Investigating Pragmatic Transfer in Interlanguage Apologies Performed by Algerian EFL Learners

Abstract

The present study attempts to investigate pragmatic transfer in interlanguage apologies performed by two groups of Algerian EFL learners. The production of these groups is compared and contrasted to the performance of two control groups representing the mother and the target languages/cultures. Data of the study have been collected by means of a seven-item discourse completion task. The findings show that pragma transfer is operative in the wording of the strategies and word for word translation. The sociopragmatic type is at play in the use of apology strategies which appear, to a large extent, in line with the mother language/culture’s assumptions as regards the evaluation of situational variables. As for linguistic proficiency, it does not give marked advantage to the high proficiency group over the low proficiency one. In addition to transfer, other factors impact the learner’s interlanguage production. These are lack of pragmatic competence, interlanguage-specific features and language constraints.
Introduction

Given the fact that the production of speech acts and speech act sets vary across languages and cultures, successful communication in gate-keeping encounters for second and foreign language learners is a challenging task (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Due to such cross-cultural divergence, miscommunication and pragmatic failure are highly likely, especially for culturally-sensitive speech acts like apologies.

The study of learners’ use, perception and acquisition of speech acts has come to be called Interlanguage Pragmatics (henceforth ILP). Though this discipline flourished decades ago, little has been done regarding the empirical investigation of the interlanguage (henceforth IL) of Algerian EFL learners at the pragmatic level. In this respect, the present study aims at uncovering its regularities through addressing three main questions:

a. What are the manifestations of transfer in IL apologies performed by Algerian EFL learners?

b. What are the other factors, other than transfer, which influence their IL apologies?

c. What is the correlation between linguistic proficiency and pragmatic transfer?

1. Literature Review

1.1. Apologies and Variables Affecting their Production

The speech act of apology is among the so-called face-threatening acts which affect the ‘public self-image’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987) of the offender as well as the victim. Bergman and Kasper define apology as a “compensatory action to an offence in the doing of which the S [the speaker] was causally involved and is costly to the H [the hearer]” (Bergman & Kasper, 1993, p. 82). According to Bataineh and Bataineh (2008), among the early Arab attempts to define apologies is that of Abdi (1981) who sees apologies as “utterances or deeds that a person offers in order to lift punishment or blame due to him for malicious deeds he has committed” (pp. 4-5, as cited in Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008, p. 795).
Many factors affect the way speakers choose the linguistic items in phrasing the apologising act. In the present paper, we shed light on three factors. These are power, social distance and the severity of offense or infraction. The factor of power (P) is defined as “the vertical disparity between the participants in a hierarchical structure (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). For Brown and Levinson, it is the Relative Power of S with respect to H (i.e. the degree to which S can impose on H) (1987, p. 74). The variable of social distance (SD) is “the degree of familiarity and solidarity [speakers] share, or might be thought to share” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 74). As for the degree of infraction (I) or severity of offence, it refers to what motivates an apology. According to the infraction’s severity and nature, the form of the subsequent apology is determined (Deutschmann, 2003).

1.2. Linguistic Proficiency and Transfer in IL Production

Kasper (2000) defines pragmatic transfer as the influence of language(s) known to the learner while trying to perform, understand or learn information in the target language (TL). It falls into two kinds. The first type is pragmalinguistic that is related to the influence of the first language (L1) in the use of linguistic structures; i.e. form-function mapping. The second type is sociopragmatic which is operative when L1’s social assumptions impact the evaluation of situations in TL regarding the interpretation and the production of language acts (p. 209). These two types of pragmatic transfer lead to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure, respectively (Thomas, 1983).

ILP studies have attempted to explore the influence of linguistic proficiency on pragmatic transfer. Based on the assumption that the linguistically proficient learners are better able to transfer linguistic structures from L1 to TL, scholars seek to investigate the extent to which this holds good for their test-takers. Some studies have proved this tendency while, for others, it has been deemed limited. As an example, Tagushi (2006) dealt with linguistic appropriateness in the realisation of the speech act of request by Japanese learners of English. The two proficiency groups (low and high) performed role-plays in response to two scenarios. The author supported previous studies suggesting that proficiency fosters better quality of speech acts in terms of the appropriateness, grammaticality and comprehensibility of linguistic expressions. Adversely, Robinson (1992) studied Japanese ESL refusals, gathered by means of a discourse completion task. For
the author, the low proficiency group was prone to pragmatic transfer of the Japanese style; meanwhile, the high proficiency one showed an ability to approximate the American refusals.

