

AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF GENDER ON THE SELECTION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN APOLOGY SPEECH ACTS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

MUHAMMAD ASIM KHAN,

Lecturer in English Laboratory College (Pars Campus) University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Pakistan.
(asim1412@gmail.com)

DR. SHABNAM ISHAQ,

Assistant Professor, Department of Punjabi, Government College University Lahore, Pakistan.
(shabnamnimer@gmail.com)

DR. HINA KHAN,

Assistant Professor, Department of Punjabi, Lahore College for Women University Lahore, Pakistan.
(drhinakkhan@gmail.com) (correspondence)

DR. ZAHEER HASSAN WATTOO,

Assistant Professor of Punjabi, Government College University Lahore, Pakistan.
(dr.zaheerhassan@gcu.edu.pk)

DR. MUNIR GUJJAR,

Associate Professor, Department of Punjabi Language, Literature and Culture, University of Sargodha, Pakistan. (munirpunjabi@gmail.com)

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the speech act of apology used by the Pakistani university students using the scheme of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Brown and Levinson gave four politeness strategies, namely bald on-record, bald off-record, positive politeness and negative politeness. The design of the study is quantitative in nature. Instrument used in research is MDCT (Multiple Choice Discourse Completion Task/Test) which consists of 5 situations followed by 4 options based on four strategies. Sample of 40 students was selected through convenient sampling technique to obtain data. Findings of the study indicated that females use more positive politeness than males. It is also observed that gender and level of formality (relationship between interlocutors) has great impact on the selection of politeness strategy.

Keywords: speech act, politeness, MDCT, Apology, University Students.

Introduction

A person's ability to communicate effectively depends on their ability to both deliver knowledge and handle social circumstances with grace. A crucial speaking act, apologizing enables us to recognize wrongdoing and sustain human peace. Interactions between gender and the use of politeness methods in apology expressions are the subject of this intriguing research.

Evidence from studies shows that people's communication styles may be impacted by their gender. We look at the possibility that apologies are composed differently by men and women. In particular, we look at whether or not the ways they choose to be courteous reflect either cultural expectations or deeply held societal norms related to gender roles.

This research provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of language usage. Recognizing these

gender differences in apologetic approaches might help us better understand the nuanced signals that are inherent in daily communication and the complexity of human connection. As a cornerstone of social interaction, politeness enables us to convey our thoughts and feelings clearly while holding others in high regard. An intricate social construction, gender may impact how people express themselves. Research suggests that how men and women express themselves in conversation may vary. This begs the interesting issue of whether there are any gender variations in the way we express regret.

Historically, women have been seen as having more submissive communication styles, which place an emphasis on fostering social peace and connection. The result can be an inclination toward methods of politeness that put the focus on the other person's vanity. To the contrary, males may lean more toward tactics that highlight their own dominance or aggression. You must remember that these are just broad strokes, and that societal expectations around gender roles are dynamic. We want to learn more about these possible differences in the context of acts of apologetic speech in this research. One way to understand the complex relationship between gender, language, and societal norms is to compare and contrast the politeness tactics used by men and women when proposing an apology. It's fairly uncommon for individuals to do harm with their words or actions while interacting with others. Apologies are offered to the listener in an effort to lessen the impact of the error. "An apology is delivered when a social norm has been breached or violated," write Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). Apology is used to mend broken relationships (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981). Apology methods and habits may be influenced by a variety of events. Considerations such as the nature of the offense, the formality of the situation, and the nature of the connection between the parties involved in an apology all play a role. Social/contextual factors (such as power (i.e., the relative authority between interlocutors, such as the boss and the subordinate), social distance, and severity of transgression) are examined in relation to gender and degree of formality in the apologetic speech act. In plain English, this research looks at how social and contextual characteristics suggested by Brown and Levinson, such as gender and formality, affect the tactics people employ when apologizing. It is often believed that women make greater use of polite language than males do.

