

A Cross-Cultural Study of Apologies in British English and Persian

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Most cross-cultural apology studies have investigated apologies across different languages based on a corpus of elicited data. Rarely have apologies been examined in the natural data; nor have the social offenses that obligated these apologies been considered. This study investigated the use of apology strategies, and also the offenses that motivated apologies among native speakers of British English and Persian by analyzing a large corpus of naturally-occurring data collected from real-life situations. Results indicated that both English and Persian speakers used relatively the same set of apology strategies, yet with significantly different preferences. In addition, it was also found that the two groups did not make apologies to remedy the same offense types and even the same offenses obligated different apology rates.

Keywords: apology speech act, apology strategies, offense types, Persian, British English

1. Introduction

Although it is argued that speech acts operate by universal pragmatic principles (Austin 1962, Searle 1969, 1975, Leech 1983), it is also claimed that they vary in conceptualization and verbalization across cultures and languages (Green 1975, Wierzbicka 1985). Due to the current debate on language universals and the importance of such notions in formation of a language theory in general and second language acquisition theory in particular (Blum-Kulka 1983), numerous studies have been carried out across different languages to test the idea of the universality of pragmatic principles (Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones 1989, Hymes 1967, Olshtain and Cohen 1983, Manes and Wolfson 1981, Beebe and Cummins 1996, Hinkel 1997, Kasper 2000, Yuan 2001, Rintell and Mitchel 1989, Duranti 1997).

Most cross-cultural speech act studies have been conducted within the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) project in order to apply the results to communicative language teaching. This project compared across languages the realization of requests and apologies to establish similarities and differences between native and non-native speakers in the realization patterns of these two acts (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984). The investigated languages demonstrated no significant difference in strategy selection, and the results revealed “surprising similarities in IFID [Illocutionary Force Indicating Device] and expression of responsibility preferences” (Olshtain 1989:171).

Outside the CCSARP project, other apology studies have been carried out in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics to compare the use of apology speech act between

native English speakers and native speakers of other languages like Hebrew (Cohen and Olshtain 1981, Olshtain 1989), Spanish (Garcia 1989), Danish (Trosborg 1987, 1995), Austrian (Meier 1992, 1998), Italian (Lipson 1994), Japanese (Sugimoto 1997), Polish and Hungarian (Suszczyńska 1999), Arabic (Al-Zumor 2003), Persian (Eslami-Rasekh 2004), Jordanian Arabic (Bataneh and Bataneh 2008), and Chinese (Shih 2006, Hou 2006).

The studies mentioned above have mostly investigated western languages against the background of the western socio-cultural system, which may not be the same in other cultural contexts (Coulmas 1981, Liebersohn, Neuman, and Bekerman 2004). Besides, in a majority of research, DCT (Discourse Completion Test) or role play has been used, while observatory methods have been less frequently applied. In addition, the situations that motivated apologies have been rarely considered.

The present study, however, intends to investigate the potential similarities and differences in the realization of apologies between native British English speakers and native speakers of Persian, a non-western language, based on a corpus of naturally-occurring apologies collected through the observatory method. Further, it examines the conditions that motivated apologies in the two languages. More specifically, it attempts to find answers to the following questions.

1. Do the same offenses motivate apologies in British English and Persian?
2. Do British English and Persian speakers use the same set of apology strategies?
3. Do British English and Persian speakers use the same apology lexemes in explicit apologies?

This study is potentially significant because it investigates an area of intercultural pragmatics that has not been sufficiently explored. Findings of this study may be applied to communicative language teaching and the study of intercultural communication. Furthermore, such empirical studies may provide useful criteria for validating the claims for the universality of speech acts.

2. Methodology

Previous research into apology speech act is said to have been, mostly, based on the data elicited through DCT or role play (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, Cohen and Olshtain 1981, Olshtain and Cohen 1983, Trosborg 1987). Although the advantages of such experimental methods are obvious (establishing identical situations for cross-linguistic studies, producing a large amount of data in a short time), there are some problems with this type of research.

