

Apologies in EFL: An Interlanguage Pragmatic Study on Moroccan Learners of English

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Abstract

This study explores the strategies Moroccan Learners of English (MLEs), American English Speakers (AEs), and Moroccan Arabic speakers (MAs) use when performing the speech act of apology. The study basically investigates the interlanguage of MLE as compared to other groups. Equally important, the aim is to study whether MLEs displayed pragmatic transfer when using apology strategies. To this end, A written discourse completion test/ task was administered to the participants both native and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in order to elicit apologies through five hypothetical situations. The productions of Moroccan EFL learners were analyzed to see where they stand between native speakers norms and Moroccan Arabic norms in terms of strategies choices. In the analysis of the data, all responses were categorized according to Trosborg's (1995) apology speech act set. The results show that Learners of English in higher education significantly deviated the overall desired strategies as compared to American native speakers of English. Meanwhile, some developmental patterns towards native like norms were perceived.

Key words: Apologies; Pragmatic transfer; Interlanguage Pragmatics

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INTRODUCTION

A good mastery of the language requires a firm grasp of the rules of linguistic rules of that language as well as a knowledge of how to apply these rules in a given social context, at the discourse level. Pragmatics is the study of meaning in context. Its primary objective is to investigate how meaning is created and interpreted in a given context. Leech (1983) defined pragmatics as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations. In fact, the role of context has always been at the heart of the way pragmatics has been defined, discussed, or studied. For instance, Levinson (1983) affirmed that “pragmatics is the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding” (p.21). Moreover, Mey (2001) points out that “pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society” (p.6). These conditions or norms can also be viewed as social context. It follows from this that any language contains some underlying dynamics and rules that are difficult to decipher at the semantic level. These rules are usually overlooked in language learning contexts, while the learner finds themselves experiencing L1 norms that are different from the formulaic structures they have been exposed to. Studies on interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) came to fill this gap, and allow for more grasp of the target language pragmatic norms and how they are digested by learners.

Successful performance and understanding of speech acts and underlying linguistic forms require a certain type of competence; pragmatic competence. The latter guides the interpretations of linguistic forms and minimizes communication breakdown. It actually refers to the language user's “ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context” (Thomas, 1983, p.92). Bachman (1990, pp.90-94) describes language users' pragmatic competence as

comprising two components: (i) illocutionary competence, which is a language user's ability to produce and recognize speech acts, and (ii) sociolinguistic competence, which is a language user's ability to take into account features of social context in order to perform and interpret speech acts successfully. While Bachman (1990, pp.90-94) uses the terms "illocutionary competence" and "sociolinguistic competence", Thomas (1983, pp.101-103) refers to the two components of pragmatic competence as "pragmalinguistic competence" and "sociopragmatic competence". Pragma-linguistic competence, on the one hand, refers to a language user's ability to produce and interpret an utterance with a specific pragmatic force (i.e., a specific illocutionary force) in a given context. Sociopragmatic competence, on the other hand, describes the ability to make and understand an utterance with a specific sense and reference and with a specific illocutionary force, all this in accordance with the social context rules of language behavior. In this regard, Blum-Kulka (1982, p.36) states that the use of speech acts (which is an aspect of a language user's pragmatic is universal to the extent that speech acts exist and are used in all languages, and for the same purposes.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

While Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence revolutionized the field of language learning and teaching. It was criticized for presenting a "Garden of Eden" point of view regarding language use in context. Hymes communicative competence attempted to bridge this gap by introducing a broader concept of successful communication comprising both the linguistic competence and the sociolinguistic knowledge of the rules of language use in context. Language learners' lack of sociocultural rules of the target language makes them make use of their own sociocultural repertoires (pragmatic transfer) that may lead to instances of communication breakdown. Thomas (1983, 1984) states that pragmatic failure is more detrimental than linguistic failure. A major factor in shaping and influencing pragmatic awareness is pragmatic transfer (Kasper & Rose, 1999). Kasper (2000) explains how the language the learner is familiar with influences their performance and perception of the target language. So, however proficient or advanced language learners may be in L2, there may be times that their pragmatic competence does not meet the expected linguistic (pragmalinguistics) or sociological (sociopragmatic) norms of the target language and culture.