Literature Review

Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) gave the idea of politeness, who established its foundations in cooperative concepts, verbal acts, and facial expressions (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) (Grice, 1989). They said that "face" refers to the outward representation of oneself that each rational member desires for himself. The definition of "face" was expanded to include "anything that is emotionally involved, may be lost, preserved, or increased, and requires ongoing attention in the encounter" (1978, p. 66).

The theory posits that politeness can be achieved through two main strategies: positive politeness, which means showing attentiveness, concern and caring about esteem of the other person, and negative politeness, which means avoiding threats to the other person's face by being indirect or using hedging expressions.

In addition, Brown and Levinson also suggests that face-threatening acts can be mitigated through the use of various politeness strategies, including bald-on-record, which involves making a direct and unambiguous request or statement; positive politeness, which involves showing attentiveness, concern, and caring the other person's face; negative politeness, which includes being indirect or using hedging expressions to avoid threatening the face of the other person; and off-record, which involves using hints or implications to convey a message without directly stating it.

Table 1:

Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Theory	Strategies	Definition
Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory	1. Positive Politeness	Showing interest, concern, and respect for the other person's face or positive self-image.
	2. Negative Politeness	Being indirect or using hedging expressions to avoid threatening the other person's face.
	3. Bald on-record Politeness	Making a direct and unambiguous request or statement.
	4. Bald off-record Politeness	Using hints or implications to convey a message without directly stating it.

Social/Contextual Variables

The politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson suggests that three social/contextual variables: power (i.e., the relative power among interlocutors), social distance, and the degree of offence in case of apology, should guide speakers' methods. The influence of these factors on apologies have varied widely throughout previous research. As we'll see, there's a strong correlation between a person's authority, social distance, and the seriousness of the offense and the extent to which they apologize.

It is often held that various social classes or subgroups within a society each reflect a unique kind of authority or power. According to Keating's description, power is the "capacity or capability to exercise control over other and have influence" (either political, social, or profitable). As a result, the phrase "one individual has compared to all others" describes the degree to which one has power or influence. In line with this idea, Keating stressed the contextual character of authority and power, suggesting that a single person may fill several roles, each of which can be understood differently depending on the nature of the relationship between the actor and the audience. So, a person's position of authority or influence may change when new circumstances arise.

The degree of familiarity between two people in a discussion may be used as a proxy for their social distance from one another. The phrase specifically points to the dissimilarities between the close and

distant relationships between the individuals speaking. One end of the spectrum may be thought of as parents and other close relatives, while the other is strangers.

Severity of the offense refers to the level of seriousness or harm caused by a particular violation of a law, rule, or social norm. It is often used as a factor in determining the appropriate punishment or consequences for the offender. The severity of an offense can vary depending on the nature of the offense, the intent of the offender, and the impact on the victim or society as a whole.

Previous Studies

Numerous studies have investigated the many facets of civility and its function in discourse (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Researchers have shown that tactics for being courteous may help protect one's "face," or how they are seen by others in social situations (Holmes, 2013). It is essential to use politeness methods effectively while apologizing, since these speech actions are intended to mend interpersonal offenses. Curiously, there may be differences in how men and women handle apologies due to gender influences on communication techniques (Tannen, 1990). To emphasize social connection, women, according to Lakoff (1973), have a "rapport-oriented" communication style. A preference for courteous techniques that put the other person's face requirements first may result from this (Holmes, 2015). To lessen the blow of an apology, women may use phrase like "I'm so sorry, but..." or "I might be wrong, but..." more often.

On the other side, according to conventional gender norms, males are expected to communicate in a more "assertive" manner (Coates, 2004). Because of this, they may include less disclaimers or hedges in their apologies, putting their own needs first. Having said that, keep in mind that they are broad strokes. Gender and communication are complicated issues, as shown in research by Zimmerman and West (2007), which places an emphasis on the role of context and individual circumstances.

Majeed and Janjua (2014) conducted the research on the study of apology speech act with reference to gender. The primary emphasis of the research was on the differences in how men and women apologize in formal and informal settings. In 2010, 25 students from NUML University were surveyed (15 female and 10 male). Ten different scenarios made up the questionnaire. Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern, suggested by Blum-kulka and Olshtain, was used to examine the data (1989). Females were shown to be more self-aware of their facial demands and to use fewer risky tactics than men. Nonetheless, when apologizing in a formal setting, both approaches were the same.