1.3 Studies on Interlanguage Apologies

Numerous studies dealt with IL production of the apologising act, though few of them focused on transfer and only sufficed with reference to transfer in interpreting their data. Jung (2004) investigated IL apologies of Korean ESL learners using the role-play for data collection. The results suggested that proficiency did not seem to positively correlate with L2 (second language) performance. Furthermore, native speakers and IL-users differed in the use of lexico-grammatical and pragmatic appropriateness. In other words, Korean learners showed ‘verbose’ transfer of L1 linguistic and pragmatic knowledge and lack of awareness of the appropriate social norms as well as language means related to the apologetic behaviour. For instance, they used the *apology* strategy as frequent as native speakers, but often with inappropriate linguistic forms. In addition, they could not use the *explanation* strategy ‘succinctly and affectively’ in L2 and, thus, fell in ‘verbosity’ (violated the maxim of quantity). As for the *acknowledgement* strategy, it was underused; the author attributed this to the influence of L1 and, more frequently, the uncertainty about L2 sociolinguistic rules.

Sabaté and Curell i Gotor (2007) dealt with the apologising act from developmental perspective. The authors focused on *IFIDs* and *intensification* with reference to transfer and TL behaviour of three Catalan learner groups: Advanced (A), proficient (P) and intermediate (I). The findings suggested that the increase in the proficiency level led to decrease in ‘non-L2-like’ pragmalinguistic performance, but it was not linear or straightforward as group (A) might face difficulties group (P) did not. Learners had the same access to strategies as NSs. In addition, linguistic proficiency may lead to overuse of ‘lexical transparent’ *IFIDs* (*I’m sorry* and *excuse me*, as they are acquired first). It was noted that group (A) moves toward more newly acquired formulae, while (P) overuses ones like *forgive me*. It was only (A) group that marked politeness by *formality* and *register*. They also showed awareness toward intensification. As for transfer, group (P) exhibited more sociopragmatic transfer, while (A) and (I) exhibited more pragmalinguistic transfer.
Al-Zumor (2011) investigated apologies realisation in Arabic, English and in learners’ production. Pragmatic transfer was evident in the use of more than one IFID, the employment of various terms of address and the avoidance of certain semantic formulae. This, for the author, was also a by-product of lack of exposure to L2. Learners, for instance, used forms like I am very very/really really/so so sorry. This resembled their use of the repeated form jiddan (very/so/really) in L1. As for the cross-cultural part of the study, the author reported that Arabic and English native speakers differed linguistically in responding to the three situations due to disparity in estimating the severity of offense. Moreover, Arabs, as reported by the author, were more inclined to admitting their deficiency in order to set things right without embarrassment. In contrast, in the Anglo-Saxon culture this was discredited because people believe in “the immunity of one’s private self.” (p. 28); in the Arab culture “people are more publically available to each other” (ibid).

2. Methodology

2.1. Data Collection

In order to collect data related to apologies’ production, we have employed a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The DCT is a written instrument which provides test-takers with descriptions of real situations with blanks to respond using would-be appropriate apologies. The Arabic and the English versions of the DCT include seven situations which are designed so as to measure the effect of the already-mentioned variables (Table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITUs</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>P (S/H)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Apologising to a university professor for forgetting his book at home</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Apologising to a young sister for not helping in homework</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Apologising to a classmate for forgetting a novel</td>
<td>equal</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Apologising to a close friend for forgetting a get-together for a second time</td>
<td>equal</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Apologising for stepping on a lady’s foot</td>
<td>equal</td>
<td>distant</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Apologising for fallen bags from a rack on a passenger</td>
<td>equal</td>
<td>distant</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Apologising for dialling a wrong number</td>
<td>equal</td>
<td>distant</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Description of the Scenarios and Variables
As all the other data collection methods (role-plays, naturally occurring data, verbal reports), DCTs have their own merits as well as shortcomings. On the positive side, they allow researchers to access large quantity of data in a reasonable time. Cohen (2006) is among the defendants of the DCT as a suitable speech act data collection tool. For him, “as long as the elicitation [via the DCT] yields data that could reflect appropriate native-speaker performance, such data can make a contribution” (2005, p. 283). Furthermore, Cohen argues that if we attempt to seek natural data for apology, as an example, we are likely to have apologies extended to several moves which may also co-occur with other speech acts like requests and compliments, while “none of these speech acts is direct enough to be readily perceptible, even to the native interlocutor” (2005, p. 283). Nonetheless, this technique has its share of criticism due to certain shortcomings. For instance, Garcés-conejos (2006) questions the authenticity of data collected by DCTs and considers them as rather intuitively-based.

2.2 Participants

In order to prove the existence of transfer, we need the collection of three types of data (Ellis, 1994). These are apologies performed by native speakers in both L1 and TL and apologies performed by learners of the TL. Table 2 provides details about the four groups that have taken part in the present study. Respondents who provide Arabic and interlanguage data are students from the Department of Arabic and the Department of English respectively (University of Constantine 1). No one of the learners has ever been in a country where English is spoken as a native language. As for ENSs, they are Americans and British who have been contacted by e-mails. By chance, in all groups, females outnumber males.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Language Used</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Arabic as a native language</td>
<td>ANSs: Arabic Native Speakers</td>
<td>Students of Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>English as a native language</td>
<td>ENSs: English Native Speakers</td>
<td>From various backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>English as a foreign language</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>First year Licence students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>English as a foreign language</td>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>First year Master students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Participants of the Study

2.3. The Coding Scheme

The coding scheme used in the present study is based on the models developed by Cohen and Olshtain (1981), Olshtain and Cohen (1983), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). Illustrations are taken from our English data whenever possible.

