

## Socio-linguistic Competence of Turkish and Turkish Cypriot English as a Foreign Language Learners in the English Speech Act of Apology

Hakan Atamturk<sup>1</sup> and Nurdan Atamturk<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Near East University, Department of PES, 99138, Mersin 10, Turkey, North Cyprus

<sup>2</sup>Near East University, Department of ELT, 99138, Mersin 10, Turkey, North Cyprus

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**ABSTRACT** Apologies are formulated when social norms are violated. The objective of this paper is to analyze the interlanguage and socio-pragmatic features of Turkish and Turkish Cypriot English as a foreign language (EFL) for learners in the speech act of apology. The interlanguage variability in the realization patterns of apologies is identified with special emphasis on the comparison between the usages of strategy types. Based on the analysis of the data gathered through a written discourse completion task, the results have revealed that the most frequently employed semantic formulae for the speech act of apology in English for all the groups are expressing regret followed by explanation and offer of repair. It is concluded that although the three groups have employed similar strategy types in apologizing, they have differed in the frequency of these strategies and that in some situations the realization patterns of apologies are influenced by the first language cultural norms.

### INTRODUCTION

Being one of the subfields of anthropology, linguistic anthropology directs attention to how speech acts are realized in various speech settings. A great deal of attention has been received by speech acts over the years. Although speech acts are universal, their usage is culture bound. Numerous cross-cultural studies have focused on EFL learners' problems concerning the usage of speech acts (Cohen and Olshtain 1981; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Koike 1989; Beebe et al. 1990; Geis 2006). More specifically, research on the use of apologies in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context indicates some similarities and differences between different cultures (Olshtain 1983; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Garcia 1989; Cohen and Olshtain 1993).

Research shows that no matter how good they are at the target language, foreign language speakers might make pragmatic mistakes, which makes way to ineffective communication (Cohen and Olshtain 1981; Blum-Kulka 1982; House 1982). These mistakes result from the cross-linguistic differences in speech act realization rules (Blum-Kulka 1984). There are also such variability types as intra-cultural or situational, cross-cultural and individual affecting these differences in speech act realization rules (Blum-Kulka 1984).

Research on Turkish native speakers' apologizing strategies indicates that they employ

highly patterned strategy types (Erden and Ozyildirim 2000; Hatipoglu 2003; Ozyildirim 2010). There is only a handful of research on Turkish English EFL learners' apologizing strategies. Istifci (2009) investigated the strategy selection of Turkish EFL learners with intermediate and advanced levels of English in using apologies. She found that the advanced level learners were closer to native speaker apology norms. However, the intermediate level learners deviated from these norms due to the fact that they transferred native Turkish speaker norms into English. Tuncel (2011) found that native speakers of English mostly preferred an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) and they were consistent in the use of basic formulas. However, they were not consistent in their speech act realizations where combinations were required. Similarly, Turkish EFL learners were not consistent in such situations, either. It was suggested that native speakers of English had a tendency for lengthy combinations. Further, it was also indicated that Turkish EFL learners transferred their first language norms into English negatively in some situations in terms of apologizing. He concluded that the possibility of negative transfer was higher in more formal and infrequent situations.

Attempting to determine the apology strategy types of teacher candidates, Bayat (2013) found that the mostly employed strategy by Turkish native speakers was *giving a reason* followed by *taking responsibility* and *expres-*

sion of regret. The results did not indicate any consistent use of apologies with undergraduate Turkish students. In terms of contrastive work, Demir and Takkac (2016) disclosed that the status and role of the situation influenced the speakers' choice of apology strategies in English.

This cross-cultural study on apology will contribute to the literature since there is not much research on socio-pragmatic studies with Turkish EFL learners. Tuncel (2011) acknowledges that in the last decade only a few studies and MA theses have been conducted in Turkey with Turkish EFL learners. To the researchers' best knowledge, the apologizing strategies utilized by Turkish Cypriots have not been investigated yet, and there is not a single study, which has analyzed the effect of distance and power variables on the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners' strategy selection in formulating apologies. In this respect, this study is unique and is expected to contribute a lot to the literature in the field of English language teaching.

