

POWER AND APOLOGY IN PALISTINIAN EFL CONTEXTS

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Abstract

This study demonstrates the mutual relation between power and apology in Palestinian EFL contexts. It also shows the reciprocal effect between power and apology. The researcher used the descriptive analytical methodology which is appropriate for this study. The sample of study includes thirty Palestinian English language students. To achieve the objective of this study, the researcher utilizes a basic tool which is an open-ended questionnaire including twenty situations based on apology. The results of the study revealed that there is a relationship between using power and apology. Moreover, the findings show that using of apology for females is more males.

Keywords: Apology; Palestinian EFL context; power.

1. Introduction

The mutual influence between any language and the society in which it is used is quite axiomatic and self-evident. Each one of these phenomena is absorbed in the other and, consequently, they greatly influence each other. (Howell & Paris, 2011, p. 51)

It is this influence that makes it easy for almost everyone to identify a speaker as belonging to a certain society and/or region. The choice of vocabulary items, sentence patterns and the accent of the speaker, all reveal different facts about the speaker's age, power, gender, social class, education, among many other things. These sociolinguistic variables are engraved in the language a speaker uses to the extent that it is impossible to isolate them from it.

In addition to what is mentioned above, the various sociolinguistic variables that frame any situation determine the level of directness and the choice of speech act strategy and whether or not to issue a speech act, at the first place. This type of influence of the sociolinguistic variables on the perception and production of speech acts is the main area of a relatively recent field of study called sociopragmatics. Sociopragmatics, as reported by Kasper (2001, p. 51), focuses principally on the social rules of speaking, that is to say, the expectations about the interactional discourse that is viewed by the members of a speech community as normal and appropriate behaviour.

Thus, in using whatever language, whether native or not, one must pay heed to the social rules of speaking that are essential to achieve appropriate communication. Being of such an importance, these principles have to be absorbed and internalized so as to escape any potential for a communication breakdown that is caused by their non-observance. The failure to observe the social rules of speaking has to be eliminated to guarantee successful communication.

There is no elaborately empirical study, to the best of our knowledge, which extensively accounts for the influence of sociolinguistic variables on Palestinian EFL university students' performance in relation to the level of using power and apology strategy of speech acts. Henceforth, the present study attempts to find out whether there are significant differences in the way Palestinian EFL male and female university students use apology strategy of speech act in L2 contexts, to identify Palestinian EFL university students' ability to modify the illocutionary force of the strategy they choose, and to investigate the mutual effect of the Palestinian EFL university students' academic progress on their appropriate choice of speech acts strategies in the EFL contexts. This study, in consequence, tries to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any significant differences in the way Palestinian EFL male and female university students use apology speech act strategies in L2 contexts?
2. Are Palestinian EFL university students able to appropriately modify the illocutionary force of the strategy they choose?

The study, as a result, sets itself the task of finding answers to these questions that would by consequence confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis stating that there are no significant differences in the way Palestinian EFL powerless and powerful university students in using apology in L2 contexts. This would hopefully bridge a gap in the relevant literature.

It is hoped that this study will be of both theoretical and practical value to all those interested in the fields of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, sociopragmatics and applied linguistics. EFL syllabus-designers and textbooks writers, EFL teachers, and EFL students can make use of this study as it sheds light on linguistic performance of EFL students in real life communicative situations.

2. Literature Review

The main aim of this study is to investigate the way in which sociolinguistic variables influence Palestinian EFL university students' realizations of some speech acts (i.e. their choice of strategies). As a result, it falls within the domain of sociopragmatics which involves, as Trosborg (1995, p. 39) states, the exploration of speech acts with respect to the social situations they are used in, and the social functions that language fulfils (2009, p. 28).

Therefore, it is intended to provide a theoretical background for the study discussing the related domains of sociopragmatics, context and appropriateness. Besides, it approaches the sociolinguistic variables of relative power, social distance and sex and ends up with introducing the speech acts of request, apology, and complaint.

2.3 Pragmatics

Yule (2010, p. 127) argues explaining that communication evidently depends not only on knowing the meaning of words in an utterance, but more importantly, on making out what speakers mean by their utterances.

2.4 Sociopragmatics

Aijmer and Andersen (2012, p. 21) believe that sociopragmatics comes as a natural consequence of advances in sociolinguistics, variational pragmatics, linguistic anthropology, critical discourse analysis and other related disciplines.

On his part, Kasper (2001, p. 51) proclaims that sociopragmatics refers to the connection between "action-relevant context factors" (which are mainly social) and "communicative action" (i. e. issuance of speech acts). Thus, it is about deciding whether (or not) to request a promotion, complain about the neighbour's barking dog, etc. and does not necessarily require any links to specific forms at all. Put differently, sociopragmatics focuses primarily on the social rules of speaking, that is, those expectations about interactional discourse viewed by members of a speech community as normal and appropriate behaviour.