- **Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs):** formulaic rutinised expressions that are used to explicitly indicate the intent of the apologiser. IFIDs fall into two sub-types:
  a. An expression of regret: *I am sorry, excuse me* and *I apologise*
  b. A request for forgiveness and accepting the apology: *forgive me* and *accept my apology*

- **Explanation or account:** the apologiser may opt for expressing reasons and/or the circumstances of his violation trying to get the hearer to accept his apology. It can be:
  a. Explicit: *I was in rush this morning and forgot your book at home.*
  b. Implicit: *I had to take care of something.*

- **Taking on responsibility**
  a. Explicit self-blame: *It is my fault.*
  b. Lack of intent: *I just went right out of my mind.*
  d. Expression of embarrassment: *I feel terrible about this.*
  f. Justify hearer: *it is understandable that you are upset.*
  g. Refusal to acknowledge guilt. This is in turn divided into three sub-types:
    i. Denial of responsibility: *It wasn’t my fault.*
    ii. Blame hearer: *you are standing in the way.*
    iii. Pretend to be offended: *I’m the one to be offended.*

- **Concern for the hearer:** *are you alright?*
- **Offer of repair:** *I will definitely bring it to you tomorrow.*
- **Promise of Forbearance:** *I promise it won’t happen again.*
3. Results and Discussion
3.1. The Overall Use of Apology Strategies

Given the fact that we have unequal sample sizes in language groups, we relied on the mean (M), i.e. average, in interpreting our statistics, since the M shows what score is typical to the group as a whole (Larson-Hall, 2010).

Starting with the overall use of apology strategies, ANSs were inclined to using more apology semantic formulae than ENSs (M=0.26 and 0.17 respectively). This in line with the findings of Hussein and Hammouri (1998) stating that ENSs (American) seem to use concise apologies with single expression of apology; in contrast, Arabs (Jordanians) were likely to opt for more elaborate apologies using combinations of three strategies (p. 46). As for IL-users, freshmen employed more strategies than ENSs and seniors seem to approximate L1 (M=0.33 and 0.24 respectively). This was understood as a concern about explicitness.

As can be seen from Table 3, IFIDs are the most used across the four groups; ANSs opted for more ones than ENSs due to the frequent use of more than one (+1) IFID (e.g. I beg your pardon (astasmihuka 3uthran) my teacher, I’ve forgotten to bring you the book, so excuse me (3uthran) once again, SITU 1). The relative overuse of this strategy by IL-users was also attributed to transfer of this strategy (e.g. hello sir, I am really sorry, because I forgot the book at home. I hope you forgive me and I promise I’ll bring it tomorrow morning, freshmen, SITU 1). Explanation strategy was relatively higher in Arabic data; this partially supports the claim stating that this semantic formula is L1-typical (Ghawi, 1993). So far as the learner groups are concerned, freshmen opted for as many explanations as in L1 and seniors approximated TL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N (Number)</th>
<th>ANSs</th>
<th>ENSs</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (Mean)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFIDs</td>
<td>58.23(237)</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>50.55(138)</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>14.00(57)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>10.62(29)</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>13.76(56)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>10.26(28)</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>2.46(10)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>7.33(20)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair</td>
<td>11.55(47)</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>20.15(55)</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Overall Use of Apology Strategies

Turning to Responsibility strategy, it was relatively higher in Arabic data; this partially supports the claim that Arabs are more inclined to acknowledging responsibility as the immunity of one’s self is not as highly valued as in the Anglo-Saxon culture (Al-Zumor, 2011). Freshmen were as liable to take on responsibility as in L1; meanwhile, seniors relatively underused this strategy. Concern and Repair strategies were more prevalent in English-native data than Arabic. This means the Anglo-Saxons were more supportive to the H’s face. So far as IL apologies are concerned, freshmen fell back on their L1 guidelines and so did seniors, with the exception of Concern semantic formula that were overrepresented by freshmen. The influence of L1 on IL is clearly manifested in Repair strategy as learners underused this strategy. Conversely, as reported by Murphy (2009), American learners of Modern Standard Arabic tend to keep this strategy in their Arabic apologies at higher levels. Forbearance strategy was the least used.

