

Shifting Responsibility Strategies: Apology in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract :

We examined the apologies of 370 Saudi Arabian undergraduate students proportionally selected from the five regional universities of the Kingdom to determine the types and sequencing of strategies they used most often to apologize. The study relied on ethnographic observation and a version of the Discourse Completion Test "DCT," written in Standard Arabic, that contained 12 hypothetical situations in which a student had committed violations involving people of different social parameters. The results revealed that apologies in Saudi Arabian culture typically *shift responsibility* away from the offender as Saudis do not like to apologize outright.

ملخص:

لقد فحص هذا البحث طرق الاعتذار عند 370 من طلاب وطالبات المرحلة الجامعية في المملكة العربية السعودية الذين اختيروا من جامعات في خمس مناطق مختلفة؛ لتحديد أنواع الاستراتيجيات المتسلسلة التي توظف في معظم الأحيان عند الاعتذار. اعتمدت الدراسة على ملاحظة التنوع المجتمعي ونسخة من فحص إنجاز الخطاب "DCT"، كُتبت بالفصحى المعاصرة وتضمنت افتراض 12 حالة يقع فيها الطالب أو الطالبة أمام أشخاص تختلف مكانتهم الاجتماعية. وكشفت النتائج لكلا الطريقتين أن الثقافة السائدة في المملكة العربية السعودية عند تقديم الاعتذار هي إما تحويل المسؤولية أو عدم ربطها بالخطئ؛ فالسعوديون لا يجذبون الاعتذار المباشر

1. Introduction

This study continues the empirical investigation of the apologies of many more diverse languages to determine which aspects are universal and which can be attributed to cultural preferences (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989:8), that was extended to the Arabic language varieties in Al-Hussein and Hammouri (1998), Bataineh and Bataineh (2006), Nureddeen (2008), Al-Zumor (2010), Al-Fattah (2010) and Jehabi (2011), illustrating that “[in] each community, apologies are realized in different patterns and carry a specific cultural value and learning to apologize appropriately is an important part of being communicatively competent within a speech community” (Holmes, 1990:32). The study intends to answer the questions:

1. Which strategies do Saudis use most frequently to apologize?
2. What strategy sequences exist in Saudi Arabic?

2. Review of literature

Apologies have been studied extensively in the literature; consequently, a plethora of definitions, categorizations and cross-cultural comparative studies exists¹. The earliest definition of apology is in Austin (1962) which observes that when one says *I am sorry* (or *I apologize*), they are, in addition to making the statement, performing the act of apologizing, based on the speech acts theory that performative verbs carry with them an illocutionary force that conveys their purpose or intention. In Searle’s (1977) taxonomy, an apology is an expressive act that conveys the speaker’s emotional state, although in Coulmas (1981), it is possible to apologize without meaning it. Furthermore, Fraser (1981) notes that an offender can apologize by expressing and taking responsibility for his/her infraction without necessarily for the act itself. For Olshtain and Cohen (1983: 20), an apology requires at least two interlocutors--- an apologizer and an

¹ A criticism that is sometimes levied on the definitions of apology in the literature is that they tend to be western-centric and impervious to the differences in realizations of apologies from culture to culture (Green, 1975; Coulmas, 1981; Wierzbicka, 1985; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Liebersohn et al, 2004; Bataineh and Bataineh, 2008; Nureddeen, 2008; Shariati and Chamani, 2000). Consequently, Holmes (1990:31) prefers definitions that combine other definitions or that take features from others.

aggrieved--- ” and occurs as a “post-event ” act which in Blum-Kulka and Ohlstein (1984), signals that a violation of a social norm has occurred or about to take place which the speaker recognizes and seeks to rectify. Finally, Gooder and Jacobs (2000) require that the hearer also forgives the offender after the latter acknowledges the infraction, accepts responsibility and expresses sincere sorrow and regret (as in Suszczysńska, 1999) and promises forbearance.

Apologies fulfill various functions across cultures. The earliest post Austin-Searle function of apology is the “remedial exchange...” in Goffman (1971: 45), part of the “...ritual organization of social encounters” that aims to establish harmony after an offense has occurred which may sometimes require compensating the hearer to maintain the equilibrium that in Leech (1983), further requires the hearer’s forgiveness. Other remedial functions are Bergman and Kasper (1993), where an apology re-establishes social harmony after an offense has been committed; Cohen (1996) states that an apology maintains a feeling of warmth and solidarity between interlocutors while O’beng (1999) notes that an it preserves the social balance among and between ethnic groups and nations.