For example, according to Cohen and Olshtain (1993:47), “role-play forces the subjects to take on a role they would not assume in real life, or they may not be good actors, then it elicits an unnatural behavior”. Furthermore, as said by Bonikowska (1988), the respondents may be forced to perform an apology in predetermined situations, while in real interactions they may decide to opt out.

Therefore, it has been suggested the data obtained through observatory methods seem to be more representative of the language used in natural settings, and it may give insights on how people apologize in natural interactions (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989, Holmes 1990, Olshtain and Cohen 1983, Rose 1994, Trosborg 1987).

2.1 Data collection

The present study was conducted on the basis of two sets of apology extracts obtained from actual speech through observatory methods. The apologies in British English were selected from the data file provided by Deutschmann (2003) with the aim of investigating apologizing in British English. These apologies were found in the dialogue texts of the spoken part of the British National Corpus (BNC), which comprises the speech of over 4700 speakers acting in a range of different conversational settings.

Deutschmann (2003) only selected the dialogues produced by speakers whose age and gender were known, which comprises 3070 examples of apologies, produced by over 1700 speakers. Among these, the authors of the present study randomly selected 500 examples. It should be noted that Deutschmann’s (2003) investigation was limited to the explicit expressions of apology containing variants of the words *afraid*, *apologize*, *apology*, *excuse*, *forgive*, *pardon*, *regret*, and *sorry*.

Deutschmann’s (2003) data file included apology extracts and apology forms. It also provided personal information about the interlocutors (age, gender, social class, profession, and role), as well as the contextual and situational details (nature of the offense, power relation and social distance between interlocutors, formality of the situation, apparent sincerity of the apology, the function of the apology, and so on) for each apology.

Similarly, the Persian corpus also consisted of 500 apology exchanges—that is complaints, apologies, and apology responses—collected by one of the authors, with the help of three assistants who helped in data collection as volunteers. They were asked to fill out some forms which consisted of three parts including demographic information about the interlocutors (gender, age, education, and occupation), contextual details (where, when, who apologized to whom, and why), and the exact

words of the actual conversations (see Appendix). It was emphasized that they should note down the exact words of the apologies as soon and accurately as possible, and avoid inducing them.

During a period of more than one year, the apology exchanges that occurred in a variety of situations were collected through an ethnographic approach to observation, i.e., collection of spontaneous speech in natural settings. This method, which was derived from anthropology and advocated by Hymes (1962, 1964, 1972), was employed successfully by researchers like Manes and Wolfson (1981) and Holmes (1990).

The data obtained this way may hopefully come close to what Trosborg (1995:141) describes as the ultimate goal of pragmatically oriented research: “The ultimate goal in most pragmatically oriented research is the collection of ethnographic data, i.e., naturally occurring data, collected along with information about the age, sex, status, situation, culture, relationship, etc. of the interactants”.

The data were produced by nearly 1250 interlocutors, in four cities of Iran, in 2006. Since it was not possible to predict how many apologies would be performed during a specific period of time, haphazard accidental sampling was used for data collection. Besides, the friends and relatives were informed that their apologies would be noted down as part of a research on apologies in Persian. However, the data were made anonymous both for those who were aware of our purposes and for the other participants, as well.

Apologies analyzed for the present study were collected both in public places and in private spaces, across different situations like the home, street, workplace, shop, and university. Students, teachers, housewives, customers, shopkeepers, employees, and workers of different ages, genders and with different degrees of familiarity and power participated in these apologies.

It is interesting to note that in the British data males offered 46% and received 40% of the apologies while females performed 54% and received 42% of the apologies. Similarly, in the Persian corpus 50% of the apologies were performed by males and 50% by females while 49% of the apologies were directed toward males and 51% toward females. Thus, it may be concluded that there were no significant gender differences between the two language groups.

