the Arabic language. Further research is required in this regard, especially pragmatic transfer.

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