Apologies have also been examined for their value in conveying politeness. Studies of apologies within politeness theory have mainly focused on whose “expectations regarding self image” --- S or H---an apology serves (Yule, 1996: 61). In Brown and Levinson (1978:70), an apology is a face-saving act for the hearer and a humiliating, face-threatening act for the speaker, since it signals “...the speaker’s awareness of having impinged on the hearer’s negative face.” Edmondson et al, (1984) also consider an apology as a face saving act for H since it placates or maintains his/her face. In Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), an apology causes a face-loss to the speaker since s/he recognizes a violation that has already occurred or expected to occur and by apologizing s/he admits to the violation of a social norm. An apology in Olshtain (1989: 156-157) also “...provide[s] support for the hearer... [since it] indicates a willingness by the speaker...to

humiliate himself or herself to some extent and to admit fault and responsibility for [the offense].” Finally, Holmes (1990:156) sees an apology as “...a speech act addressed to the [hearer’s] face-needs and intended to remedy an offence for which the apologizer takes responsibility, and thus to restore equilibrium between the apologizer and the person offended.” Other functions of apologies that have been noted include: tools that indicate good manners (Norricks, 1978), leave-taking devices (Coulmas, 1981) and means to express sympathy and condolences (Shariati and Chamani, 2010).

Beyond definitions and functions, studies of apologies have also examined their realizations in *individual languages* (Edmondson, 1981; Fraser, 1981; Wolfson et al., 1989; Garcia, 1989; Tannen, 1994), British English (Owen, 1983; Ajmer, 1995, 1996; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Deutschmann, 2003), New Zealand English (Holmes, 1989, 1990), Cantonese (Lee, 2012), German (Vollmer and Olshtain, 1989; Golato, 2002), French (Kerbat-Orecchioni, 2001), Japanese (Ide, 1998), Akan (O’beng, 1999), Lombok (Wouk, 2006), Persian (Shariati and Chamani, 2010) and Romanian (Demeter, 2006)); *interlanguages* (Cantonese (Rose, 2000), Danish (Trosborg, 1995), German (Meier, 1997; Vollmer and Olshtain, 1989), Hungarian and Italian (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998), Hebrew (Olshtain, 1989), Japanese (Kondo, 1997), Korean (Kim, 2008), Mexican Spanish (Felix-Bradsdefer, 2008), Polish and Hungarian (Suszczyńska, 1999), Russian (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983), Thai (Bergman and Kasper, 1993), Uruguyan Spanish (Marquez Reiter, 2000) and Venezuelan Spanish (Garcia, 1989), and *across cultures* (Green, 1975; Coulmas, 1981; Wierzbicka, 1985; Olshtain, 1989; Holmes 1990; Hussein and Hamouri, 1998; Yu, 2003; Blum-Kulka et al., House and Kasper, 1989; Liebersohn et al, 2004; Bataineh and Bataineh, 2008; Nureddeen, 2008; Al-Fattah, 2010; Al-Zumor, 2010) that have shown “...similarities in illocutionary force indicating devices and expression of responsibility preferences” (Olshtain, 1989 p.171).

3.0 Methodology of the study

The population of the study was approximately 134,786 male and female undergraduate students enrolled in various disciplines at the five regional universities of the Kingdom --- University of Tabuk

(north), King Saud University, Riyadh (center), King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah (west), University of Jazan (south) and University of Dammam (east). Using a stratified sampling method, a proportional random selection of 370 students was made².

The study used both ethnographic observation (or role play) and DCT to examine the types and sequencing of strategies which Saudis employ most often to apologize to determine what aspects are universal and which ones are culture specific: an ethnographic observation (or role play) was used to elicit spoken language using a spoken medium (e.g., Bonikowska, 1988; Holmes, 1991; Galato, 2003) and a DCT written in Standard Arabic was used for ease of comparison with related studies of the Arabic language varieties (e.g., Bataineh and Bataineh, 2006; Nureddeen, 2008; Al-Fattah, 2010 and Jehabi, 2011), that asked the name, age, university and discipline of the respondent (Appendix A).

In order to ascertain the effects of situation on the choice of strategy, four types of offensive acts of equal severity (mild-serious) were described: 1) direct or indirect physical contact; 2) damage to possession; 3) waste of time and 4) intrusion into another's space that had been committed against a hearer (H) who was 1) socially distant and more powerful than the speaker (S), such as a dean, an administrator, a professor or an instructor, which was designated [+distance, + dominance], or 2) socially distant and less powerful than S, such as a Bengali coffee attendant, which was assigned [+distance, -dominance], or 3) equal in status with S, such as a friend or a classmate, which was designated [-distance, -dominance]³. The resulting twelve situations are summarized in Appendix B.

3.1 Coding Scheme

² To accommodate the mandatory segregation of genders in Saudi Arabian schools, two versions of DCT were distributed.

³ Brown and Levinson (1989), Blum-Kulka (1982), Holmes (1989), Afghari, (2007), Nureddeen (2008), Shariati and Chamani (2010) etc., contain various illustrations of the effects of different situational and cultural variables on speech acts.