Having considered the overall use of apology strategies, we currently shed light on type. We are not going to tackle all strategies, but only the ones in which variability has been apparently observed; i.e. IFIDs and Responsibility. These strategies are called ‘canonical strategies’ (Bergman & Kasper, 1993, p. 98). As it is displayed in Table 4, ANSs tend to use varied IFIDs striking balance between expressing regret (e.g. aasif/aasifa=sorry, uttered by male and female speakers respectively), asking for forgiveness (e.g. saamihnii/samihiini=forgive me, addressed to male and female speakers and requesting the acceptance of the apology (e.g. a3thirnii=excuse me). In contrast, ENSs opted extensively for expressing regret using the conventionalised formulaic form (I’m/I am) sorry. Though IL-users extensively used I’m sorry to express regret, this was not understood as a sign of pragmatic competence since this IFID was judged as transparent, following Trosborg (1995) who attributed the frequent use of this pragmalinguistic form by Danish learners to accessibility. Moreover, the use of excuse me and pardon me by freshmen, mainly, was attributed to deficiency in pragmalinguistic competence; i.e. confusion.
between *sorry* and *excuse me* (e.g. *Excuse me sir. I forgot your book at home. I will bring it tomorrow*, freshmen, SITU 1; *Excuse me, I’ve confused the numbers*, seniors, SITU 7). In English, this *IFID* was only employed for attention cues than as a real apology. It was apparent that learners utilised *IFIDs* they know whether formal or informal rather than to accommodate them in accordance with the situational variations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANSs</th>
<th>ENSs</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(I’m) sorry</em></td>
<td>37.55(89)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>87.68(121)</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgive me</td>
<td>31.22(74)</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>5.07(7)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse me</td>
<td>15.19(36)</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>3.62(5)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(I beg your)</em></td>
<td>11.81(28)</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.72(1)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pardon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.50(10)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I apologise</td>
<td>2.53(6)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>2.17(3)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Accept)</em> My apologies</td>
<td>0.42(1)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.72(1)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t blame me</td>
<td>0.84(2)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00(0)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m afraid</td>
<td>0.00(0)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00(0)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.42(1)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.45(2)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100(237)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>100(138)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Overall Use of *IFIDs*

Intensification was usually centred on *IFIDs* primarily. Given the ritualistic nature of English *IFIDs*, intensifiers were more frequently used in TL than L1 (*M* = 0.25 vs. 0.13) as a warrant of sincerity (Bergman & Kasper, 1993). Learners overused intensifiers, as they employed both L1-proper intensifiers, namely, *swearing*, +1*IFID* and *please* and TL-proper ones, namely, *adverbials*. It was also noted that L1 and IL-users were more prone to intensifying strategies other than *IFIDs* (e.g. *Oh lady! I’m sorry. I really didn’t see you*, seniors, SITU 5). In contrast, intensification in TL was centred on *IFIDs* (e.g. *I’m so sorry; I am terribly sorry; I’m really sorry*). We explained this as a concern about the circumstances of the offense and a concern about the illocution respectively.
Table 5: Overall Use of Intensifiers

As it is shown in the above table, the use of +1 IFID, lexical softeners (equivalent of please), adverbials and swearing are the main means of intensification in L1. In TL, adverbials (so, really, terribly, very and truly) and emotional expressions are the major ones. As for I can’t believe (or you can’t believe) and you have no idea, they were considered TL-specific. As for learners, they favoured accessible ones: adverbials (so, really and very) and the marker please. They also opted for +1 IFID, swearing and believe me under the influence of L1. In addition, they attempted to utilise emotional expressions. Given the fact that IL-intensifiers did not usually modify IFIDs, sincerity in IL-IFIDs was not always carried over.

Examples: L1: By God/I swear (wallahii) I forgot it. [SITU 1]
?aasif jiddan/I’m very sorry [SITU 1]

TL: Oh my goodness. I completely forgot to bring it! [SITU 3]
Oh my gosh, I can’t believe I forgot AGAIN. [SITU 3]

Freshmen: Sorry sir, I swear to bring it tomorrow.
Sorry … Believe me I didn’t notice you were behind me [SITU 5]

Seniors: Please, forgive me for forgetting the book. [SITU 1]
Believe me. I was busy ... I'm so sorry. [SITU 3]