Pragmalinguistic failure, according to Thomas (1983), occurs when the pragmatic force (e.g. the intention) of a linguistic structure is different from that normally assigned to it by a native speaker or when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from the L1 to the L2. As (Thomas, 1983, Al-Hindawi, et.al; 2014) explain, the other type of pragmatic failure, sociopragmatic

failure, is related to the knowledge of what to say and whom to say it to, which differs by complicated factors such as the size of imposition, cross-culturally different assessments of relative power or social distance, and value judgments. Misunderstanding caused by socio-pragmatic failure is more detrimental. In addition to pragmatic transfer and situational factors, TL proficiency may also affect interlanguage pragmatics competence. To get a better understanding of the language, learners need a good mastery of the linguistic components of the target language. (i.e., grammar, vocabulary) as well as the knowledge and ability to use and understand forms correctly (i.e., pragmatics) within a given sociocultural context.

In her interlanguage study comparing oral output of Japanese learners of English to native speakers of English, Taguchi (2007) found a significant correlation between L2 proficiency and pragmatic ability. Fifty-Nine Japanese learners of English with varying levels of proficiency at English participated in a closed role-play task in which they were asked to some speech acts. The scenarios varied based on the variables of power, distance and the ranking of imposition. The results yielded a significant correlation between L2 proficiency levels, and appropriateness to the context. The learners with advanced levels produced patters similar to those of native speakers of English, while less proficient participants diverged from the target language norms.

As a matter of fact, the majority of studies investing the relationship between L2 proficiency and L2 pragmatic awareness highlight a significant relationship between the two variables (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2003, Taguchi, 2007, Trosborg, 1995), whereas fewer studies suggest a limited impact of language mastery over the pragmatic competence. As a case in the point, Youn (2014) explored L2 English learners' written pragmatic performances. She compared the productions of three group of informants at different proficiency levels, based on their TOEFL scores and current L2 class level. The participants filled in four written tasks based on real-life situations. Each written task required L2 pragmatic knowledge to complete (e.g., a recommendation letter request to a professor; giving a suggestion on a classmate's work). Youn concluded that some of the learners with advanced levels of English written productions diverged from English pragmatic norms, yet some less proficient participants' productions were more appropriate in the target language context. This low correlation between the target language proficiency and the pragmatic competence, Youn suggests, shows that pragmatic competence and proficiency are two distinct constructs that share some similarities. Divergence on the norms underlines the idea that learners need to learn both the sociocultural and linguistic items to communicate appropriately and effectively in the target language. Exposure to native-live norms might have a positive influence on the pragmatic competence of learners. Youn (2014) findings highlight the importance of integrating

pragmatic competence as a part and parcel of language teaching. Regardless of their levels of proficiency, learners may not meet the expected linguistic (pragmalinguistics) or sociological (sociopragmatic) norms of the target language and culture. It is very important to take into consideration pragmatic competence as communication breakdown is more likely to happen due to pragmatic incompetence than by the lack of proficiency or linguistic competence.

Apologies are a type of convivial speech act which aims to maintain social relationships and maintain or restore harmony between the speaker and the hearer (Leech, 1983). Hence; Bergman and Kasper (1993, p.82) define complaint as a “compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S (the speaker) was causally involved and which is costly to H (the hearer)” or which has violated social norms (Olshtain, 1983). We can note here that Another apologies such like the speech act of complaining is happen post-event unlike other speech acts such as requests. Bergman, M. L., Kasper, G., (1993). It should be noted here that the speech act of apology can be perceived from different perspectives: that of the hearer and that of the speaker. From the perspective of the addressee, an apology is a face-saving act with regard to its protective orientation towards saving one’s own face (Goffman, 1972, p.190). The addresser must let the hearer know that he/she regrets the harm done and the wrongdoing committed, so the act is highly hearer-supportive and often self-demeaning (Edmondson, 1981, p.45). What happens here actually is the rise of wants conflicts as the potential apologizer may find themselves in a position of “inner conflict”. Following this logic, the opologizer may perceive the act as seriously face-threatening, or may not feel the need to apologize. This stand may also stem from different social variables including age, social distance, power relationship between the interlocutors, or the degree of the offence committed (Cohen, 1999, p.75).

Some major theoretical frameworks on apology were established by Cohen and Olshtain (1981, 1985) and Olshtain and Cohen (1983) who compared performance of the speech act of apology in Hebrew and English. They categorized the semantic formulas by five major apology strategies such as:

- An expression of an apology: Use of an expression which contains a relevant performative expression (e.g., “I’m sorry,” “I apologize,” “Excuse me,” or “Please, forgive me,” “Pardon me.”)