### Objective of the Research

The goal of this paper was to investigate the socio-pragmatic features of Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners in the English speech act of apology. Sixty university students of the following three groups constituted the participants of this study, that is, 20 Turkish Cypriot EFL students, 20 Turkish EFL students and 20 British native speakers. The interlanguage variability in the realization patterns of apologies was identified with special emphasis on the comparison between the usages of strategy types utilized by the native speakers of English and the non-native speakers of English as well as the cultural variability between the Turkish and the Turkish Cypriot groups. The following research questions were posed:

1. How are the patterns with respect to apologies realized by the three groups?
2. In what ways do the patterns change depending on the situations specified?
3. In what ways are the realization patterns of apologies of the two EFL groups different from those of the native speakers of English?

### Significance of the Research

The findings of this research provide insights into the pragmatic mistakes of Turkish and Turk-

ish Cypriot EFL learners resulting from the influence of their mother tongue. Hence, all prospective English teachers, English teachers and EFL students can benefit from the results of this study.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Research Design

The present research was conducted with a quantitative research design and a survey methodology to collect data. The data were collected from the participants through the discourse completion task (DCT) developed by Byon (2005).

### Setting, Participants and Sampling

Twenty Turkish EFL learners, 20 Turkish Cypriot EFL learners and 20 British students participated in the study. All participants were undergraduate university students studying at the English Language and Literature, and English Language Teaching Departments in a university in North Cyprus. Hence, they have good grammatical and lexical command of both Turkish and English.

The DCT was administered in the first week of the spring semester in 2015. Convenience sampling on a voluntary basis was employed. Forty-four of the participants were female and sixteen of them were male. The age range was 20-23 years.

### Instrumentation and Data Collection

The instrument, which was the DCT, developed by Byon (2005) contained six situations to which the participants were asked to respond. The participant was a student and the hearer was a professor in the first and second situations with only the distance variable being different. In the third and fourth situations, the speakers and the hearers held equal status but the distance variable was different again. The speakers had a higher status than the hearers in situations 5 and 6 with the distance variable being different again.

Byon (2005) states that three sets of data namely, 'samples of speech act performance in the target language by L2 learners, samples performed by native speakers of the target language and samples performed by native speakers of the L1' consist of the analysis of interlanguage pragmatics studies.

In this present research, the data were gathered from the samples who were native speakers of British English, Turkish EFL learners and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners via the written DCT developed by Byon (2005). The DCT was administered to seventy-five students studying English Language and Literature and English Language Teaching at a university in North Cyprus during the last twenty minutes of their class hours. They were informed that their participation was not compulsory and that they were free to leave any time during the course of the DCT. Sixty-nine DCTs were collected. However, nine of them were incomplete, which excluded them from the study.

### Data Analysis

The data collected were through the DCT was analyzed descriptively and the apology strategies were identified. In coding data, the questions originally posed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) were utilized. Whether or not the difference in question contained an IFID, an explanation or a promise of forbearance and whether or not it expressed responsibility or an offer of repair helped the researchers in coding.

The situations in the DCT provided an opportunity to test whether or not Turkish, Turkish Cypriot and British university students felt the need to apologize in given specific situations and if so what strategies they resorted to and in what ways they differed.

When the data revealed a positive answer to any of these questions, that response was assigned to that specified category. After the analysis of the data, the semantic formula categories for the speech act of apology in English were

identified. These categories consisted of expression of regret, explanation, expression of concern, offer of repair, offer of apology, opting out, promise of forbearance, accepting the blame, expression of embarrassment and minimizing.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With regards to anthropology in general and linguistic anthropology in particular, the overall results revealed that all the three groups employed *expressing regret* as the most frequently used apology formula. As Table 1 illustrates, in terms of frequency, *expressing regret* was followed by *explanation* and *offer of repair* (Table 1). The most frequent formulas utilized by the Turkish EFL learners were *expressing regret* (38.9%), *offer of repair* (25%) and *explanation* (22.2%). The Turkish Cypriot EFL learners, on the other hand, resorted to *expressing regret* (30.4%), *explanation* (29.9%) and *offer of repair* (25.5%). As for the British students, *expressing regret* (47.6%), *explanation* (23.1%) and *offer of repair* (21.7%) were the most used formulas. It was found that the formula usage of Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners was not as frequent as that of British English native speakers and that Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners were not as verbose as British native speakers either. This finding went in line with Tuncel's (2011) finding that native English speakers were more into lengthy combinations. The finding that the British English native speakers were consistent in the use of basic formulas was also reminiscent of Tuncel's (2011) findings.

Following the overall perspective above, the analysis of the responses to each of the six apology situations were displayed.