Table 6 shows the sub-types of Responsibility strategy employed. ANSs tend to protect their own face through opting mostly for lack of intent (e.g. *I didn’t pay attention; it wasn’t my intention*, literal translation) and denial of responsibility (the fault wasn’t my fault, literal translation). Conversely, ENSs seemed more considerate to the offended party’s face through self-deficiency (e.g. *I didn’t see you there; I am very clumsy*), self-dispraise (e.g. *I’m a shitty sister; I’m such a @≠%! head*) and removal of misinterpretation (e.g. *I promise it has nothing to do with you; it is just bad luck that I forgot*). The latter categories are of stronger apologetic force as they are H-supportive. Regarding the other categories, they were, to a large extent, equally supplied. Turning to IL-users, they were more liable to employing self-blame, lack of intent and self-deficiency. The high frequency of these choices was not an influence of L1 or TL. Seemingly, learners are inclined to using strategies which are less demanding, syntactically speaking. Learners employed transparent expressions like *it’s my fault, I didn’t pay attention* and *I completely forgot* to realise them. This interpretation is supported by the fact that in wording other strategies like expression of embarrassment, justifying the H and self-dispraise learners resorted to word for word translation from L1 to cope with the linguistic difficulty (e.g. *I am embarrassed from you; please don’t cry; how stupid I am*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANSs (%N)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>ENSs (%N)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Freshmen (%N)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Seniors (%N)</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>16.07(9)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>16.67(5)</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>28.57(20)</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>37.93(11)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of intent</td>
<td>53.57(30)</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.00(0)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>27.14(19)</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>20.69(6)</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-deficiency</td>
<td>14.29(8)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>56.67(17)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>25.71(18)</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>24.14(7)</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td>1.79(1)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>3.33(1)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>5.71(4)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>6.90(2)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-dispraise</td>
<td>0.00(0)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>10.00(3)</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.00(0)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00(0)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justify H</td>
<td>5.36(3)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>6.67(2)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>8.57(6)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>6.90(2)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>8.93(5)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.00(0)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.86(2)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>3.45(1)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
<td>6.67(2)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1.43(1)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00(0)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100(56)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>100(30)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>100(70)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>100(29)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Overall Use of Responsibility Sub-Strategies
Having considered the employment of the apology strategies and their wording disregarding any situational variation, we presently consider how the perception of the three variables under question affected the strategies’ selection.

3.2. Apology Strategies and Situational Variables

Starting with the P-variable, we noted that in both L1 and TL fewer excuses (Explanation strategy) were offered in status-equal (SITU 3) and status-high contexts (SITU 1), unlike in status-low context (SITU 2). Responsibility strategy remained constant across the three scenarios in L1; whereas, in TL apologisers opted for acknowledging guilt with status-equal than with status-high and status-low interlocutors. In Arabic, Repair strategy was employed across the three scenarios with varied degrees (status-equal, -high and -low, ordered by frequency). In TL, Repair strategy was favoured in status-high/equal contexts. In Arabic, Repair strategy was employed across the three scenarios with varied degrees (status-equal, -high and -low, ordered by frequency). In TL, Repair strategy was favoured in status-high/equal contexts. As for intensification, in L1, more intensifiers were offered in status-high, status-equal than status-low contexts. To that end, it could be said that both Arabic and English cultures seem to value the factor of dominance, to a large extent, in the same way; with the exception that, in TL, apologisers are unlikely to admit responsibility in status-high contexts. As for IL apologies, in SITU 1, 2 and 3, freshmen resembled L1 regarding the preference of Explanation in status-low context more than in status-high/equal contexts. Also, Responsibility remained constant across the three scenarios. As for intensification, it seemed to increase in accordance with the interlocutors’ status; it was more frequent in status-high, status-low than status-equal, once again, in agreement with L1. The only strategy that followed TL distribution is that of Repair. As far as seniors are concerned, they were in line with L1 in the employment of Explanation, Responsibility and intensification. Seniors were inclined to using Explanation in status-low context than status-high/equal contexts. Responsibility almost remained constant in that only relative decrease was noted when apologising to status-equal/low interlocutors. Like in the control groups, intensity varied in accordance with the interlocutor’s status. As for the Repair strategy, its distribution was in line with TL. Like freshmen, the employment of apology
strategies concurred with the control groups, except for Responsibility that was L1-driven. Thus, it could be claimed that positive transfer was operative in using apology strategies by learners, since we concluded that the control groups were, to a large extent, alike in their perception of the dominance variable, except for the Responsibility strategy which was negatively transferred.

As regards the SD-variable, the examination of the control groups’ performance in SITU 3 and 5 revealed that, in L1, apologisers were prone to admit responsibility with distant interlocutors (SITU 5) than with close ones (SITU 3), while Explanation remained largely constant in both contexts. Quite the opposite, in TL, Responsibility decreased and more explanations were provided with close interlocutors. Since SITU 5 does not require Repair, this strategy is inapt for measuring perception. As for Concern, Anglo-Americans were more inclined to express it than Algerians. In both groups, more intensifiers were offered in apologising to a stranger. In SITU 4-6, in both groups, no or fewer Explanation and Repair strategies were utilised in apologising to a stranger (SITU 6). In L1, apologisers were more inclined to admit responsibility in front of distant people (SITU 4); meanwhile, Responsibility strategy was less frequently employed with a stranger in TL. In both cultures, apologisers opted for more intensifiers when interacting with strangers. From the descriptions provided by ENSs (e.g. I should be under a lot of stress to be so forgetful; this could not be a ‘close friend’ I would not forget. The first time ‘maybe’, but surely not the second), it seems that L1 and TL cultures are dissimilar in weighing apologies to a close friend. In L1, it is someone who is likely to understand our mistakes, while, in TL it is someone who should not be offended by our mistakes.