- **An explanation or account of the situation used as an indirect act of apology:** Explanation or an account of situations which caused the apologizer to commit the offense (e.g., “I have family business,” “I’m late for my class.”)

- Acknowledgment of responsibility: Recognition by an apologizer of his or her own fault in causing the offense (e.g., “That’s my fault,” “I admit that I was wrong.”)

- An offer of repair: Offer made by an apologizer to

provide payment for some kind of damage caused by his or her infraction, which can be specific and non-specific (e.g., “I will do extra work over the weekend.”)

- **A promise of forbearance: Commitment made by an apologizer not to let the offense happen again** (e.g., “It won’t happen again.”)

Cohen and Olshtain (1981) investigated the appropriateness of sociocultural rules of the of apologies among nonnative speakers of English. They compared 1. A group of Hebrew native speakers 2. a group of Hebrew intermediate-level learners of English and 3. Another group of native English speakers in eight scenarios using role play as a data elicitation technique. The study revealed some instances of negative pragmatic transfer in the learners’ performance, especially with regard to appropriateness to the context and the use of intensifiers. Moreover, some participants among Hebrew learners of English displayed a deficiency in linguistic proficiency, since they overlooked some of the strategies found in native English and native Hebrew performances.

Jung (2004) conducted a study on the interlanguage pragmatic competence of apologies among Korean ESL learners using role-plays as data collection technique. The results showed that there is a lack of proficiency and appropriateness in the performance of the Korean learners of English. Furthermore, native speakers and Korean learners of English differed in the use of lexico- grammatical and pragmatic appropriateness. More precisely, Korean ESL learners showed ‘verbose’ transfer of L1 linguistic and pragmatic awareness and weak performance regarding the appropriateness social norms related to expressing the speech act of apology. This can be seen in the overuse of the *apology strategies* with no consideration to the social context and the appropriate linguistic forms. The deviation can also be perceived in the way Korean ESL learners violated the maxim of quality and fell in verbosity. According to Jung, the study revealed that four factors influenced ESL learner’s apology performances: (1) the lack of linguistic proficiency in L2, (2) transfer of linguistic knowledge, (3) transfer of pragmatic knowledge, (4) the perception of contextual factors when apologizing (power, distance and the ranking of imposition).

Another relevant study was done by Alfattah (2010) who investigated apology strategies of Yemeni EFL university students. The data were collected via a written questionnaire including four situations representing different social variables. The results revealed the strategy the most used in the study was that of “expressions of regret”. This was explained by the fact that Yemeni EFL learners believe that apologies should consist of the expression as a compulsory component by any one of the other strategies. Another strategy that followed regret was that of ‘An acknowledgement of responsibility’. It was offered as an apology when the speaker recognized his/her responsibility for the offense. The study indicated that the

participants tended to choose expressions of regret in all situations but in a considerable variation.

The speech act of apologizing has been investigated by many researchers and according to different variables. The common point among these scholars is that Non-native speakers have to pay close attention to the specificities of apologies in the target language and culture. They also have to learn how to adapt the semantic formulae of the speech act of apology to the contextual variables.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The current study draws from previous studies on the speech act of apology. Lacking pragmatic competence with regard to the production of apologies is likely to lead to communication breakdown. Therefore, Moroccan EFL learners should be aware of these considerations because language mastery alone cannot ensure successful communication with native speakers. The present study is original in that it makes a contribution to the field of interlanguage-cultural pragmatics by considering the linguistic expression of apologies in two markedly different contexts of Morocco and the US. The study addresses some gaps in the light of investigating apologies in Moroccan EFL context. More precisely, ignoring the influence of cultural norms to account for the different choices made by non-native speakers, or MLE in particular can prevent us from understanding some deeper mechanisms that are reflected in pragmatic transfer. Thus, it is hoped that the study will provide a substantial contribution to knowledge through enriching the growing literature dealing with interlanguage pragmatics, and comparative cross-cultural studies.