Pratiwi et al., (2018) analyzed the etiquette used by the protagonists and antagonists in "The Princess Diaries" while apologizing to one another. The research on Brown and Levinson's etiquette techniques took the form of a descriptive-qualitative study. The movie was examined using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and a total of 15 statements were identified as expressions of regret. There were a total of 15 statements, 11 of which were deemed polite while the other four were deemed impolite. The apologizer chose to exhibit positive civility while addressing their close friend and family group. As a kind of respect, negative politeness served to lessen the effect of offense on the listener. Apologies using positive politeness were found to be the most common kind, and it was found that all positive politeness utterances were made by the female characters, suggesting that women are more concerned with maintaining a good public face.

Sultana and Khan. (2014) looked at the impact of gender on the apologetic speech acts of Urdu and Pashto-speaking college students. Two-culture theory, which asserts that men and women have distinct cultural backgrounds, is used in the research. Undergraduates taking English classes throughout NUML University's faculties provided the data. Apologies to people of the same gender were met with comparable techniques from both male and female students, but apologies to those of the opposite gender were met with distinct approaches. Students' apologies to people of the same gender in formal

settings revealed a gender impact that cannot be disregarded. According to the data, students often exercised caution while apologizing to people of the opposing gender.

Al-Sallal and Ahmed (2020) looked at how people say "sorry" in Jordanian Arabic. Forty participants were surveyed (20 male and 20 Female). The data was encoded using cross cultural speech act realization (CCSARP) patterns to account for cultural differences in speech acts. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data were conducted. The study's results show that women and men utilize comparable tactics when apologizing for wrongdoing. Both groups were shown to use a variety of methods within a single statement. There was also no statistically significant difference between men and women in Jordan regarding the methods they used while apologizing.

More recent studies investigate this subject in more detail. As one example, Mills (2015) looks at how men and women handle apologies at work differently. She discovered that women were more prone to provide thorough apologies, recognizing the mistake and suggesting ways to fix it. Apologies from males were often more straightforward, with an emphasis on only recognizing the transgression. There is still a need, even if these research fill up some important gaps. Few studies have looked at how men and women choose politeness methods in their apologies. To fill this knowledge vacuum, this research compares and contrasts the vocabulary used by men and women when they apologize, looking for signs of possible gender biases in politeness tactics.

Research Questions

Q 1: What are the most commonly used politeness strategies in apology speech acts among male and female university students, and how do they differ?

Q 2: To what extent does the level of formality influence the selection of politeness strategies in apology speech acts among male and female university students?

Methodology

Sampling Technique

Convenient Sampling technique is utilized to select the participants. Convenient sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the researcher selects participants who are easily accessible and available for the study. This sampling method is often used when the population is large and it is not practical to obtain a random sample. The selection of participants is based on the convenience of the researcher or the availability of the participants, rather than a random selection process.

Participants

The cohort of the current study includes 40 students, 20 male and 20 female, selected through convenient sampling from G.C. University of Faisalabad. Age of the Participants ranged from 17 to 25 years.

Instrument

The Multiple choice Discourse Completion Task (MDCT) is a tool for gathering data. A MDCT consists of "a sequence of brief written role-plays based on real world events that are intended to elicit a particular speech act by forcing informants to choose a turn of discourse for each item". Through DCT huge amount of data is collected in no time. Through DCT researcher have the ability to manipulate the situations according to social variables of power, status and severity of offence. Current DCT contains five situations varying in social variables proposed in politeness theory by Brown and Levinson followed by 4 options based on the politeness strategies.