From the above remarks, we conclude that, with reference to Responsibility and Explanation strategies mainly, TL stands to assign higher value to SD-variable, since ENSs avoided taking on responsibility and opted for more excuses with distant interlocutors. As far as IL-users are concerned, in the first pair (SITU 3-5), in freshmen’s corpus, Explanation remained almost constant in apologising to a close (SITU 3) or strange interlocutor (SITU 5). As for Responsibility, it increased in apologising to a distant interlocutor; meanwhile, the Concern strategy was hardly ever offered to a stranger. The distribution
of the aforementioned strategies is, a great deal, in line with their employment in L1 rather than TL. Regarding intensification, intensifiers employed decreased in apologising to a stranger in disagreement with both control groups. Turning to seniors, we noted that Explanation was only relatively increased and Responsibility sharply increased in apologising to a distant person. Concern strategy was hardly ever employed in apologising to a distant person, while, intensifiers increased by half in disagreement with both control groups. Overall, employing Responsibility and Concern strategies appears to be L1-driven, while, Explanation followed the TL distribution.

So far as the second pair (SITU 4-6) is concerned, the two learner groups’ performance seemed identical. We observed the employment of fewer Explanation strategies, relative increase in Responsibility strategies, tendency to express Concern and offer fewer Repair strategies in apologising to distance interlocutors (SITU 6). The employment of these strategies appears to, remarkably, follow L1 distribution. As for intensification, it agrees with both control groups in the sense that more intensifiers were used in apologising to a distant apologee. The above discussion suggests that IL-users evaluated SD-variable in TL contexts by means of social assumptions from L1. It is then clearly indicated that negative sociopragmatic transfer was operative in IL-apologies.

So far as the I-variable is concerned, in SITU 3-4, both cultures tend to employ Repair strategies (the offense in SITU 4 does not require repair) and offered more Explanation ones, with absence of Concern strategies (the offense in SITU 3 does not require expressing concern) in high-I context (SITU 4). Apologisers in English employed Forbearance, too, in high-I context. Respondents in both groups offered more intensifiers in low-I context (SITU 3), because, we assume, the interlocutor is distant. Apologisers in TL were prone to admitting responsibility in high-I context (SITU 3), because, presumably, the interlocutor is close; meanwhile, Algerians were prone to admitting responsibility in low-I context (SITU 3), since the interlocutors are distant. Except for the utilisation of the Responsibility strategy in which cross-cultural variation was apparent, the employment of the other strategies suggests that, to a certain extent, the two languages assigned the same value to the I-variable; they
considered the offense in SITU 4 of higher degree than in SITU 3. Moreover, in SITU 5-6, in L1, Explanation was not used in high-I context (SITU 6) and Concern relatively increased in high-I context too. As for Responsibility, it remained almost constant, while intensifiers increased in high-I context. In TL, we noticed relative increase in Responsibility, increase in Concern, employment of Repair in high-I context. Meanwhile, Explanation remained constant and intensifiers increased in high-I context. In these two scenarios, on the whole, the perception of the I-variable was, to a certain extent, identical in L1 and TL, except for the fact that L1 seems to favour Responsibility and TL favours Concern.

Turning to the traits of IL-apologies, in the first pair, SITU 3-4, the two learner groups were, to the greatest extent, identical. We noted an increase in Explanation, relative increase in Responsibility, fewer/absence of Repair strategies and the utilisation of Forbearance in high-I context (SITU 4). As for intensity, intensifiers remained constant in freshmen’s corpus and increased in seniors’ one in high-I context (the latter agrees with L1 and TL). Since we suggested that the control groups assigned the same value to the I-variable, it is plausible to assume that positive sociopragmatic transfer was at play. Still noticeable, in these two scenarios, the distribution of the Responsibility strategy appears to match that of L1. In the second pair, SITU 5-6, in freshmen’s corpus, a decrease in Explanation and intensifiers in high-I context (SITU 6) is observed. Both Repair and Concern strategies almost remained constant in high- and low-I contexts. These propensities were much more in agreement with L1 distribution, but intensification seems to agree with both control groups. As for seniors, we observed a relative increase in Repair strategies and a sharp increase in intensifiers in high-I context. In addition, we noted an absence of Explanation strategies and a decrease in Responsibility strategies in high-I context; meanwhile Repair was only employed in high-I context. These tendencies agree, a good deal, with L1 regarding Explanation, Responsibility and Concern and with TL regarding Repair. As for intensification, it was in line with both control groups. In this respect, positive sociopragmatic transfer was operative, since the performance in L1 and TL was earlier deemed so identical. Still apparently enough, IL-users, like L1, favoured Responsibility in both contexts, unlike ENSs who favoured Concern.
4. Summary of the Findings