In addition, analysis of the English corpus revealed that the highest rate of apologies was performed by the speakers aged 25 to 44. More specifically, 8% of the English speakers were aged 1-14, 15% aged 15-24, 42% aged 25-44, 25% aged 45-59, and 10% aged above 60. On the other hand, nearly half of Persian speakers were 15 to 24 years of age. To be more specific, 6% of the Persian speakers were aged 1-14, 50% aged 15-24, 17% aged 25-44, 22% aged 45-59, and 5% of them aged above 60.

Also, in the Persian data 43% of the apologies were exchanged between strangers, 30% between friends, and 27% between intimates. Besides, 50% of the apologies were exchanged between equals, 33% were performed by speakers with more power, and 17 % by those with less power. In the British corpus 37% of the apologies occurred between strangers, 33% between intimates, and 20% were exchanged between friends. Furthermore, 55% of the apologies were exchanged between equals, 22% were performed by speakers with more power, and 13% by those with less power. The relationship between 10% of English speakers was unknown.

2.2 Coding scheme and data analysis

Different taxonomies have been devised for classification of apology strategies (Bergman and Kasper 1993, Brown and Attardo 2000, Fraser 1981, Meier 1992, Olshtain and Cohen 1983, Owen 1983, Sugimoto 1997, Trosborg 1987). There are overlaps between these taxonomies and while some of them are detailed, some others are broad.

In this study, the apology strategies were coded according to Deutschmann's (2003) taxonomy. This classification is based on the speakers' tendency to take on responsibility (explicitly or inexplicitly), or to reject responsibility for the offense (partly or totally). It includes the following strategies and sub-strategies:

1. Explicit expression of apology, e.g. sorry, excuse, apologizes, forgive, pardon, regret, afraid.
2. Taking on responsibility
 - Explicit acknowledgement, e.g. My fault!
 - Indirect acknowledgement such as:
 - i) Self-deprecation, e.g. I'm an idiot!
 - ii) Offer of repair, e.g. I'll help you get up.
 - Promise of forbearance, e.g., It won't happen again.
3. Minimizing responsibility
 - Explanations
 - Scapegoating
 - Excuses
 - Justifications
 - Claiming lack of intent

It should be noted that in addition to the apology strategies and sub-strategies included in this taxonomy, other strategies were also observed in the Persian corpus,

i.e., justifying the hearer, expression of appeal, refusing responsibility, intensifications, expression of deference, showing the speaker's humility, and expressing the hearer's superiority. There were sub-strategies for them, as well. Nevertheless, this taxonomy includes the basic strategies used to apologize, and thus can provide a general account of the existing differences and similarities in the use of apologies in the two languages.

3. Results and discussion

This section examines the offense types that motivated apologies among the two language groups and compare them with each other to see if they are the same across the two sets of data. Then, the frequencies obtained for different apology strategies in the English and Persian data are described and compared with each other.

3.1 Offense types

The offense or "object of regret" (Coulmas 1981:75) is what obligates an apology. It is argued that the nature and severity of an offense strongly affect the form of the subsequent apology (Deutschmann 2003). For example, stepping on someone's toe will most probably result in a different apology than knocking someone over and breaking his/her leg.

In this study, the offenses were categorized according to the framework provided by Deutschmann (2003:64) that was developed based on Holmes (1990) and Aijmer (1996). It is claimed that this taxonomy covers the social situations that accommodate the apologies found in the BNC (Deutschmann 2003). It also accounts for most instances in the Persian corpus. Therefore, this taxonomy was employed to make comparisons between the offenses in the two corpora. It included the following categories:

1. Accidents: Damage to property, hurting someone unintentionally, bumping into a person, unintentionally being in the way
2. Mistakes and misunderstandings: Misunderstanding someone, mistakes
3. Breach of expectations: Declining offers, declining requests, forgetting agreements, not keeping agreements, inability to fulfill expectations, personal shortcomings
4. Lack of consideration: Interruptions, overlooking a person, not paying attention, forgetting a name, being late, leaving inappropriately, causing inconvenience, taking something without permission, taboo offenses, hurting someone's feelings unintentionally