Linguists have proposed several diverse and sometimes overlapping strategies of apology. However, the most commonly referenced strategies are Fraser (1981), Olshtain and Cohen (1983), Blum-Kulka et al., (1989), Holmes (1990) and Bergman and Kasper (1993). Holmes (1990) incorporates aspects of Olshtain and Cohen (1983), and Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) is akin to Olshtain and Cohen (1983). Most cross-cultural studies of apologies use either Olshtain and Cohen (1983) or Blum-Kulka et al., 1989. The coding scheme used in this study is a combination of Olshtain and Cohen (1983), Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) and Holmes (1990).

In Olshtain and Cohen (1983) system of strategies, an offender may accept responsibility and apologize by the following possible methods:

1. Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs):
 - A. An expression of regret (“I’m sorry.”)
 - B. An apology (“I apologize.”)
 - C. A request for forgiveness (“Forgive me.”)
 2. Taking responsibility
 - A. Accepting the blame (“It’s my fault.”)
 - B. Expressing self-deficiency (“I am so forgetful.”)
 - C. Recognizing the hearer’s entitlement to an apology (“You deserve an apology.”)
 - D. Expressing lack of intent (“I didn’t mean it.”)
 3. Explanation or account of the situation (“Traffic is always so heavy in the morning.”)
 4. Offer of repair (“I will fix it.”)
 5. Promise of forbearance (“That won’t happen again.”)
- Or, the offender may deny responsibility by:
- E. Not accepting the fault (“It was not my fault.”)
 - F. Blaming the victim (“It was your fault.”).
 - G. A denial of the need for an apology (“There is no need to apologize.”)

In Blum-Kulka et al., (1989:206), *Taking Responsibility* (2), *Explanation or account* of the situation (3), *Offer of repair* (4) and *Promise of forbearance* (5) are indirect apologies that qualify as apologies by satisfying the felicity conditions of an apology.

Similarly, in Holmes (1990), when used without IFIDs, these strategies are also indirect apologies that make excuses, take responsibility for a violation or make a promise.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The results of the study suggested a preference for the following strategies in Saudi Arabian Arabic:

1. IFIDs

A. Request for forgiveness [sāmiḥnī] “Forgive me.”

B. Request for patience [iṣbir ‘alay] “Be patient with me.”

C. Expression of regret [anā āsif] “I’m sorry.”

D. Offer of apology [anā ya‘atadhir] “I apologize.”

2. Taking Responsibility

A. Acknowledging the hearer’s right to act [ḥaqqak ‘alay] “Your right is on me.”

3. Explanation or account of the situation [sayyaratī mu‘aṭṭalah] “My car broke down.”

4. Offer of repair

A. “I will fix it. ” [sawfa uṣliḥuh]

5. Promise of forbearance

A. “That won’t happen again.” [hādhā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā]

Or, the offender denied responsibility by:

A. Blaming the victim [innaha ghalthatuk] “It was your fault.”

B. Blaming TP

The frequencies of the Saudi apology strategies are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Frequencies of Saudi strategies

Strategies	No.	%
IFIDs	2400	64.2
Acknowledging the hearer’s right to act	1000	25.7

Explanation or account	200	5.1
Offer of Repair	70	1.8
Promise of Forbearance	70	1.8
Total	3740	100

Per the table, IFIDs were the most frequently used strategies (64.2%), followed by *Acknowledging* (25.7%), followed by *Explanation* (5.1%), then *Offer* (1.8%) and *Promise* (1.8%). As can also be noted from the table, after IFIDs, *Acknowledging the hearer's right to act* [ḥaqqak 'alay] "Your right is on me" (25.7%) is the next most frequently used strategy in Saudi apology. This parallels Danish (Trosborg, 1987), Hebrew, Canadian French and Australian English (Olshtain and Cohen, 1989), German (Vollmer and Olshtain, 1989) and Persian (Shariati and Chamani, 2010) where another *Taking Responsibility* subcategory *Recognizing the hearer's entitlement to an apology* "You deserve an apology," sits at the top with IFIDs. However, the hierarchy is inapposite to English (Trosborg, 1987), New Zealand English (Holmes, 1990) and Sudanese (Nureddeen, 2008) where *explanation* or *account* sits at the top with IFIDs. This difference in hierarchies demonstrates the language or culture specificity of strategy choice.