METHODS

This study attempts to investigate Moroccan EFL Learners' interlanguage pragmatic competence based on the production of three groups of participants. Therefore, three comparable sets of data were collected: (a) samples of the target language as performed by the Moroccan learners of English, (b) samples of the realizations of native speakers, and (c) samples of the target language as performed by L1 native speakers -Moroccan Arabic speakers in this case (Ellis, 1994; Kasper & Dahl, 1991). Ellis asserts that collecting data from these three groups of informants enables the researcher "to determine to what extent learner performance differs from native-speaker performance and whether the differences are traceable to transfer from the L1" (p. 162)

This group of 45 informants included 9 American teachers working in KSA at Al-Yamamah University, 20 participants included students and faculty members at Duke University of North Carolina in addition to 16 Peace Corps volunteers serving in Morocco. Moroccan learners of English were recruited from the English department of Schools of Arts and humanities of Ainchok in Casablanca,

Ibn-Toufail, in Kenitra. The MLE group was made up of 43 students all enrolled in third-year English studies (Semester 5 and semester 6). This group of participants had studied English for four years at least before they majored in English studies at higher education level. It should be noted that the gender and age variables were not controlled in this study, though it was taken into consideration that participants represent both sexes. 45 MA speakers were recruited from two schools: School of law in Settat, and Arabic department from the School of arts and humanities Ainchok. The age variable was not controlled in this study.

As stated before, the scenarios of the DCT were all based on university contexts. Having stated that, Moroccan first year students didn't participate in the study for fear that they might produce unrepresentative performances and perceptions. The current study used equally-sized groups for many reasons. First, using the same number of participants makes it easy to analyze the data by means of the total instead of percentages. Sometimes, Percentages referring to strategies produced by different-sized groups can be misleading, with high percentages representing small values in small groups and vice versa.

Table 1
The status of participants

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Moroccan Learners of English (MLE)	Native speakers of American English (AE)	Native speakers of Moroccan Arabic (MA)
45 (Apologies)	45 (Apologies)	45 (apologies)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To investigate the issues discussed above in an EFL context, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

How does the use of use of apology strategies by Moroccan EFL learners compare to that of American English native speakers and Moroccan Arabic native speakers?

Is there L1 influence (i.e., negative pragmatic transfer) in Moroccan EFL learners' performance of apologies?

Discourse completion Tests (DCTs) are more practical considering the availability of data. They allow for investigation of the influence of the variables of power and distance across cultures and situations in a consistent way (Beebe - Cummings; 1996; Nelson et al, 2002, p.167). Furthermore, written DCTs help the participants get rid of the stress and pressure that might arise from oral productions. The choice of a DCT was also motivated by its reliability to answer the study's research questions regarding the realizations of the speech act of and apology. Kasper (2000) emphasized the merits of discourse completion tasks when the objective of the study is to "inform about speakers' pragmalinguistic knowledge of the strategies and linguistic forms by

which communicative acts can be implemented and about their socio-pragmatic knowledge of the context factors under which particular strategic and linguistic choices are appropriate” (p.329). In other words, DCTs are used because they are replicable and can offer more room for a systematic variation of control variables.

In the current study, the DCT sets involved five situations, each including a typical scenario for an apology. 8 students including 4 Moroccans and 4 Americans were asked to think about the most common complaining situations in a university setting. Based on the situations described in this questionnaire, five topic were included in the test, which involved the two interlocutors reacting to situations regarding: recommendation letter delay (task 1), pair work (task 2), line cutter (task 3), photocopying delay (task 4), student missed assignment (task 5).

Second, all scenarios varied according to the socio-pragmatic factors of social status and social distance in the realization of the speech act, and consequently, two levels of social status (i.e., low and high) and social distance (i.e., close and distant) were considered. Equally important, the design of each situation was based on systematic variation of the three above mentioned social variables, which have been of great significance in determining speech-act behavior in inter-pragmatic pragmatics research (Blum-Kulka, et al., 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1987). As far as data collection is concerned, an online Discourse completion questionnaire was administered to those participants who agreed to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

Apology realizations in this study were categorized and analyzed based on Olshtain and Cohen (1983); Trosborg, 1995) classification system along with additional strategies modified by (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2014). They proposed five categories and divided them into sub-categories.

Table 2
Apology strategies (adapted from Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1995; Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor 2014)

Strategy	Example
Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs)	
a. regret	Sorry
b. offer-of-apology	I apologize
c. request for forgiveness	Pardon me
Explanation or account	The traffic was terrible
Acknowledgement of responsibility	
a. Accepting the blame	It' s my fault
b. Expressing self-deficiency	I didn' t see you
c. Showing embarrassment	I-feel-awful-about-it
d. Justifying the hearer	You are right
e. Expressing lack of intent	I didn' t mean to
f. Refusing to acknowledge	It wasn' t my fault
Offer of repair	I' ll pay for the broken vase
Promise of forbearance	It won' t happen again

The statistical analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 23.0)

and the Microsoft Excel software program. The chi-square test, the most appropriate test for analyzing frequency data (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991), was performed on the IDCT data to examine the degree of similarity and difference within the three groups' apology behavior.