5. Talk offenses: Slips of the tongue, digressions, hesitations, corrections, being unclear, forgetting to mention something
6. Social gaffes: Coughing, burping, sneezing, clearing the throat, laughing loudly unintentionally, flatulence
7. Requests: Requests for attention, asking someone to do something or to move
8. Hearing offenses: Not hearing, not understanding, not believing one's ears
9. Offenses involving breach of consensus: Disagreeing or contradicting, reprimanding, refusing, denying, retaliating, insisting, challenging

Furthermore, Deutschmann (2003:59) has distinguished four types of apologies that are performed to remedy different offense types: prototypical or real apologies, which are “real expressions of regret for non-trivial transgressions”; formulaic apologies which are uttered where the offense is minimal, almost non-existent and where apologizing is a matter of routine; formulaic apologies with added functions, in which the offense is minimal and apology has other functions in addition to that of repair work; and face attack apologies which are uttered when the remedial nature of the apology is questionable. Table 1 illustrates the relative distributions of offenses and also the proportion of different apology types in the British and Persian corpora.

Table 1. Offense types in English and Persian

Offense types	British		Persian	
	No	%	No	%
Accident	11	2.2	137	27.4
Breach of expectation	41	8.2	97	19.4
Mistake	42	8.4	38	7.6
Lack of consideration	81	16.2	126	25.2
Real	175	35	398	80
Gaffe	21	4.2	0	0
Talk	52	10.4	0	0
Hearing	154	30.8	0	0
Request	23	4.6	32	6
Formulaic	250	50	32	6
Consensus (Face attack)	55	11	53	10.6
Unidentified	20	4	14	2.8
Total	500	100	500	100

As Table 1 shows, in the English data hearing offenses were the most common source of apologies (31%) and accidents elicited the lowest number of apologies (2%). Conversely, in the Persian data accidents led to the highest rate of apologies (27%) and requests presented the lowest frequency (6%). In addition, lack of consideration was the second most common reason for apologies among both groups.

It is interesting to note that hearing offenses, social gaffes, and talk offenses, which resulted in about half of the apologies in the English corpus, elicited not even a single apology in the Persian data. Thus, it seems that English speakers apologized for a wider range of offense types compared to Persian speakers.

The authors observed that in everyday interactions Iranians usually do not apologize for not hearing or understanding someone, instead they say: *či* ‘what?’, *či gofti* ‘what did you say?’ or *bale* ‘yes?’ with a rising intonation. However, they may behave differently in their interactions with people who possess a higher social status in a formal setting. For instance, a university student may apologize for not hearing the professor in a class or an employee may apologize for not hearing the boss in a meeting. Moreover, modern and learned people or inhabitants of urban areas may apologize for social gaffes like a slip of the tongue in formal settings or in interactions with higher status strangers, but this does not happen in all situations. Traditional and illiterate speakers or residents of rural areas hardly perceive such things as an example of an offense.

On the other hand, 3% of the offense types which were encountered in Persian data were absent in the English corpus. These included intentional transgressions like beating, slapping and injuring someone in a fight, and requests for *halāliyat* ‘forgiveness’ before leaving someone, going on a pilgrimage, or making a long journey.

Furthermore, among the offenses common to both data, breach of consensus, mistakes and misunderstandings, and requests occurred with relatively the same frequency in both sets of data whereas other offense types elicited different rates of apologies in the two corpora. For example, breach of expectations led to about 8% of apologies in English while it caused 19% of apologies in Persian.

Overall, English interlocutors mostly performed formulaic apologies to remedy minimal offenses (50%) while Persian speakers mainly uttered real apologies to express regret for non-trivial transgressions (80%). Thus, the two groups did not apologize for the same offense types and even the same offenses in the two corpora obligated different apology rates.