Table 2:

Distribution of social variables across 5 situations

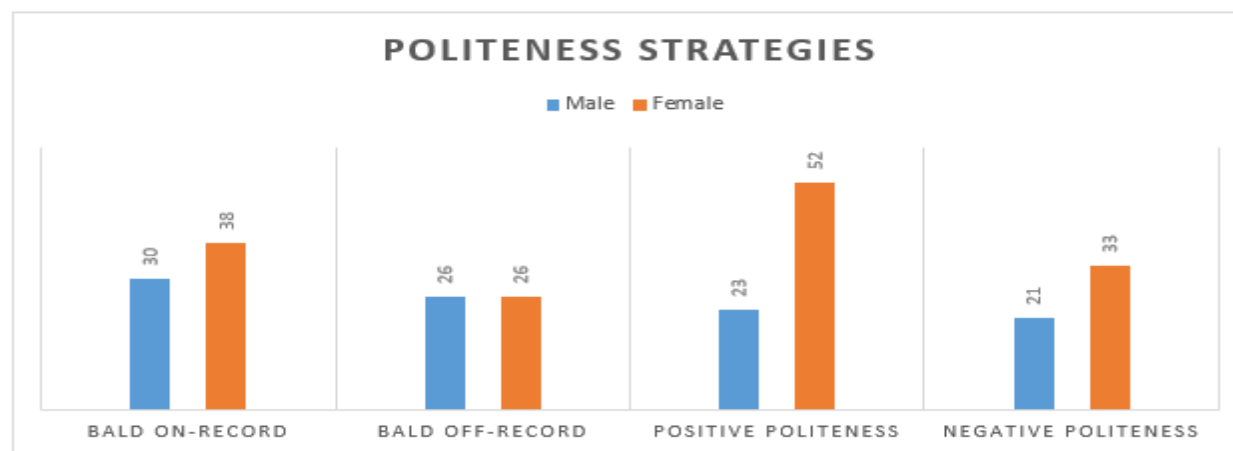
Situation	Social Power	Social Distance	Severity of Offence
1	Low	High	Low
2	Low	High	High
3	Equal	Low	High
4	Equal	High	Low
5	Equal	High	Low

Results

Table 3:

Number of times strategies used by male and female students

No.	Strategy	Male	Female
1	Bald on-record	30	38
2	Bald off-record	26	26
3	Positive politeness	23	52
4	Negative politeness	21	33



The data in table 3 represents that females used each strategy more than males used. Bald on-record strategy was used 30 times by males and 38 times by females. Bald off-record strategy was used 26 times by both males and females. Much difference is observed in the using positive politeness strategy, females used 52 times whereas males used 23 times, which leads to conclude that females are more polite than males. Negative Politeness is used 21 times by males and 33 times by females, this result is bit opposite to the norm that females used negative politeness more than males. Overall results indicate that females use politeness techniques more than males to maintain social relations.

Discussion

Table 4:

Analysis of the five situations of DCT

Sit.	Strategy	Male	Female	Description
1	Bald on-record	5	7	I got late due to some serious issue. I am sorry Sir.
	Bald off-record	7	7	I have to fulfill some duties at home too. I am extremely sorry Sir.
	Positive Politeness	4	13	I apologize for being late. Please pardon me Sir. It won't happen again.
	Negative Politeness	4	3	I think I have not missed much of the class. I am sorry for being late, can I sit?
2	Bald on-record	6	7	I forgot the book at home ma'am. Sorry.
	Bald off-record	7	8	Ma'am, you know exams are near and under the burden I could not bring it today. I am really sorry for it

	Positive Politeness	4	13	Ma'am, I am ashamed that I could not return it to you on time. Will you please forgive me?
	Negative Politeness	3	2	Ma'am, I hope you Won't mind much that I forget it. Will it be possible to pardon me?
3	Bald on-record	6	8	I forgot to submit your assignment. I am sorry.
	Bald off-record	5	7	I was too much busy in class because of new project. I forgot to submit your assignment. I am really sorry.
	Positive Politeness	4	6	You faced trouble because of me in submitting your assignment after due date. I am very sorry for this, will you please pardon me?
	Negative Politeness	5	9	I hope your marks will not be affected by it. I am Sorry.
4	Bald on-record	5	7	I ruined your shoes and made you feel uncomfortable. I am sorry.
	Bald off-record	5	4	I think you like your shoes very much, now it will take time to clean them. Sorry for this.
	Positive Politeness	7	10	I disturbed you and your shoes gets dirty because of me. I am sorry for this. Please forgive me.
	Negative Politeness	3	8	I know what I did to you is not right. Will it be possible for you to let it go?
5	Bald on-record	8	9	I just hit you up as I didn't see you. I am sorry.
	Bald off-record	2	0	I think you were carrying notes to class but I really didn't do it intentionally. So forgive me.
	Positive Politeness	4	10	Will you forgive me please as I hit you but believe me it was not an intentional act?
	Negative Politeness	6	11	Whatever happened is not good. I am really sorry for that. I am looking for forgiveness.