As suggested by Kasper (1992), the following criteria were used to establish the occurrence or absence of negative pragmatic transfer. *Negative pragmatic transfer* was operational if there was a significant statistical difference in the frequency of a certain pragmatic feature between the MA and AE groups and between the MLE and AE groups and no statistically significant difference between the MA and MLE groups. *Positive pragmatic transfer* was operational if there was no statistically significant difference in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature between the mother language, Interlanguage, and target language native norm.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

With regard to research questions, it is hypothesized in previous interlanguage investigations that apology formulas are cross-culturally universal (Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Es-Sobti, 2004; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984a; Olshtain, 1989; Ahmed, 2017; Trosborg, 1987, 1995). Putting more focus on the interlanguage of MLEs, previous literature has also indicated that EFL learners are prone to use more strategies than native speakers as it was the case with MLEs' production of apologies; Waffle phenomenon.

Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentage of the five apology strategies subjected to investigation in the three groups of MLE, AE, and MA. In terms of preferences, the findings clearly show that, in line with previous studies (Ahmed, 2017; Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Dendenne, 2017; Holmes, 1990; Olshtain, 1989; Sachie, 1998), the three groups of informants, MLE, AE, and MA tend towards choosing direct apologies, *IFIDs* (53.87%, 42.27%, 48.56 % respectively) and *explanation of account* (16.21%, 23.41%, 18.18 %, respectively) much more than any other strategy listed above.

Table 3
Percentage and raw frequency of apology strategy use by group

Strategies	MLE (N %)		AE (N %)		MAS (N%)	
IFIDs	216	53.87%	186	42.27%	219	48.56 %
Explanation	65	16.21%	103	23.41%	82	18.18 %
Responsibility	44	10.97%	56	12.83%	80	17.74%
Repair	64	15.96%	78	17.73%	50	11.09%
Forbearance	12	2.99%	14	3.18%	20	4.43%
All strategies combined	401	%	440	%	451	100%

Note: AE =American English speakers, MLE = Moroccan learners of English, MA = Moroccan Arabic Speakers

Besides, results of this study also reveal that the apology strategy of *offering repair* is basically utilized in combination with other apology strategies. On the other hand, in the use of the strategy of *taking responsibility*, MLE participants (10.97%) seem to approximate the tendency adopted by American participants (12.83%), while deviating from their native language norms (17.74%). The following are some examples taken from our data:

I was busy with other stuff. It just went right out of my mind. (S4, AE, #25)

I just don't know how I could forget about it. I'm really busy these days. (S1, MLE, #6)

As a matter of fact, a cross-cultural comparison of Moroccan Arabic and American English with regard to the use of strategy of *taking responsibility* in this study might support the claim that while *acknowledging responsibility* is appreciated among Arabic speakers, Anglo-Saxon culture seems to shun that (Al-Zumor, 2011). MLE frequency use of *taking responsibility* indicates a developmental tendency toward L2 native norms. Speaking of *promise of forbearance*, the results are in line with previous studies (Reiter, 2003; Hassan, 2014; Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain, 1989; Krulatz, 2018, Trosborg, 1995), among the five apology strategies, the strategy of offering promise of forbearance is used least in every group, and it is found to be situation specific. The situations where this strategy is widely used include the situation where a student apologizes for not submitting (presentation) assignment in due time (situation 5) and in the situation where someone forgets a photocopy order (situation 4). The common point among these situations is that the speaker has less power than the hearer. This will be discussed more in details in the next section. This can be explained in the light of Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimensions theory. Morocco is ranked among countries where there is a high degree of power distance (70), and where these inequalities are endorsed by members of the society. On the other hand, Americans are classified (40) as less unequal with regard to perceiving

power among members of the society. Following this logic, it can be said that MLEs apology choices are also determined by some deeply rooted cultural considerations. In general, though revealing some differences regarding preferences, the results confirm Olshtain's claim that direct strategies are the main components of the speech act of apologizing, while *offering repair* and promise for forbearance are context-dependent strategies (Olshtain, 1983, 1989).