4.1. The Wording of Strategies

At the level of IFIDs, IL-users, oftentimes, opted for more than one IFID in phrasing the apology formula or the repetition of the expression of apology singled by hedges like again in sorry again sir and the verb to repeat like it I repeat my apology (freshmen). Furthermore, the employment of forgive me and don’t blame me appears to be L1-driven, i.e. word for word translation from Arabic. The utilisation of excuse me as a real apology rather than an attention-getter could be an influence of French, the first foreign language to the majority of Algerian university students. Under the influence of L1, Algerian EFL learners heavily supplied terms of address, before or after IFIDs, in conjunction with possessive pronouns (e.g., freshmen: I am so sorry sir; I’m sorry my sweet sister; Sorry my friend; I’m sorry miss; seniors: sir, please forgive me; Oh! My sister ... I regret; I’m sorry honey; Sorry ma’am). We explained this tendency in the light of the fact that terms of address are part and parcel of the politeness system in L1. In the context of apology, they help in appeasing the offended person and, in case he/she is a stranger, seeking distance minimisation (Maalej, 2010). Another related aspect to IFIDs is intensifiers. L1 affected IL intensifiers in three main ways. First, learners used L1-proper intensifiers, namely, +1 IFID, swearing, the marker please and believe me. Second, they employed intensifiers to reinforce strategies other than IFIDs; i.e. IFID-external. Third, they utilised the intensifier very or the repetitive use of intensifiers (e.g. so so/very very/really really sorry and please please accept my apologies). Using such intensifiers by IL-users means that sincerity is not always conveyed in their expressions of apology taking into consideration that intensifiers function as a conflict avoidance strategy in English apologies (Márquez Reiter, 2000). Nevertheless, we should not ignore that they, in several cases, used a couple of TL intensifiers appropriately, namely, so, really and deeply.

Turning to Explanation strategy, it was observed that learners, following L1 guidelines, were liable to providing explicit accounts (mainly in SITU 4). Also, they seemed to use sickness as a non-negotiable justification. As far as Responsibility strategy is concerned, thanks to positive transfer of linguistic means, in SITU 2 and 6, IL-
users showed a good command in admitting responsibility, in terms of frequency. However, Responsibility was expressed awkwardly by IL-users, especially freshmen, owing to word for word translation (e.g. I am shy for you; I am ashamed from you; I am embarrassed from you, freshmen; I don’t know what to tell you, seniors). Learners also showed their deep bounds to their religious faith through fatalistic expressions (e.g. it is not by my hand, freshmen). As for the Concern strategy, there are more grammatical and discourse deviations than pragmatic ones. Linguistically speaking, this strategy was well-structured, but not necessarily as a sign of pragmalinguistic competence since learners employed syntactically transparent utterances (e.g. are you ok/alright?) or translated literally from L1 (e.g. don’t cry; I hope that you are fine; I wish I didn’t hurt you). As far as the Repair strategy is concerned, we only mention that learners may refer to the God’s will in phrasing the future repair (e.g. Sorry for doing this, I won’t forget next time God willing). The Forbearance strategy is the least used across the four language groups and, thus, its employment did not reveal insightful conclusions.

4.2. Apology Strategies’ Selection

IL-users tend to use certain apology strategies following L1-guidelines. They used more than one IFID in phrasing the apology assuming that this would give more apologetic force. Moreover, they continuously employed terms of address either before or after the expression of apology under the influence of L1, assuming that such linguistic items carrying the same force in the target context. At the level of intensification, learners tend to intensify strategies other than IFIDs. It means that learners’ apologies reflect the mother language’s sensibilities which give much attention to the circumstances of the apology than the illocutionary force or the propositional content. Therefore, when using a ritualistic expression of apology in TL without proper intensification, sincerity is not ensured in IL. Furthermore, the presence of the mother culture’s preconceptions is evidenced in Responsibility strategy in the sense that learners freely admitted responsibility in interacting with a person of higher authority or with a stranger as well as in high-I contexts. Meanwhile, in such scenarios, ENSs favoured Concern and Repair strategies than Responsibility. As for the perception of the situational variables, sociopragmatic transfer
was judged positive regarding the P-variable and I-variable, but negative regarding the SD-variable.

4.3. Other Features

In addition to transfer, IL production of Algerian EFL learners is characterised by other features. First, the lack of pragmatic competence is one factor. At the level of *IFIDs*, learners confused between the expression of apology *I’m sorry* used for real apologies and other expressions like *pardon me* and *excuse me* employed as attention-getters, in freshmen apologies mainly (e.g. *excuse me sir, I let your book at home and it is too late to go back to home. Sorry again sir*). It was evident that learners know a host of TL *IFIDs* (e.g. *I regret, I apologise, I beg your pardon, I apologise*) but they employed them randomly; i.e. in informal and formal situations. At the level of intensification, the lack of pragmatic competence is manifested in the underuse of certain intensifiers like emotional expressions, the absence of others (e.g. *I can’t/you won’t believe, you have no idea*) and non-native-like ones (e.g. *too sorry; I am really sorry for this stupid forget*) by freshmen. At the level of *Concern* strategy, a learner (from freshmen group), confusingly, employed *how do you feel* used for asking about somebody’s health to express concern about the victim.