**Table 1: The total number of formulae used in all situations**  
% (N=raw score )

	Turkish EFL students		Turkish Cypriot EFL students		British students	
Expressing regret	38.9	(70)	30.4	(56)	47.6	(103)
Explanation	22.2	(40)	29.9	(55)	23.1	(50)
Expressing concern	-		-		0.4	(1)
Offer of repair	25.0	(45)	25.5	(47)	21.7	(47)
Offer of apology	10.5	(19)	5.9	(11)	2.3	(5)
Opting out	-		4.8	(9)	0.9	(2)
Promise of forbearance	1.1	(2)	2.7	(5)	2.7	(6)
Accepting the blame	1.1	(2)	0.5	(1)	0.4	(1)
Embarrassment	-		-		0.4	(1)
Minimizing	1.1	(2)	-		-	
	100.0	(180)	100.0	(184)	100.0	(216)

**Table 2: The total number of formulae used in situation 1**  
% (N=raw score )

	Turkish EFL students	Turkish Cypriot EFL students	British students
Expressing regret	40.0 (14)	48.7 (19)	57.5 (19)
Explanation	31.4 (11)	38.4 (15)	30.3 (10)
Expressing concern	-	-	-
Offer of repair	-	-	-
Offer of apology	22.8 (8)	5.1 (2)	3.03 (1)
Opting out	-	2.5 (1)	-
Promise of forbearance	5.7 (2)	5.1 (2)	9.0 (3)
Accepting the blame	-	-	-
Embarrassment	-	-	-
Minimizing	-	-	-
	100.0 (35)	100.0 (39)	100.0 (33)

In Situation 1, there is a student as the speaker and a professor as the hearer. The hearer holds a higher social status than the speaker and the speaker does not know the professor well. Table 2 displays that *expressing regret* was the most frequently utilized formula for all the three groups. *Explanation* was the second mostly preferred formula followed by *offer of apology* and *promise of forbearance* (Table 2). The mostly occurring formulas of the Turkish EFL students were *expressing regret* (40%), *explanation* (31.4%) and *offer of apology* (22.8%). Those of the Turkish Cypriot EFL learners were *expressing regret* (48.7%), *explanation* (38.4%), *offer of apology* (5.1%) and *promise of forbearance* (5.1%). British students, on the other hand, used *expressing regret* (57.5%), *explanation* (30.3%) and *promise of forbearance* (9%). The Turkish Cypriot EFL learners were found to be closer to native speaker norms than the Turkish EFL learners were. The Turkish EFL learners' use of *offer of apology* (22.8%), which indicated a change in formula selection, suggested that the status of the hearer and the distance variable played an important role in formulating apologies. This finding was consistent with Demir and Takkac's (2016) finding.

Amongst the three groups, the Turkish Cypriot EFL learners were the most verbose. However, the Turkish EFL learners did not feel the need to say *sorry* more than once in the given context. *Sir* and *professor* were identified as the two types of openers in the data. For all the three groups, being used on 94 occasions, *sir* was the most frequently utilized opener. *Professor* was used on three occasions, one being utilized by a Turkish Cypriot student and the other two being resorted to by the British native speakers. The data collected from the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners did not reveal any self-introduc-

ing remark. The lack of this peripheral element is attributed to the result of the L1 transfer effect.

In Situation 2, the hearer holds a higher social status than the speaker again but this time the distance variable is different with the hearer being familiar. As in Situation 1, the most frequently utilized formula for all the three groups was *expressing regret* in Situation 2. The second major formula in Situation 1, which was *explanation*, was replaced by *offer of repair* in Situation 2 for all the three groups (Table 3). The data in Table 3 exhibits that the Turkish EFL learners' mostly employed formulas were *expressing regret* (44.7%) followed by *offer of repair* (36.8%), those of the Turkish Cypriots were *expressing regret* (41.1%) followed by *offer of repair* (35.2%) and those of the British learners were *expressing regret* (51.3%) followed by *offer of repair* (29.7%).

The distance variable did not seem to play a role in the usage of positive politeness strategies of all groups. Compared to distance, power seemed to be more dominant in determining the formula to be used for all groups.