4.1 IFIDs

In Olshtain and Cohen (1983), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Holmes (1990), apologizing by an IFID is usually the first and most direct manner of expressing remorse, whereby the offender uses one of the set of formulaic, routinized performative verbs (" (be) sorry, excuse, apologize, forgive, regret, pardon") to apologize. As we see in Section 5, sometimes in Saudi culture an apology does not begin with an IFID; instead, the situation and the pragmatics determine how the apology begins. The frequencies of Saudi IFIDs are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Frequencies of IFIDs

IFIDs	No.	%
Request for forgiveness	1900	52.0

Request for patience	400	40.0
Expression of regret	50	2.0
Offer of apology	50	2.0
Total	2400	100

4.1.1 Request for forgiveness [sāmiḥnī] “Forgive me.”

As can be seen from table 2, of the 2400 IFIDs in Table 1, *Request for forgiveness* [sāmiḥnī] (“Forgive me” 52%) is the most frequently used IFID in Saudi culture. This hierarchy is similar to Persian (Shariati and Chamani, 2010) and Indonesian (Wouk, 2006), but differs from English *Expression of regret* (Owen 1983; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Holmes, 1990; Mattson and Johnstone, 1994; Deutschmann, 2003) and Polish *Offer of apology* (Suszczyńska, 1999), which again illustrates that strategy use is dictated by culture. Saudis use *Request for forgiveness* [sāmiḥnī] to apologize to everyone regardless of status, no matter what the offence is. A rationale similar to Shariati and Chamani (2010:1693) for the Persian *bedaxid* “Forgive me” may be advanced. S&C suggest that the high frequency in Persian of *bedaxid* might be linked to “...the teachings of Islam, which emphasizes respecting the rights of others regarding their body, feeling, face and properties”. Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Islam and the brooding omnipresence of the religion is felt in every walk of life. Islam obliges believers to seek forgiveness from Allah (God) and those whom one has offended, whether one is in the right or in the wrong. Consequently, this IFID has become so sacrosanct in Saudi culture that it is not uncommon for a host to request his guests’ forgiveness no matter how lavish was a dinner. It is therefore not a coincidence that the strategy tops the hierarchy of IFIDs.

4.1.2 Request for patience [iṣbir ‘alay] “Be patient with me.”

IFID 1B *Request for patience* [iṣbir ‘alay] appears to be a Saudi Arabian culture specific strategy since it is not reported elsewhere in the literature, such as in the neighboring Persian (Afghari, 2007; Shariati and Chamani, 2010) and the other Arabic varieties, Sudanese

(Nureddeen, 2008) and Tunisian (Jehabi, 2010). However, unlike *Request for forgiveness* [sāmiḥnī] (“Forgive me”), above, *Request for patience* [iṣbir ‘alay] “Be patient with me” is inherently situation-dependent. A Saudi ordinarily uses this strategy to apologize in Situations 1, 4, 7, 10 (someone in authority) and Situations 3, 6, 9, 12 (someone with whom he/she has or intends to maintain a long lasting relationship, such as a classmate or friend). It is most unusual that a Saudi apologizes in Situations 2, 5, 8, 11 (someone less powerful and distant, such as a Bengali coffee attendant) using *Request for patience* [iṣbir ‘alay] “Be patient with me”.

As with *Request for forgiveness* [sāmiḥnī] “Forgive me,” above, the high frequencies of *Request for patience* [iṣbir ‘alay] “Be patient with me” (40%) may be linked to religion. In the Quran, Islam’s Holy Book, forgiveness is usually mentioned with patience: people are commanded to forgive and exercise patient with those who have offended them.

4.1.3 *Expression of regret* [anā āsif] “I’m sorry.”

As we see in Table 2, unlike in Ohlstein and Cohen (1983), in Saudi culture, *expression of regret* [anā āsif] “I’m sorry,” is not one of the first and most frequently used formulaic expressions of apology. Saudis inherently do not like to apologize using expressions that outright indicate an admission of fault or failure. An expression of regret for one’s actions in Saudi culture indicates a weakness and entails self-humbling.

4.1.4 *Offer of apology* [anā a‘tadhir] “I apologize.”

Offer of apology [anā a‘tadhir] “I apologize” is another situation dependent low frequency strategy. In the corpus, it was used only where a student intrudes the space of someone in authority (7) or is late for an appointment (10). Saudis do not like to apologize outright; consequently, they avoid using terms such as “apologize” that entail their doing what they dislike.

4. 2 *Acknowledging the hearer’s right to act* [ḥaqqak ‘alay] “Your right is on me.”

As can be observed from Table 1, after IFIDS, *acknowledging the hearer's right to act* [ḥaqqak 'alay] ("Your right is on me" 25.7%) is the most commonly used strategy in Saudi culture. The strategy applies everywhere except in Situations 8 & 11, where the S violates the *time* (8) or *space* (11) of someone he/she perceives to be less powerful. It is S's invitation to H to act or demand compensation in equal proportion to the violation. The acknowledgement of the victim's right to act proportionally may be rooted in religion or deep Bedouin traditions. Islam divides rights into those owed to Allah/God, which only He can forgive, and those owed to fellow creatures, which only they can forgive, both of which must be acknowledged and given by the offender. Contemporary Saudi Arabian Sharia law offers victims the option of blood (revenge), blood money (compensation) or forgiveness. Forgiveness is usually out of the victim's volition after the offender requests it. Sometimes, however, the strong Bedouin sense of honor overrides the obligation to self-humble with an outright apology and S demands to be avenged. In Blum-Kulka et al., (1989: 207), strategies such as this one are "face threatening to S" since they entail "...strong self-humbling on S's part." Since Saudis ordinarily do not like to apologize outright, the use of this strategy allows them to avoid the self-humbling or face threat of a direct apology, an acceptance of blame (Nureddeen 2008) or a recognition of H's entitlement to an apology (Ohlstain and Cohen, 1983).