This seems to validate the hypothesis proposed by Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones (1989) which suggests that the notions of offense and obligation seem to be culture-specific; the situations which motivate apologies in one language may fail to

do so in another, or the same offense may be weighted differently across various cultures.

3.2 Apology strategies

Based on the Deutschmann's (2003) taxonomy presented above, the data were grouped into four categories: A (explicit apology only), AB (explicit apology with an added strategy minimizing the responsibility for the offense, explanations and justifications, for example), AC (explicit apology with an added strategy involving taking on responsibility for the offense), and Multiple (explicit apology with combined usage of strategies involving minimizing and taking on responsibility). The distribution of these apology strategies is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Apology strategies in English and Persian

Apology strategies	English		Persian	
	No	%	No	%
A (explicit only)	400	80	183	37
AB (Explicit +minimization)	77	15	191	38
AC (Explicit + responsibility)	11	2	56	11
Multiple (combined usage)	12	3	70	14
Total	500	100	500	100

At a global level, English and Persian speakers displayed some similarities in strategy selection: they all used the same apology strategies relatively in the same order of frequency ranging from: A, AB, to multiple strategies, and AC. Still, Chi-Square analysis revealed significant differences between the two groups in the number of different strategies they used.

English speakers opted for a single IFID in most situations (80%) as opposed to Persian speakers who selected this strategy in less than half of their apologies (37%). Strategy AB was employed in merely 15% of English apologies whereas it occurred as the most frequent strategy in Persian (38%). Finally, English speakers used AC and Multiple strategies quite rarely (5%) while Persian speakers used them in 25% of situations.

It should be noted that the distribution of apology strategies was quite different in the two corpora. English apologies were highly restricted to the usage of a single IFID (80%). Of the remaining apologies, AB was used in 15% of situations, and AC and Multiple strategies were employed quite rarely. On the contrary, in the Persian

apologies strategy, A and AB occurred with relatively the same frequency (37% vs. 38%) where AC and Multiple strategies were used in 25% of apologies.

It seems that different offenses elicited different apology strategies in the two sets of data. In Persian, apologies were largely used for non-trivial offenses (80%) that call for more elaborate apologies; while half of the English apologies were performed for minimal offenses that simply elicit a single IFID. Thus, Persian speakers employed IFIDs with added strategies more than English speakers who used a single IFID in most situations.

A more detailed analysis of the data revealed that strategy A (a single IFID) was the most common strategy in all three types of English apologies where it was employed in formulaic apologies more than other types. This strategy was mostly used to remedy hearing offenses, as the most common offense type, in the English data. It is interesting to note that in Persian apologies strategy A also presented the highest frequency in formulaic apologies yet it occurred for requests. AB (explicit apology and minimizing the responsibility) was the dominant strategy in real and face attack apologies while it was more common in real apologies specifically for the offenses concerning lack of consideration. In addition, face attack apologies included exactly the same rate of AB in the two corpora.

Moreover, apology responses in the data demonstrated that Iranians usually do not accept apologies easily and quickly. They may continue complaining even after receiving an elaborate apology to teach the wrong-doer a lesson that he will never forget, and thus hopefully never commit such an offense again. It appears that they do not believe that the offender did not mean to commit the offense or they doubt the sincerity of the apology. They are also afraid that by accepting an apology, they may *rou bedahand* 'give face' to the offender or other people for committing more serious offenses. For instance, if someone insults you verbally and gets away with it, s/he may dare to do the same thing or something worse to you in the future. Hence, the offender must use all strategies s/he knows, repeat them many times, and also swear and appeal in order to satisfy the offended party that s/he will never commit the offense again; otherwise, s/he must face the possible consequences.