After analyzing the order of preferences among the three groups, now the frequencies of apology strategies are explored in more details. Table 3 clearly demonstrates that MLE participants used fewer apology strategies than did both AE and MAs. The findings are inconsistent with previous research. (e.g., Hassall, 2001; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993; Chen, 2011, Chang et al, 2016) which affirmed that EFL learners tend to be more verbose than the native speakers of English. Our results seem to deviate from this tendency, and this can be explained by some reasons. Compared to other widely investigated speech acts such as complaining, apologies are different in nature. While the former is more speaker-oriented in terms of face needs, thus, requires more verbosity in an attempt to restore equilibrium and balance its effect, the latter seems to be less in need for other strategies, "unlike other speech acts which require planning and preparation in advance, like making a request, a complaint, or giving advice" (Ahmed, 2017; 210). Another study concerning whether or not EFL learners are more verbose in their use of apologies in the academic context via email communication was carried out by Chang *et al.* (2016) who supported the view that EFL learners are likely to use more strategies when it comes to apologies used by EFL learners compared to native speakers. On the other hand, the results presented by Chang were somehow consistent with our results. MLE produced more IFIDs strategies than did the American participants. This pushes us to ask the following questions: It this pragmatic failure a results to negative pragmatic transfer, or a result of the lack of pragmatic awareness?

Table 4
Frequency of apology strategies by Group in the five situations

Situation	MLE	AE	MA	MLE-AE		MLE-MA		AE-MA	
	N %	N %	N %	Z	AS	Z	AS	Z	AS
1.(+P/+D) Reference letter	66 (16.46%)	67 (16.71%)	72 (15.96%)	-4.002	.472	-1.042	.258	-1.214	.704
2.(=P/-D)Classmate contribution	69 (17.21%)	89 (20.23%)	81 (17.96%)	-2.878*	.015	-2.952*	.000	-1.150	.841
3 .(=P/ +D) line cutter	67 (16.71%)	81 (16.41%)	78 (17.29%)	-1.603*	.000	-1.303*	.031	-1.215	.718
4.(-P/ +D) Photocopy order	102 (25.44%)	89 (22.27%)	93 (20.62%)	-1.104	.367	-.870	.584	-2.535	.534
5 .(-P/ - D) Assignment	97 (24.19%)	105 (23.86%)	127 (29.16%)	-2.843	.793	-1.209*	.027	-1.863	.007

Note. P = social power, D = social distance. AE =American English speakers, MLE = Moroccan learners of English, MA = Moroccan Arabic Speakers. T indicates the occurrence of negative pragmatic transfer.

* $p < 0.05$

The analysis of apology strategies in the five situations will lead us to shed light on three main observed patterns. In the first instance, in situations 1 and 4 MLE participants (16.46% and 25.44%, respectively) showed no significant

deviation from both the target language (16.71% and 22.27%, respectively) and the native language (15.96% and 22.62%, respectively). Interestingly, these situations displayed the criteria of positive transfer as indicated

by (Kasper, 1992); the lack of statistically significant differences among the three groups. The second pattern that was observed among the MLE participant is their significant deviation from the norms adopted by both AE and MA speakers. In Situations 2 and 3, MLE informants (17.21% and 16.71%, respectively) produced significantly less apology strategies from both AE (20.23% and 16.4%, respectively) and MA participants (17.96% and 17.29%, respectively). In situation 5, it is noted that MLE group (24.19%) significantly approximated the frequency and percentage of apology strategy use adopted by AE informants (23.86%). On the other hand, MA participants (29.16%) significantly produced more apology strategies than both MLE and AE participants.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study indicated some cross-cultural differences in the types of strategies adopted by the three groups of informants. Generally, the results indicated that apology strategy use tend to be universal as suggested by previous literature, especially with the use of direct apologies strategies as the most frequent ones. The study also revealed some cross-cultural differences with regard to the use of certain strategies and formulas. Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimension are referred to account for the pragmatic behavior observed among MLEs. However, further studies need to be conducted in order to verify and generalize these findings. The participants in this study respond to scenarios that might occur in academic settings, hence, to generalize this results will be a risky choice. We are in dire for more investigations of pragmatic competence among Moroccan EFL learners at the tertiary level. Other studies may go deeper to explore other variables (i.e. age, distance, gender, visits aboard etc).

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