In Situation 3, the speaker and the hearer are classmates. In this situation, the most frequently used formulas by the Turkish EFL learners were *offer of repair* (43.7%) and *expressing regret* (40.6%) and those of the Turkish Cypriot EFL learners were *offer of repair* (38.8%) and *expressing regret* (30.5%) as illustrated in Table 4. The Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners differed from the British native speakers in this situation. *Expressing regret* (39.4%) was still the most frequently utilized formula by the British native speakers group. However, the other two groups resorted to *offer of repair* as the most frequently utilized formula (Table 4). The finding that the British learners' selection of apology forms was highly patterned went in line with the

**Table 3: The total number of formulae used in situation 2**  
% (N=raw score )

	<i>Turkish EFL students</i>	<i>Turkish Cypriot EFL students</i>	<i>British students</i>
Expressing regret	44.7 (1)	41.1 (14)	51.3 (19)
Explanation	13.1 (5)	8.8 (3)	16.2 (6)
Expressing concern	-	-	-
Offer of repair	36.8 (14)	35.2 (12)	29.7 (11)
Offer of apology	5.2 (2)	5.8 (2)	-
Opting out	-	2.9 (1)	-
Promise of forbearance	-	5.8 (2)	2.7 (1)
Accepting the blame	-	-	-
Embarrassment	-	-	-
Minimizing	-	-	-
	100.0 (38)	100.0 (34)	100.0 (37)

**Table 4: The total number of formulae used in situation 3**  
% (N=raw score )

	<i>Turkish EFL students</i>	<i>Turkish Cypriot EFL students</i>	<i>British students</i>
Expressing regret	40.6 (13)	30.5 (11)	39.4 (15)
Explanation	6.2 (2)	19.4 (7)	21.0 (8)
Expressing concern	-	-	-
Offer of repair	43.7 (14)	38.8 (14)	31.5 (12)
Offer of apology	9.3 (3)	5.5 (2)	2.6 (1)
Opting out	-	-	-
Promise of forbearance	-	2.7 (1)	-
Accepting the blame	-	2.7 (1)	2.6 (1)
Embarrassment	-	-	2.6 (1)
Minimizing	-	-	-
	100.0 (32)	100.0 (36)	100.0 (38)

findings of previous research (Cohen and Olhstain 1981; Tuncel 2011). The lack of positive politeness strategies is ascribed to the equal status of the speaker and the hearer and to the L1 transfer effect.

In Situation 4, the speaker and the hearer have equal social power and they are close. The data in Table 5 suggest that the Turkish EFL learners employed more *explanations* (47.6%) than the other two groups did. Apart from that,

the three groups resorted to similar formulae usage, *expressing regret*, being the most often used formula usage followed by *explanation* and *offer of repair* respectively (Table 5). *Minimizing* is utilized for the first time by the Turkish EFL learners in this situation, which is again ascribed to the change in the distance variable.

In Situation 5, the speaker has more social power than the hearer and they are not familiar. All the three groups were similar in terms of the

**Table 5: The total number of formulae used in situation 4**  
% (N=raw score )

	<i>Turkish EFL students</i>	<i>Turkish Cypriot EFL students</i>	<i>British students</i>
Expressing regret	33.3 (7)	40.0 (12)	41.6 (15)
Explanation	47.6 (10)	20.0 (6)	27.7 (10)
Expressing concern	-	-	-
Offer of repair	19.0 (4)	23.3 (7)	16.6 (6)
Offer of apology	-	3.3 (1)	2.7 (1)
Opting out	-	13.3 (4)	5.5 (2)
Promise of forbearance	-	-	5.5 (2)
Accepting the blame	-	-	-
Embarrassment	-	-	-
Minimizing	9.5 (2)	-	-
	100.0 (21)	100.0 (30)	100.0 (36)

most frequently used semantic formula. As Table 6 illustrates, *expressing regret* was the most often used formula followed by *explanation*, *offer of repair* and *offer of apology*, respectively (Table 6). In this situation, the most frequently used formulas by the Turkish EFL learners were *expressing regret* (46.4%) and *explanation* (35.7%) and those of the Turkish Cypriot EFL learners were *expressing regret* (40.6%) and *explanation* (37.5%). Similarly, the British learners used *expressing regret* (51.3%) and *explanation* (35.1%). Two of the Turkish Cypriot EFL learners reported that they would not feel the need to apologize since the hearers were students and they themselves were professors. The finding that status and power played an important role in apology formulation was endorsed by the findings of previous research (Demir and Takkac 2016).

