

## **Teaching Speech Acts (Apology) to Sudanese EFL Learners. A case study at Sudan University of Science and Technology – Faculty of Education – English Language Department**

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### **Abstract**

*This study is an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of the methods of teaching Apology to the Sudanese EFL learners. Two questionnaires were designed for both the Sudanese EFL teachers and learners at (Sudan University of science and Technology- College of education English department).A random sample of 60 EFL Sudanese learners participated in this study.*

*To establish the reliability of both questionnaires; the researcher has distributed the questionnaire for the same candidates twice at different times. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, a panel of six professors was consulted. The questionnaires are analyzed using SPSS computer program and the researcher has reached to the following findings: Proper methods are used to teach apology speech act to the Sudanese EFL learners; the Sudanese EFL learners managed to adapt the English language culture and use apology strategies in the right way and the Sudanese EFL learners' curriculum includes the speech acts and mainly apology strategies. The researcher recommends the following: Textbooks should include activities on speech acts, EFL teachers should be trained in a proper way, EFL teachers should use authentic materials and more studies should be conducted about the effectiveness of teaching the different speech acts such as: Promising and Thanking.*

**Key words:** Pragmatics, Speech acts, Apology strategies, EFL teaching and learning .

## INTRODUCTION

Few studies were done in the area of linguistic politeness in the Sudan that is why the researcher feels the need for this study. As a speaker of Arabic ( Sudanese dialect ) ,the researcher assume that our language does not include a great deal of polite expressions and the Sudanese are not very much considerate to the use of very polite and elegant expressions in daily life.

We might give examples of that 'language which contains respectful forms of address like sir or madam', 'language that displays certain "polite" formulaic utterances like please, thank you, excuse me or sorry', or even 'elegantly expressed language'. And again we would encounter people who consider the polite use of language as 'hypocritical', 'dishonest', 'distant', 'feelingless', etc.

To characterize polite language usage, we might resort to expressions like 'the language a person uses to avoid being too direct', or 'language which displays respect towards or consideration for others'. "Richard J. Watts, 2003, page 6"

An apology is a speech act used when the behavioral norm is broken. When an action or utterances has resulted that one or more persons perceives themselves as offended, the guilty person(s) needs to apologize. The speech act of apologizing aims at maintaining, restoring, and enhancing interpersonal relationship. According to Olshtain (1983) when an action or utterance result in the fact that one or more persons perceive themselves as offended, the culpable party(s) needs to apologize. Apologizing is polite speech act used to restore social relations following an offence. Searle (1976) further emphasizes that both parties must recognize the offense and the need for repair.

Holmes (1995) asserts apology as a speech act directed to the addressee's face needs and intended to resolve an offence

for which the speaker takes responsibility, and to restore balance between speaker and addressee. Leech (1983:104) cited in Trosborg (1995:373) defined the act of apologizing is a convivial speech act, the goal of which coincides with the social goal of maintaining harmony between speaker and hearer. In addition, Marquez-reiter (2004) declares an apology as a compensatory action for an offense committed by the speaker which has affected the hearer.

An apology serves compensatory action to an offence which the guilty person admits guilt to what he has done and asks for the speaker's forgiveness. As stated by Searle (1979) cited in Olshtain (1983), a person who apologizes for doing something wrong expresses regret for doing that. The apology act will occur only if the speaker believes that the wrong act has been performed prior to the time of speaking and that the act resulted in an infraction which affected another person who deserves an apology. (Juhana, 2011, page 3).

## **What do We Know about the Speech Act of Apologizing?**

### ***The Apology Speech Act Set***

An apology is a speech act which aims to provide support for the hearer (H) who was actually or potentially mal-affected by a violation (X) for which the speaker (S) is at least partially responsible. When apologizing, the S is willing to humiliate him/herself to some extent and to admit to fault and responsibility for X. Hence, the act of apologizing is face-saving "Elite Olshtain, Andrew Cohen, 1990, Page 46"

In recent years, teachers have been encouraged to give attention in their instruction to speech act sets that are likely to be called upon in given speech situations. Such speech act sets have been described for functions such as apologizing, complaining, requesting, complimenting, and the like. It has become increasingly clear to researchers that learners of a

language may lack even partial mastery of such speech act sets and that this lack of mastery may cause difficulties or even breakdowns in communication.