LoCastro (2012, p. 159) asserts that a major thread through the study of sociopragmatics is how communication of pragmatic meaning involves speakers' presentation of their identities. The choice of a cell phone or an intonation contour is as important as a greeting in signaling to other community members how the speaker sees her/himself to be. She (ibid) explains that the categories which are habitually used to describe features of human beings (like ethnicity, race, sex/ gender, socioeconomic background/ class) are abstractions. Those abstractions become real or transparent as they are enacted through our choices of clothing, hairstyles, posture, lifestyles, and most assuredly how we use language. Word choice, prosody, tone of voice, degree of grammatical complexity, and interactional routines are all components of sociopragmatics.

It can, thus, be stated that sociopragmatics aims at showing how social and cultural features are influential in language practices, and how they affect the pragmatic strategies that are manifested by linguistic forms in certain communicative contexts. Consequently, sociopragmatics does not view pragmatic phenomena, such as speech acts, inference, presupposition, etc., as mere theoretical constructs or as cognitive phenomena but aims to account for their realizations in empirical socio-cultural contexts and to present cultural, social, and situational differences in their manifestation. In other words, sociopragmatics, , in its broad sense, is distinct from theories of pragmatics based in philosophical, logic or cognition.

3. Methodology

In light of the title, questions and objectives of this study, the researcher will use the descriptive analytical and quasi-experimental methodology. This approach is regarded the most suitable one to achieve the objectives of this study.

3.3 Population and Sample

The population which is targeted by this study is the Palestinian EFL university students in both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Consequently, a representative sample of this population is chosen from both levels. Table (1) below shows the demographic aspects of all the groups which have participated in this study.

3.4 Tools of Study

The researcher mainly uses a questionnaire, which will be in the form of a discourse completion test as the basic tool of study.

3.5 Procedures of Study

In order to fulfill the objectives of this study and verify its hypotheses, the under - mentioned procedures will be followed:

1. Presenting a theoretical background that:
 - a. Surveys the literature on the relevant fields of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and sociopragmatics.
 - b. Discusses the speech acts of apology.
2. Reflects on the relevant sociolinguistic variable of relative power, Conducting an empirical work via a questionnaire in the form of a discourse completion test (henceforth: DCT) to collect data about Palestinian EFL university students' performance. This procedure entails the following steps:
 - a. Designing a DCT containing various situations representing everyday authentic encounters evenly distributed in light of apology.
 - b. Submitting the designed DCT to a jury of experts (professors and supervisors of English) to judge its validity, suitability, and the authenticity of its situations.
 - c. Conducting a pilot study to test the practicality of the DCT.
3. Using suitable statistical methods represented raw frequencies, means, percentages, and the T-test to tabulate, compare, and calculate the significance of the differences between the results of the collected data of all groups.
4. Discussing the results to arrive at conclusions and recommendations.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 The Elicitation Technique

There is no doubt that the most reliable data that really represent genuine linguistic performance is found in authentic, naturally-occurring discourse (Cohen, 1996, p. 66; Beebe & Cummings, 1996, p. 70). To obtain data of such a quality that are both thorough and complete, Trosborg (1995, p. 141) states that researchers need to record lengthy stretches of naturally-occurring speech in order to find representative samples of the speech act(s) that are required for a particular study.

In linguistics and more specifically in pragmatics, however, such data are not easily collected. They are in fact hard, if not impossible, to control in terms of consistency of situations. Restrictions on personal as well as situational variables (e. g. age, sex, education, social distance, relative power, etc.) demand the collection of an enormous quantity of data to avail the information needed on native speakers' natural performance.

As for the foreign learners, the probability of collecting data of natural speech is almost nil, since such learners rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to use English in real-life foreign environments. Above all, the chance to find the same situation repeated even only twice cannot be assured. Besides, there is no guarantee that the collected data are exhaustive and sufficient. It is because of these problems that many researchers have adopted the discourse completion task (henceforth: DCT), by means of which researchers can fully control the situations from which they get the required data (See Blum-Kulka, et al. (1989a) and Cohen (1996).

3.4.2 Why DCT?

Because of the above mentioned reasons, the technique used in this study to elicit data from Palestinian EFL university students, as well as the native speakers of English, is the DCT. Ellis (1994, p. 163) reports that the DCT has been employed extensively since its first initiation in the CCSARP which is designed and run by Blum-Kulka, and Olshtain (1984a). In the same vein, Trosborg (1995, p. 141) argues that it is usually employed in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics research because it offers a handy and fast way of attaining a plethora of data, not to mention that it ensures full control over the contextual variables of the needed situations.