3.2.1 IFID formula

As mentioned above, explicit expression of apology occurred as the most frequent strategy among English speakers while it was the second most common strategy among Persian speakers. In all cases there was at least one IFID per situation. If there were more, only the first one was considered, while other different IFIDs in the same situation were not counted or repetitions of the same IFID was considered as a single

occurrence. Therefore, in each set of data 500 occurrences of different IFIDs were observed. These are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. IFID formula in English and Persian

British			Persian		
Expression	No.	%	Expression	No.	%
<i>sorry</i>	292	58.4	<i>bebaxšid</i> 'forgive me'	319	64
<i>pardon</i>	123	24.6	<i>?ozr/ma?zerat</i> 'apologize'	110	22
<i>excuse</i>	58	11.6	<i>šarmande</i> 'ashamed'	59	12
<i>afraid</i>	16	3.2	<i>mote?asef</i> 'sorry'	12	2
<i>apologize</i>	7	1.4			
<i>forgive</i>	4	0.8			
Total	500	100		500	100

As Table 3 illustrates, explicit apologies were realized through different forms in English and Persian that can not be perfectly mapped onto one another. For example, British speakers did not use *šarmande* 'ashamed' as an apologetic formula, and Persians had no exact equivalent of *excuse*, *pardon*, and *afraid* for minimal offenses. Instead, Persians simply used *bebaxšid* 'forgive' in all three situations. However, in both languages, there were IFID formulas for expressing regret (*sorry* / *mote?asef*), requesting forgiveness (*forgive* / *bebaxšid*), and offering apology (*apologize* / *?ozr/ma?zerat*), though preferences for the use of these forms varied across the two languages.

As reported in other apology studies (Aijmer 1996, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, Deutschmann 2003, Holmes 1990, Bean and Johnstone 1994, Meier 1992, Owen 1983), *sorry* was the most common formulaic expression of apology in English (59%). Interestingly, its counterpart in Persian i.e., *mote?asef* was used quite rarely (2%).

On the other hand, in line with Afghari (2007), it was found that *bebaxšid* 'forgive' is the most common explicit apology (64%) in Persian. This, yet, does not support Eslami-Rasekh (2004) who reported *?ozr/ma?zerat* 'apologize' as the most frequent IFID in Persian. The existing difference may be attributed to the different nature and number of samples analyzed in these studies. The present study analyzed

500 examples of naturally-occurring apology exchanges produced by more than 1250 participants, while Eslami-Rasekh (2004) analyzed 180 apologies elicited through a DCT from 30 university students. Therefore, the use of IFIDs among them may hardly represent the overall distribution of apology forms in Persian.

Moreover, although *bebaxšid* was the most common form in Persian, its equivalent, i.e. *forgive*, was used the least in English (less than 1%). Further, *?ozr/ma?zerat* ‘apologize’ in Persian, and also *pardon* in English, as the second most common forms, occurred with relatively the same frequency (22% vs. 25%). *Excuse* also occurred in English as the third IFID (12%) with *afraid*, *apologize*, and *forgive* (together constituting 5%) coming next. *Šarmande* ‘ashamed’ was also the third common expression of apology in Persian (14%).

Overall, it seems that exactly the same IFIDs were not used in English and Persian; there were also differences in the frequency of relatively similar IFIDs. For example, expression of regret was the most commonly used IFID in English, while it was the least frequently used form in Persian. On the other hand, request for forgiveness was the most common IFID in Persian, and the least frequent form in English. In addition, in Persian there was an expression of shame that was not common as an apology form in English.

It appears that the observed differences in the realization of explicit apologies are reflections of different socio-cultural values, beliefs, and norms. As noted by Wierzbicka (1985), Anglo-Saxon culture emphasizes autonomy and privacy, both psychological and physical, as a natural and important right for everyone, and thus considers distance as a positive value to respect the autonomy of the individual. Therefore, British people mostly opted for sorry that seems to build distance between speaker and hearer more than other forms do.