First category is bald on-record politeness strategy which is 38 times used by females and 30 times by males. Females highly used this strategy in situation 5, 9 times when apologizing to opposite gender when they are not familiar with each other, in other words when social distance is high females used bald on-record more than other strategies. On the other hand males used bald on-record strategy more in situation 5, 8 times. These results are similar to female, both used bald on-record strategy more when apologizing to opposite gender when social distance is high.

Second category is bald off-record politeness strategy which is used 26 times by both males and females. In case of female it highest frequency is in situation 2, 8 times. In situation 2 apologizing to same gender professor when social distance is high females used this strategy more than to other situations. And in case of males bald off-record's highest frequency is in situation 1, 2, 7 times. In situation 1 apologizing to professor of same gender and in situation 2 apologizing to professor of opposite gender when social distance is high males used bald off-record strategy 7 times in both situations.

Third category is positive politeness strategy which is used 52 times by females and 23 times by males. Females used this strategy more in situation 1, 13 times and in situation 4, 5, 10 times in each. Males used this strategy more in situation 4, 7 times while in rest of the situations it is used 4 times only. Females used positive politeness more when apologizing to professor of same gender where social distance is high. In situation 4 & 5 where social power is equal but social distance is high in both situations females used more positive politeness strategy when apologizing to same and different gender. Males used positive strategy more in situation 4 where social distance is high, apologizing to same gender.

Fourth category is negative politeness which is used 33 times by females and 21 times by the males. Females used this strategy more in situation 5 when apologizing to student when social distance is high. But this strategy is used minimum in situation 2 when apologizing to professor of same gender. Males used this strategy more in situation 6 when apologizing to student when social distance is high.

From the above results it is concluded that level of formality affects the choice of strategy when apologizing to same and different gender. This has been verified through various situations like in situation 1 and 2 apologizing from professor females highly used positive politeness strategy 13 times and negative politeness is used only 3 & 2 times respectively, while in situation 3 apologizing to a friend females used positive politeness 6 times less than negative politeness which is used 9 times. Same is the case with the males, they used positive politeness strategy 4 times when apologizing from professor but in situation 4 when apologizing from friend of same gender they used positive politeness more 7 times. As level of formality changes from professor to friend, apologizing strategy changes too which leads to conclude that level of formality affects the use of apologizing strategy. Data also leads to conclude that females used more positive politeness compared to males. Males used every strategy in moderate number when level of formality is high and low. Results of the study relates with the findings of Al-Sallal, R., & Ahmed, M. (2020) in the sense that both male and female utilized same type of strategies for apologizing, there's no vital difference in the use of strategies of both male and female. But this notion "women are more courteous than men and female are more concerned about their positive face" has been proved by the findings of the study.

Conclusion

The findings of the study are small in scale but significant in understanding the apology strategies used by males and females. It is determined that both males and females prefer the use of politeness in apology. Females use positive politeness more where the hearer possesses higher social distance. This study also discovered that women tend to use more positive politeness strategy in comparison with males. This may be demonstrated in female students' tendency for apologizing to professor where social distance is high. According to the studies findings, there exist no significant disparity in choice of

apologetic tactics between female and male students. It also confirms that women apologize more positively than male students. The current study is limited because students used in research belong to English department of Government College University Faisalabad. Including students from other universities may yield different results.

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