In Situation 6, the speaker has a higher social status than the hearer and they know each other. The data in Table 7 suggest that the most frequently employed formulas by the British native speakers were *expressing regret* (45.7%), *offer of repair* (42.8%), *explanation* (8.5%) and

*offer of apology* (2.8%). The other two groups differed from the British native speakers in their semantic formula usage. The most often employed formulas for the Turkish EFL learners were *offer of repair* (45.8%) in this situation followed by *expressing regret* (25%) and *offer of apology* (16.6%). The Turkish Cypriot learners utilized *offer of repair* (32.3%) in this situation followed by *expressing regret* (29.4%) and *explanation* (29.4%) (Table 7). This deviation from native speaker norms is ascribed to the L1 transfer effect. The use of *expressing regret* for the Turkish (25%) and Turkish Cypriot learners (29.4%) was the lowest in this situation when compared to the first five situations. One of the major findings of this study was that when the speaker with high social power was close to the hearer, the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL speakers resorted to *expressing regret* less. The lack of positive politeness strategies like *expressing concern* was also noteworthy. On the other hand, it should be noted that a Turkish speaker accepted the blame and a Turkish Cypriot speaker responded that since he was a professor, he did not need to say sorry.

**Table 6: The total number of formulae used in situation 5**

% (N=raw score )

	Turkish EFL students	Turkish Cypriot EFL students	British students
Expressing regret	46.4 (13)	40.6 (13)	51.3 (19)
Explanation	35.7 (10)	37.5 (12)	35.1 (13)
Expression concern	-	-	2.7 (1)
Offer of repair	7.1 (2)	9.3 (3)	8.1 (3)
Offer of apology	7.1 (2)	6.2 (2)	2.7 (1)
Opting out	-	6.2 (2)	-
Promise of forbearance	-	-	-
Accepting the blame	3.5 (1)	-	-
Embarrassment	-	-	-
Minimizing	-	-	-
	100.0 (28)	100.0 (32)	100.0 (37)

**Table 7: The total number of formulae used in situation 6**

% (N=raw score )

	Turkish EFL students	Turkish Cypriot EFL students	British students
Expressing regret	25.0 (6)	29.4 (10)	45.7 (15)
Explanation	8.3 (2)	29.4 (10)	8.5 (3)
Expressing concern	-	-	-
Offer of repair	45.8 (11)	32.3 (11)	42.8 (15)
Offer of apology	16.6 (4)	5.8 (2)	2.8 (1)
Opting out	-	2.9 (1)	-
Promise of forbearance	-	-	-
Accepting the blame	4.1 (1)	-	-
Embarrassment	-	-	-
Minimizing	-	-	-
	100.0 (24)	100.0 (34)	100.0 (35)

The finding that the most frequently employed semantic formula for the speech act of apology in English for all the groups were *expressing regret* followed by *explanation* and *offer of repair* went in line with Olshtain's (1983) argument that if the social variables and the level of offence were the same, similar apology strategies were utilized cross-linguistically. 'Sorry' was the most preferred IFID for all the groups in expressing regret. It can be suggested that the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot participants preferred to use an IFID when apologizing. This finding is reminiscent of the findings of the previous studies (Erden and Ozyildirim 2000; Hatipoglu 2003; Ozyildirim 2010) that the strategy types employed by the Turkish native speakers are highly patterned. The data also revealed that the power and distance variables were important in the employment of the semantic formula usage.

### CONCLUSION

Since little is known about the apologizing strategies utilized by Turkish EFL learners, this paper will contribute to the knowledge in the field of English language teaching, provide insights into the rules of intercultural communication and L1 transfer effect by disclosing that the strategy types employed by the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners are highly patterned. One of the major findings of the study is that the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners do not tend to intensify their apologies. The principal variable in determining the strategy type of the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL learners is the social power of the participants. The less social power the speaker has in relation to the hearer, the more likely the speaker is to apologize. Similarly, the more social power the speaker has in relation to the hearer, the less likely the speaker is to apologize. In situations where the hearer and the speaker hold equal social power, the distance variable gains importance. It is also revealed that the Turkish and the Turkish Cypriot EFL learners employ *explanations* rather than any other strategy in the situations when the speaker and the hearer are equal in terms of social status. As for positive and negative politeness strategies, the Turkish and the Turkish Cypriot EFL learners do not use positive politeness strategies much. Overall, the findings indicate that all the three groups em-

ploy similar strategy types in apologizing but they differ in the frequency of these strategies, and that in some situations the realization patterns of apologies are influenced by L1 cultural norms.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As far as teaching English as a foreign language is concerned, the norms of the Turkish language and how these norms apply to those of the English language are imperative to be investigated. Speech acts are realized in the Turkish culture and English culture in different ways. Since socio-cultural competence is an indispensable part of language learning, more studies on speech acts in general and on apologies in particular are needed with Turkish EFL learners having pre-intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced levels of English. Future research can employ an ethnographic approach to explore the apologizing strategies of Turkish EFL learners.

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