Iranian culture, however, considers human beings as different parts of the same body, whose life is dependent to their complete inter-connection. This belief is well illustrated in the following poem of Sa’di Shirazi, the famous Iranian poet of the 13th century, (Gulistan, The manners of kings, Story 10).

The sons of Adam are limbs of each other
 Having been created of one essence.
 When the calamity of time afflicts one limb
 The other limbs can not remain at rest.
 If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others
 Thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a man.

Therefore, what is of paramount concern to an Iranian is not to keep distance in order to preserve his territory, but to become and remain accepted by others, and to find a position among them. This tradition, which appears to be deeply rooted in the history of Persia, i.e., Mithraism—religion of ancient Iranians around 3500 B.C.—on one hand, and in the Islamic religion teachings on the other hand, encourages unity and harmony among people, and also displays emotion and specifically affection toward others in order to maintain this unity.

Iranians thus refer to a kindhearted and compassionate person (like mother) as an angel, while they criticize an inconsiderate one as a real stone, beast, or ogre. Likewise, they value generosity as a typical characteristic of *bozorgān* ‘noble people’, and sharing your property, emotion and opinion with others are as different signs of such generosity, as are affection and kindness.

Therefore, Persian speakers mostly requested the offended party to forgive them perhaps because the answer the addressee provides for this direct request—o.k. or no—clearly shows if the relationship is maintained, or it is still in danger and thus more effort is needed to maintain or restore it. Thus, it probably shows the speaker’s concern for the hearer.

On the other hand, in Iranian culture, a noble person is not expected to reject requests specifically the requests that are made by people of lower status because accepting the requests is considered as a sign of *mardānegi* ‘masculinity’ that is a positive value. When requesting others to give you something is against masculinity, and only those with lower status do so, whereas a noble man only requests God for something. Therefore, in a strategic attempt, the speaker lowers his/her status and at the same time raises the addressee’s status, and requests for forgiveness in order to persuade the hearer to give a desirable answer. It is quite common in Persian to say *baxšeš as bozorgān ast* ‘forgiving is of nobles’ before requesting forgiveness for a serious offense, or even a trivial one if it is considered serious to the hearer.

Being unaware of these differences may result in cultural misunderstandings and cultural clashes in the interactions between Persian and British English speakers. If an English speaker simply utters sorry in case of a serious offense, s/he is likely to be seen as inconsiderate because, from the Iranian cultural perspective, this formula is too weak. If the same person fails to respond to an elaborate apology, s/he is likely to be seen as uncooperative, or dumb. On the other hand, using an imperative form like forgive me may seem rude or boorish to an English speaker because the directness, forcefulness and emotionality of Persian speakers can be offensive and irritating to an English speaker. Obviously, cultural clashes of this kind can not be completely eliminated, yet they can be minimized through intercultural education.

Furthermore, it should be noticed that selecting an apologetic form in a specific situation depends on many factors including personal identity and characteristics, the relationship between the interlocutors, formality of situation, type and severity of offense and cultural background. These factors need to be investigated in future apology studies in order to come to a clear understanding about the realization of the apology speech act.

For example, in the present data some patterns were observed in the use of IFIDs for different offense types. Of the lexemes investigated in English, *sorry* was the preferred lexeme in all real apologies accounting for 77% of this category. Other preferred lexemes in this category included *afraid* (extremely specialized to apologies for breach of expectations) and *excuse* (specialized to lack of consideration). Also, *sorry* along with *pardon* were the common lexemes in the formulaic apologies. It was the preferred form for lack of consideration, talk offenses and hearing offenses. *Pardon* however was extremely specialized for hearing offenses accounting for 69% of apologies in this category. *Excuse* was the common form for social gaffes and requests. The remaining three forms (*afraid*, *apologize* and *forgive*) were avoided completely in this category. In face attack apologies remedying breach of consensus, *sorry* was the most common form used (53%). Here, however, the relative distribution of this form was lower than in other categories. *Excuse* was relatively more frequent in this type of apology than in other types; 29% of face attack apologies used this form.