The pragmatics of *Acknowledging the hearer's right to act* [ḥaqqak 'alay] "Your right is on me," also contrasts with the Sudanese "You have the right to blame me" (Nureddeen, 2008: 302) and the Ohlstain and Cohen (1983) *Recognizing the hearer's entitlement to an apology* ("You deserve an apology")⁴. In Saudi culture, the offender not only admits blame or acknowledges a duty to apologize, but also invites H to act in proportion to the offense s/he

⁴ In Holmes (1989), *Recognizing the hearer's entitlement to an apology* is part of *Offer to repair*.

has committed. Traditional Saudi Arabian culture pretty much adhered to the Hummurabi code (“eye for eye...”) and this strategy may well be a relic of that era⁵.

4.3 *Explanation: blaming situation, circumstance or entity*

In Holmes (1990), *explanation or account* is an indirect strategy that is intended to protect the speaker’s face. In Blum-Kulka et al. (1989: 208), an *explanation or account* is the offender’s way of placating the face using external forces “...over which s/he has no (or very little) control.” *Explanations* can be explicit: “The bus was late;” “My car broke down.” or implicit: “Traffic is always so heavy in the morning,” both of which exist in Saudi Arabic: *Explicit*: [alḥāfilah muta’axxirah] “The bus was late;” sayyaratī mu’aṭṭalah “My car broke down;” *Implicit*: [ḥarakat almurūr muzdahimah] “Traffic is always so heavy in the morning,” although there usage is highly situation dependent and virtually nonexistent when the violation involves someone less powerful than the S.

4.4 *Offer of repair [inshā’ Allāh , sawfa uṣliḥuh] “If Allah wills, I will fix it”*

Both this strategy and *Promise of forbearance* “That won't happen again.” [hādhā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā], immediately below, require the locution [inshā’ Allāh] “If Allah wills” to precede them since future occurrences are considered the province of Allah/God.

In Holmes (1990), an *offer of repair* “I will fix it” is an indirect apology. In Blum-Kulka et al. (1989:208), an *offer of repair* may be expressed either as a specific offer to repair “I will fix it” or left unspecified “I will see what I can do.” In Saudi culture, both specific and non specific uses are allowed provided [inshā’ Allāh] “if Allah wills” accompanies them. The strategy is situation dependent and applies in Situations 4, 5 & 6, that involve damage to another’s possession.

4.5 *Promise of forbearance “If Allah wills, that won't happen again.” [inshā’ Allāh hādhā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā]*

⁵ The influence of Islam on traditional Saudi Bedouin customs is a topic of future research.

In Blum-Kulka et al., (1989:208), a *promise of forbearance*, such as the Saudi [inshā' Allāh] “If Allah wills, that won't happen again” [inshā' Allāh hādhā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā] “If Allah wills, that won't happen again” is the offender’s way of apologizing without admitting fault by promising that he/she will not commit the offense again. In Bergman and Kasper (1993), this strategy is a subcategory of “*Concern for the Hearer*” and in Holmes (1990), it is another indirect apology. It has all these functions in Saudi culture and like “offer of repair” above, it requires the locution [inshā' Allāh] ”If Allah wills” in the situations (4, 6 *possession* and 7 *time*) where it is used.

4.6 Blaming victim

Only two cases of *Blaming victim* use were found in the corpus (Situation 2)⁶. Once again, one can rely on religion to justify the dearth in use. Islam requires absolute certainty before accusing the victim. Consequently, it is not uncommon that S blames him/herself than blame H.

4.7 Blame TP

Blame TP was also hardly used. The three cases of its use were situation dependent to 7 (*time*). Here also, the low use follows the Islam injunction against bearing false witness against another. A compromise TP to blame when one is forced to, however, is Shaitan (Satan), whom Islam teaches is the cause of all evil.

4.8 Modifiers

Apologies may be modified by various methods, most often by *intensifiers* (‘very sorry’) and *downtoners/minimization* (‘possibly,’ ‘perhaps’), etc. (Bergman and Kasper, 1993; Felix-Bradsdefer, 2007; Nureddeen, 2008).