Second, IL-specific phenomena are another feature. Learners overused particular linguistic materials. This behaviour has come to be known as *waffling* (Edmondson & House, 1991). For instance, learners overused the expression of regret *I’m sorry*. Though this trend agreed with TL distribution, it was regarded an outcome of overlearning than a pragmatic competence. The same thing could be said about the intensifiers which were over-supplied (*very, so, really*). Verbosity was apparent in freshmen’s performance, especially, regarding the overall use of apology strategies as well as in individual scenarios. Moreover, certain *Responsibility* sub-strategies, namely, *self-blame, lack of intent* and *self-deficiency* were interpreted in the light of linguistic accessibility than pragmatic choice and, thus, meant as an avoidance technique.

Third, Language constraints are an outstanding feature in IL production. The number of these errors is proportionate to the decrease in linguistic proficiency; i.e. freshmen committed most of them.
Deviations related to the lack of linguistic competence were encountered in almost the wording of all the strategies: *IFIDs* (e.g. *would you forgive me; accept my apologised*, freshmen; *in order to apologise me; accept my apology; may I have your excuse*, seniors), *Explanation* (e.g. *I didn’t find time for that; but I didn’t get time*, freshmen; *I could not find time*, seniors), *Responsibility* (e.g. *I know this is a lot; I do not see your foot; it is my entire fault*, freshmen; *this is a false; I didn’t expect the fall of the bag*, seniors) and *Repair* (e.g. *please remember [remind] me*, freshmen), *Concern* (are you fine, freshmen; *I wish I didn’t hurt you*, seniors). It goes without saying that some discourse errors could also be an outcome of transfer from L1.

4.4 The Correlation between Linguistic Proficiency and Pragmatic Transfer

In general terms, the high proficiency group did not remarkably outperform the low proficiency one, since both language groups’ performance was almost identical across the seven scenarios. The learner apologies in both groups were impacted by the same factors (transfer and other features). Over all, Table 7 shows that freshmen were relatively prone to transfer than seniors. This suggests that linguistic proficiency does not necessarily encourage the exhibition of more pragmatic transfer. At the pragmalinguistic level, freshmen, again, exhibited more transfer; meanwhile at the sociopragmatic one, the two groups showed close resemblance.

<table>
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<th>Types of Transfer</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmalinguistic</td>
<td>59.09 (26)</td>
<td>52.50 (21)</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td><em>M</em></td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociopragmatic</td>
<td>40.91 (18)</td>
<td>47.50 (19)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M</em></td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (44)</td>
<td>100 (40)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>M</em> (both types)</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 7: Frequency of the Two Types of Transfer in IL Apologies

The analysis reveals that the high proficiency group appears to be more pragmalinguistically competent regarding the employment of *IFIDs* (e.g. *sorry vs. excuse me/pardon me*). In a similar vein, it was judged to be less affected by the violation of the maxim of quantity as
well as language barriers. Additionally, seniors were rather tactful as they employed linguistic structures/strategies they have overlearned. In contrast, freshmen attempted to use as many strategies as possible despite the lack of pragmatic and linguistic competence; this explains the prevalence of transfer of linguistic items and the verbose style as well.

**Conclusion**

Deviations in learners’ IL apologies are likely to be a source of pragmatic failure/communication breakdown in gatekeeping encounters. These deviations affect all the strategies comprising the apology speech act set (IFIDs, intensifiers and other strategies) at the level of the wording as well as the selection of strategies. Therefore, we should be thoughtful of the possible ways of teaching/learning speech acts in general. First, Algerian EFL textbooks should be enriched with empirical speech act data that cover the pragmalinguistic and the sociopragmatic dimensions as well as metapragmatic information. Many studies show that the EFL/ESL textbooks offer inadequate pragmatic input (e.g. Vellenga, 2004; Salazar Campillo, 2007; Neddar, 2010; Dendenne, 2014). Second, instructors should design creative activities which give learners an opportunity to analyse, discuss and comment on speech acts instead of associating speech act production/comprehension with decontextualised linguistic structures. For instance, Usó-Juan (2007) suggests a three-step procedure for learning and practicing speech acts: presentation, recognition and collaborative practice. In a similar vein, Martinez-Flor (2007) sees that films could be an efficient pedagogical means which may be implemented in the EFL classroom through deductive and inductive approaches. Third, learners’ efforts should be taken into account. This can be achieved by styles- and strategic-based instruction which covers both strategies for learning and practicing speech acts as well as metapragmatic issues (Cohen, 2005).
References


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