On the contrary, of the investigated IFIDs in the Persian corpus, *bebaxšid* 'forgive' had the most generalized usage, featuring in apologies for all categories of offenses investigated. Preferred usage of this form was particularly apparent in real apologies (62%) for accidents and lack of consideration offenses. Usage of *apologize* and *ashamed* also seemed to be generalized, and to occur mainly in real apologies. *Apologize* was the second most common form used in real apologies for lack of consideration and accidents while *ashamed* was most often used for breach of expectation and lack of consideration offenses. *Sorry* was widely avoided and it was used quite rarely for real apologies remedying the offenses related to accidents and breach of expectations. In formulaic apologies (requests) *bebaxšid* 'forgive' was also the preferred form accounting for 64% of this category and *apologize* was the other preferred form. This was also the case for face attack apologies.

4. Conclusion

This paper intended to analyze and contrast apology strategies and the events that motivated apologies in British English and Persian. The analysis demonstrated that

hearing offenses in English (31%) and accidents in Persian (27%) elicited the highest rate of apologies. It was also found that both groups used the same apology strategies relatively with the same hierarchy. However, English speakers opted for a single IFID in the majority of situations (80%) while Persian speakers typically used an explicit apology with some added strategy/strategies (63%). In addition, *sorry* in English (59%) and *bebaxšid* 'forgive' in Persian were the most common IFIDs. The results also indicated an extra IFID is used in Persian.

The discrepancies observed between the two groups may partly be attributed to the methodology applied in this study; the present study was based on the data collected through observatory methods. This way is claimed to be the best approach to collecting data in speech act studies; however, it fails to establish identical situations because, as addressed by Cohen and Olshtain (1985), no two situations are ever really identical in natural settings, consequently determining the realization of a given speech act in specific situations entails investigating that speech act in identical situations. Thus, if the two groups were observed in exactly the same situations perhaps they would act in relatively the same ways.

Therefore, findings of this study are not to be regarded as an exclusive description of apologies, as it just provides a general account of this communicative act in the two languages and no correlations with social and situational variables have been shown; still, it does demonstrate certain preferences which seem to support Wierzbicka's (1985, 1991) position that speech acts are not language-independent natural types but culture-specific communicative routines.

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Appendix: Data collection form

A. Persian version of data collection form

1. مشخصات کسی که عذر خواهی می کند:
سن: جنس: سطح تحصیلات: شغل: گویش یا زبان:
2. مشخصات کسی که از او عذر خواهی می شود:
سن: جنس: سطح تحصیلات: شغل: گویش یا زبان:
3. نسبت طرفین با هم: محل وقوع گفتگو: تاریخ: علت عذر خواهی :
4. گفتگوی دقیق و کامل طرفین

B. English version of data collection form

1. Characteristics of the person who apologizes:

Age: Gender: Degree: Occupation:
Language or accent:

2. Characteristics of the person who receives apology:

Age: Gender: Degree: Occupation:
Language or accent:

3. Relationship between the interlocutors:

Place in which apology occurs: Date:
Reason for apologizing:

4. Exact words of apology exchange:

英式英語和波斯語中 抱歉語行的跨文化研究

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大部分多語言的跨文化抱歉表達研究，都是根據提析而得的語料庫；鮮少關注自然語料或考量社會上約定俗成的規範。本研究透過真實生活情境蒐得的自發性語料庫，調查英式英語及波斯語母語使用者抱歉策略的使用及導致抱歉產生的冒失。結果顯示兩語言使用者有差不多的抱歉策略，但卻有明顯不同的使用偏好。除此之外，兩語言對相同冒失類型所展現的抱歉以及相同冒失所引發的抱歉比例也不同。

關鍵詞：抱歉語行、抱歉策略、冒失類型、波斯語、英式英語