In Felix-Bradsdefer (2007), there are several methods to modify a strategy: *intensifier* (“terribly,” “awfully,” “very”), *downtoner* (“possibly,” “perhaps”), hedges (“maybe,” “sort of,” “kind of,”

⁶ Since the *Blame* strategies were rarely used, the five cases in 4.7 and 4.8 were not included in the original tabulation of strategies analyzed in 3.0.

“somehow”), *mental state predicate* (“I suppose,” “I think,” “I believe”) to soften it, intensifying expression, such as an adverb (“very sorry”), *iterations or duplications of the adverb* (“very, very sorry”), *explicit expression of concern for the hearer* (“Have you been waiting long?”), etc.

Modifiers are not treated as separate strategies in Blum-Kulka et al., (1989). Regardless of status, modifiers are rarely used in Saudi culture and true to their inhibition about expressiveness in apologizing, Saudis rarely use modifiers to apologize.

4.9 [inshā' Allāh] “Allah (God) Willing/If Allah Wills”

As indicated above, the locution [inshā' Allāh] “If Allah wills” is reserved for use with the future casting strategies *Offer of repair* and *Promise of forbearance*. Therefore, its frequencies are predictably linked to the frequencies of these strategies. Islam teaches that future events are in Allah/God’s control. Muslims are taught to begin any promise or statement related to the future with [inshā' Allāh] “If Allah Wills.” One who forgets to do so at the beginning of an interlocution must use it as soon as one realizes so. The locution is also attested in other Arabian varieties (Nureddeen, 2008; Jehabi, 2010).

5.0 Strategy Sequencing

As noted earlier, in Ohlstein and Cohen (1983), Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), the first expression of an apology is an IFID. Moreover, in Holmes (1990:168), a polite apology is one that contains an IFID (“explicit apology”) and another strategy. However, various strategy combinations have been shown to be permissible across languages (Shariati & Chamani, 2010; Nureddeen, 2008), including some, like Persian, that seem to allow a free reign of permutations (Shariati & Chamani, 2010: 1694-1696). As stated throughout this discussion, Saudis do not like to apologize; when they do, they do so with the least amount of expressiveness, such as by using IFIDs alone. The use of a compound strategy, such as combining one strategy with another, entails expressing oneself more than one would perhaps prefer. Nevertheless, the few combinations found in the corpus reveal the following permissible permutations:

5.1 IFID + Strategy

In a few examples, another strategy is allowed to follow an IFID in Saudi Arabic. Table 3 illustrates the permissible permutations of IFID plus strategy.

Table 3 *IFID + Strategy* combinations

Request for forgiveness + Strategy	Request for patience + Strategy	Expression of regret + Strategy	Offer of apology + Strategy
*A-1	*B-1	*C-1	*D-1
A-2	B-2	C-2	D-2
A-3	B-3	C-3	D-3
A-4	B-4	C-4	D-4

Key: A = request for forgiveness; B = request for patience; C = expression of regret; D = offer of apology; 1= acknowledgement of right; 2 = explanation; 3 = offer of repair; 4 = promise of forbearance; * = impermissible

5.2 Strategy + Strategy

On other very rare occasions, Saudis might juxtapose two non IFID strategies as we see in Table 4.

Table 4 *Strategy + Strategy* combinations

Strategy + Strategy	Strategy + Strategy	Strategy + Strategy
1-2	1-3	1-4
*2-1	*2-3	*2-4
*3-1	*3-2	*3-4
*4-1	*4-2	*4-3

Key: 1= acknowledgement of right; 2 = explanation; 3 = offer of repair; 4 = promise of forbearance

* - impermissible

5.3 Final IFIDs

In the corpus, some final IFIDs were observed in Situations 1, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9, 10, 12 (violations involving people in authority and classmates or friends).

In Nureddeen (2008: 288), a final IFID is used to further indicate the hearer's sincerity or as a habit. In Saudi, a final IFID does not express sincerity as it does in Sudanese; however, since it is situation dependent, it suggests that it is a habit or ritual (Fraser 1981) in those situations where it is used, above. Another explanation follows Holmes (1990) that a final IFID is a compensatory speech act that is appended when the offender realizes that politeness requires it initially at the beginning of the interlocution in those situations where it is used.

In the examples where final IFIDs were used, it was also noted that a low frequency strategy, such as *offer of repair* or *promise of forbearance* never took as a final IFID a low frequency IFID, such as *expression of regret* or *offer of apology*:

Offer of repair + IFID

[*inshā' Allāh , sawfa uṣliḥuh. anā āsif] "If Allah wills, I will fix it. I'm sorry."

[*inshā' Allāh , sawfa uṣliḥuh. ya'atadhir] "If Allah wills, I will fix it. I apologize."

Promise of forbearance + IFID

[*inshā' Allāh , hādhā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā. anā āsif] " If Allah wills, that won't happen again. I am sorry."

[*inshā' Allāh , hādhā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā. anā ya'atadhir] "If Allah wills, that won't happen again. I apologize."