4. Results

4.2 Results of Apology

To find out whether there are differences between the male and the female use of apology strategies, the results are presented in the following tables according to whether the speaker is male or female. In male speaker situations, table (4.46) displays the two groups' choice of apology category. In line with the previous results, the use of "indirect requests" is equally used by BA and MA groups. The highest percentage recorded for "direct apologies" is by the MA group (66.66%) and the lowest is by the BA group (63.98%).

Table 2.

The Groups' Category Choice in Male Speaker Apology Situations

	BA	MA
	%	%
Making No Apologies	3.03	0.00
Indirect Apologies	32.99	33.34
Direct Apologies	63.98	66.66

Table (2) shows that "Direct Apology" is the strategy most frequently used by the two groups, though with variant percentages (in a descending order BA 63.98 and MA 66.66%). In addition to this strategy, the two groups also use "no apologies" but with significantly lower percentages. Besides, the MA group employs "indirect apologies" (32.99 and the BA group "lack of intent" (33,34).

Table 3.*The Groups' Strategy Choice in Male Speaker Apology Situations*

	BA		MA	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Denying responsibility	2	0.67	0	0
Blaming the complainer	7	2.36	0	0
Acknowledgement	34	11.45	8	14.81
Lack of intent	32	10.77	3	5.56
Embarrassment	11	3.70	3	5.56
Explanation	21	7.07	4	7.41
Expressing regret	162	54.55	24	44.44
Expressing apology	10	3.37	5	9.26
Asking for forgiveness	18	6.06	7	12.96
Total	297	100	54	100

Table (3) below presents the results of the situations where the speaker is a male. It shows that the highest percentage of " Expressing regret " is by the MA (44.44%). As for "Expressing apology", while the MA group is (9.26) percentage and the BA group is (3.37).

Table 4.*The Groups' Category Choice in Female Speaker Apology Situations*

	BA%	MA%
Making No Apologies	0.90	2.03
Indirect Apologies	32.96	36.55
Direct Apologies	66.13	61.42

In strategy choice, table (4) shows that the BA and the MA groups use this strategy with different percentage. Other strategies used by female speakers are “Making No Apologies”, “Indirect Apologies”, and “Direct Apologies” though with noticeably lesser percentages.

Table 5.*The Groups' Strategy Choice in Female Speaker Apology Situations*

	BA		MA	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Denying responsibility	7	0.70	0	0
Blaming the complainer	2	0.20	4	2.03
Acknowledgement	88	8.84	20	10.15
Lack of intent	87	8.74	26	13.20
Embarrassment	27	2.71	9	4.57
Explanation	126	12.66	17	8.63
Expressing regret	543	54.57	107	54.31
Expressing apology	28	2.81	6	3.05
Asking for forgiveness	87	8.74	8	4.06
Total	995	100	197	100

5. Discussion

In light of the data analysis presented above, the researchers concluded that there are significant differences in the way Palestinian EFL male and female university students use apology speech act strategies in L2 contexts in favor for female students. Additionally, Palestinian EFL university students are able to appropriately modify the illocutionary force of the strategy they choose.

These findings lead us to confirm the hypothesis stated prior the investigation in which it was assumed that there are no significant differences in the way Palestinian EFL powerless and powerful university students in using apology in L2 contexts.

6. Conclusion

The study findings confirmed that Palestinian EFL university students succeed to appropriately modify the force of their illocutionary acts. With respect to the gender of the speaker, it is found that there are significant differences between the males' and the females' use of apology in favour for females. Besides, the results of the speech act of apology proved that the Palestinian EFL students use direct apologies across all situations and with evidently high percentages.

The generated findings set the ground for a number of pedagogical recommendations that are listed below:

- The first indication the findings give is that the students lack adequate sociocultural knowledge of the rules of use that enable them to communicate appropriately in a range of authentic communicative situations. In consequence it is highly recommended that Palestinian EFL students be directly exposed to the English culture by living a suitable period of time, two months at least, in an English-speaking country.
- English language teachers have to adjust their methodologies as required in order to meet the learners' requirements and interests. In addition, teachers have to associate rules of language usage with the rules of language use because correctness of usage alone does not bring about successful communication unless accompanied by appropriateness of rules of use. This means that teachers should not lay too heavy emphasis on grammar and pronunciation but rather they have to stress language fluency, the matter which demands setting priorities on what, when, and how to correct in accordance with the immediate context of learning.
- Language students need to be given more room for practicing language inside the classroom since they might not have other opportunities to use the target language. Consequently, language teachers need to play the role of administrators and facilitators in their classrooms. The benefit of this practice is twofold: it gives teachers more chances to observe and evaluate the students' performances in the target language.
- To achieve the previous point, it is found very helpful that language teachers apply the role play technique in the classroom, which would definitely boost the linguistic correctness as well as the cultural appropriateness of different speech acts.

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