That is, low frequency strategies were always followed by high frequency IFIDs:

Offer of repair + IFID

[inshā' Allāh , sawfa uṣliḥuh. sāmiḥnī] “If Allah wills, I will fix it. Forgive me.”

[inshā' Allāh , sawfa uṣliḥuh. iṣbir ‘alay] “If Allah wills, I will fix it. Be patient with me.”

Promise of forbearance + IFID

[inshā' Allāh , hādhā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā. sāmiḥnī] “ If Allah wills, that won't happen again. Forgive me.”

[inshā' Allāh hādhā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā. iṣbir ‘alay] “ If Allah wills, that won't happen again. Be patient with me.”

An explanation that may be offered is that in Saudi Arabic a low frequency IFID (āsif “sorry;” ya‘atadhir “apologize”) is so weak in expressing politeness that it is incapable of propping a preceding low frequency strategy (*sawfa uṣliḥuh* “I will fix it (Offer of repair);” *hādhā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā* “That won’t happen again (Promise of forbearance); consequently, a “strong” (high frequency) IFID (*yaghfir* ‘forgive,” *ṣbir* “patient”) is added as a final IFID to make it polite. Cultures would of course defer in how they define “weak” and “strong” strategies, in which strategies need to be propped and which IFIDs are used to prop them.

6.0 Shifting and Binding Strategies: a typology

Nureddeen (2008: 296) suggests, but leaves open “...for discussion and research,” a typology based on Sudanese that divides strategies into: “...taking responsibility (S admits the offense and/or regrets it) and avoiding responsibility (S attempts to avoid responsibility by relying on explanations, minimization and/or denial.”) Here also, one must leave room for cultural variation. Saudis do not like to apologize. Apologizing means taking responsibility and self-humbling oneself. Consequently, most Saudi strategies *shift responsibility* away from the S (which we have referred to as *Shifting responsibility*). Only the two low use IFIDs (*Offer of apology* and *Expression of regret*) do not shift responsibility (which we have referred to as *Binding*). This typology of Saudi strategies is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5 A typology of *shifting responsibility* and *binding* strategies

<i>Shifting strategies</i>	<i>Binding strategies</i>
1) Request for forgiveness [anā yaghfi] “Forgive me.” (IFID)	8) Expression of regret [anā āsif] “I’m sorry.” (IFID)
2) Request for patience [iṣbir ‘alay] “Be patient with me.” (IFID)	9) Offer of apology [anā a’tadhir] “I apologize.” (IFID)
3) Acknowledging the hearer’s right to act [ḥaqqak ‘alay] “Your right is on me.”	
4) Blame victim	
5) Blame TP	
6) Explanation or account of the situation [sayyaratī mu’aṭṭalah] “My car broke down.”	
7a. Offer of repair [sawfa uṣliḥuh] “I will fix it.”	
7b. Promise of forbearance [inshā’ Allāh hādḥā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā] “Allah’s will, that won’t happen again.”	

By this typology, Saudis mostly engage strategies that *shift* responsibility away from themselves when apologizing (1-7). Only the two very low strategies *Expression of regret* [anā āsif] “I’m sorry” and *Offer of apology* [anā ya’tadhir] “I apologize” are *binding* strategies (8 & 9), where S cannot shift responsibility away from him/herself.

Shifting strategies (1-7) can further be reorganized into three subcategories: where the S attempts to shift responsibility to H to reify

the situation (1, 2, 3, 8), where S shifts blame to H, TP, entity or circumstance (4, 5) and where S shifts responsibility to Allah/God using the locution [inshā' Allāh] “If Allah wills’ (7, 7a, 7b). Table 6 illustrates the sub-categorizations⁷.

Table 6 Subcategories of *Shifting* responsibility strategies and locutions.

<i>Shifting Responsibility to H</i>	<i>Shifting Blame to H, TP circumstances</i>	<i>Shifting Responsibility to Allah (God)</i>
Request for forgiveness [sāmiḥnī] “Forgive me.” (1)	Blame victim (4)	Offer of repair [inshā' Allāh sawfa uṣliḥuh] “If Allah wills, I will fix it.” (7a)
Request for patience [iṣbir ‘alay] “Be patient with me.” (2)	Blame TP (5)	Promise of forbearance [inshā' Allāh hādḥā lan yaḥduth marratan uxrā] “ if Allah wills, that won't happen again.” (7b)
Acknowledging the hearer’s right to act [ḥaqqak ‘alay] “Your right is on me.” (3)	Explanation or account (6)	

7.0 Conclusion

In Saudi Arabian culture, apology strategies either *shift* responsibility away from or *bind* the offender. *Shifting* strategies are predominant. Saudis do not like to apologize outright. Apologizing is face threatening and self-humbling to S, since it is perceived in Saudi culture as evidence of moral turpitude and a source of potential embarrassment to one’s family or tribe. Consequently, influenced by religion and traditional Bedouin traditions, Saudis use strategies that predominantly shift responsibility (or blame) away from the offender.

⁷ *Binding* strategies should also contain subcategories across cultures.

Also loathing expressiveness during an apology, Saudis use mainly IFIDs to apologize although strategy combinations are employed to a limited scale. Saudi strategies are also influenced by social variables, such as status of the interlocutors. Consequently, in certain situations, the ubiquitous Gulf expression [ayy xidmah] *Any service* is used to propitiate H and signal the closure of an apology interlocution. Although the study investigated only the apologies of university students, care was taken to ensure that all the regions of Saudi Arabia were represented in the hope that the findings can be generalized to the entire Saudi culture. On whether the typology (“shifting responsibility” vs. “binding”) suggested by the Saudi corpus applies cross-culturally, is an empirical question that requires further cross cultural investigations.

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APPENDIX A DCT (Arabic)

عزيزي المشارك: نرجو أن تأخذ بعض الوقت لإكمال هذا الاستبيان. لست مضطراً لأن تكتب اسمك ان لم ترد ذلك. كل من المواقف التالية يتطلب منك أن تلعب دور الشخص الذي يقوم بالإساءة للشخص الآخر. نرجو أن تكتب عن الطريقة التي ستعذر فيها للشخص في كل موقف.

الاسم (اختياري):

العمر:

الجامعة:

الاختصاص:

أ- جسدياً:

1- أنت في المصعد مع عميد الكلية التي تدرس فيها و تقوم خطأً بالدوس على قدمه. ماذا ستقول له كي تعذر؟

2- أنت في المصعد مع أحمد، احد عمال الشاي و القهوة البنغاليين في الجامعة. تقوم خطأً بإصابة ذراع أحمد مسقطاً الصينية التي يحملها و القهوة تندلق عليه. ماذا تقول كنوع من الاعتذار لأحمد؟

3- أنت في المصعد مع فهد، أحد زملائك، و تقوم خطأً بالدوس على قدمه. ماذا ستقول له كي تعذر؟

ب- الممتلكات:

4- لقد فقدت الرسالة التي أعطاك إياها مدرسك لتعطيها للعميد. ماذا ستقول له (المدرس أو العميد) على سبيل الاعتذار؟

5- لقد فقدت الرسالة التي أعطاك إياها مدرسك لتعطيها لأحمد، احد عمال الشاي و القهوة البنغاليين في الجامعة. ماذا ستقول لأحمد كي تعذر منه؟

6- لقد فقدت الكتاب الذي أعطاك إياه مدرسك لتعطيها لزميلك فهد. ماذا ستقول لفهد على سبيل الاعتذار؟

ج- الوقت:

- 7- لقد تأخرت على مقابلتك مع العميد. ماذا ستقول كي تعتذر منه؟
- 8- لقد طلبت من أحمد، احد عمال الشاي و القهوة البنغاليين في الجامعة، أن يراقب سيارتك و لكنك تأخرت في العودة إليه. ماذا ستقول له كي تعتذر منه؟
- 9- لقد طلبت من زميلك فهد أن يوصلك و لكنك تأخرت في النهوض صباحاً. ماذا ستقول له على سبيل الاعتذار؟
- د- المكان:

- 10- لقد دخلت مكتب العميد بالخطأ حيث أنك كنت تريد دخول مكتب مدرسك. ماذا ستقول للعميد على سبيل الاعتذار؟
- 11- لقد دخلت إلى الغرفة التي يعمل فيها أحمد مع باقي موظفي الشاي و القهوة في الجامعة. ماذا ستقول على سبيل الاعتذار؟
- 12- لقد دخلت إلى غرفة و وجدت عدداً من الطلاب في اجتماع خاص. ماذا ستقول لهم على سبيل الاعتذار؟

APPENDIX B Apology situations of corpus

Situation No.	Offense Type	Offence committed	Social relations	Severity
1	Physical	Step on Dean's shoes	+dist./+dom.	Mild-Serious
2		Spilled coffee On Bengali	+ dist./-dom.	Mild-Serious
3	Possession	Step on Classmate's shoes	-dist./-dom.	Mild-Serious
4		Damaged Dean's chair	+dist./+dom.	Mild-Serious
5		Lost Bengali's letter	+ dist./-dom.	Mild-Serious
6		Lost book	-dist./-dom.	Mild-Serious
7	Time	Late for interview with Dean	+dist./+dom.	Mild-Serious
8		Late to return	+ dist./-dom.	Mild-Serious
9		Late for ride	-dist./-dom.	Mild-Serious
10	Spatial	Wrong office	+dist./+dom.	Mild-Serious
11		Wrong room	+ dist./-dom.	Mild-Serious
12		Wrong room	-dist./-dom.	Mild-Serious