Teaching materials dealing with speech acts have for the most part been constructed largely in the absence of empirical studies to draw upon. They have relied on the curriculum writer's intuition and can best be characterized as reflecting a high level of simplicity and generality. Most of the currently popular English-foreign-Language textbooks treat speech acts such as "apology" rather simplistically. For example, emphasis is almost exclusively on the expression of an apology: *sorry, I'm sorry, I'm very sorry*, etc. Brief reference is made to other apology strategies, but without underlying principles for when to use what. No effort is made to analyze the apology speech act set into its semantic formulas i.e., the various verbal realizations of an apology "previous reference, page 45"

### ***Linguistic competence:***

Chomsky (1965) emphasized the difference between linguistic competence, the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language and performance, the actual use of language in concrete situations, he points out that "linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such gram-matically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interests, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. "(p.4)

### ***Pragmatic competence:***

Pragmatic knowledge refers to abilities for creating and interpreting discourse. It includes two areas of knowledge:

knowledge of pragmatic conventions for expressing acceptable language functions and for interpreting the illocutionary power of utterances or discourse (functional knowledge) and knowledge of sociolinguistic conventions for creating and interpreting language utterances which are appropriate in a particular context of language use (sociolinguistic knowledge). Strategic knowledge is conceived in the model as a set of metacognitive components which enable language user involvement in goal setting, assessment of communicative sources, and planning. Goal setting includes identifying a set of possible tasks, choosing one or more of them and deciding whether or not to attempt to complete them. Assessment is a means by which language use context is related to other areas of communicative language ability: topical knowledge and affective schemata. Planning involves deciding how to make use of language knowledge and other components involved in the process of language use to complete the chosen task successfully. "Bagarić V., Mihaljević Djigunović J. 2007,page 94"

### ***Communicative competence***

Dell Hymes (1972) was the first to point out that the Chomskyan notion of competence dealing with the ideal speaker-listener in a homogeneous speech community provides no place for competency for language use, i.e. The theory fails to account for the whole socio-cultural dimension. As a linguist and anthropologist, Hymes was concerned on the one hand with linguistic theory, and on the other hand with the socio-cultural aspect of language. Indeed, says Hymes, what one is inevitably concerned with is "performance" - the actual use of language in a concrete situation; its use moreover by speaker-listeners who are far from "ideal" and whose language behaviour cannot be characterised as that of any "homogeneous speech community".

### **The Importance of Pragmatics**

As Locastro (2012) mentioned improving the learners' pragmatic knowledge is as important as developing one's IT and technology skills. Both are important for the world of today. ESL/EFL teachers are on the frontlines of pragmatic development. They also had great responsibility for learners who intend to use the L2 for study or work abroad. So the teachers in particular need to pursue their own ability to think critically about language data and instances of use to prepare themselves. Their learners benefit from the explicit teaching of pragmatics by their teachers and ideally become autonomous learners, doing pragmatics to solve communication problems and pushing their competence level. According to Yined Tello Rueda (2006) pragmatic studies should consider to provide the students with linguistic tools and helping them to learn and understand the action in an appropriate way.

### **The Importance of Teaching Pragmatics**

The major problem in teaching pragmatics is the sheer number of speech acts, as Williams (1988) investigates. He explains that the large number of language functions and speech acts makes the teaching of a particular speech act an unattainable goal and instead suggests that 'the focus should ... be ... on using language in ongoing discourse, As Bardovi – Harlig (1991) mentions the real responsibility of the classroom teacher is making students more aware about existing pragmatic functions in language, especially in discourse. The teachers should know about these speech acts and their elements to use the natural input for the students in a particular content, for a particular purpose, and as part of a strategy'

According to Brock (2005,) for classroom instruction to pragmatic competence the teachers should consider the simple acronym S.U.R.E.to guide them as they help their students **See,**

**Use, Review, and Experience** pragmatics in the EFL classroom.

### **See**

*Teachers can help their students see the language in context, raise consciousness of the role of pragmatics, and explain the function pragmatics in specific communicative events.*

### **Use**

*Teachers can develop activities through which students use in contexts ( simulated and real) where they choose how they interact based on their understanding of the situation suggested by the activity.*

### **Review**

*Teachers should review, reinforce, and recycle the areas of pragmatic competence previously taught.*

### **Experience**

*Teachers can arrange for their students to experience and observe the role of pragmatics in communication)* Intercultural miscommunication is often caused when learners fall back on their L1 sociocultural norms in realizing speech acts in target language. This is referred to as pragmatic transfer. Rizk (2003) defines pragmatic transfer as “the influence of learners’ pragmatic knowledge of language and culture other than the target language on their comprehension, production and acquisition of L2 pragmatic information”. ‘Saeedeh Shokouhi & Amir Rezaei ,2015,page 103’

One way to teach pragmatics is through exposing ESL/ EFL learners to the linguistic choices of speakers of the target community. This is usually done through exposing the learners to conversational formulas and encouraging them to memorize these formulas. In a similar manner, cultural values that

underlie a communicative event can be taught through exposing ESL learners to cultural facts about the target culture, which is usually presented as a homogeneous construct. *Iryna Lenchuk and Amer Ahmed, 2013, page 85'*

### ***Cross-linguistic influences in L2 learning***

Everyday observation tells us that learners' performance in a second language is influenced by the language, or languages, that they already know. This is routinely obvious from learners' 'foreign accent', i.e. pronunciation which bears traces of the phonology of their first language. It is also obvious when learners make certain characteristic mistakes.

This kind of phenomenon in learner productions is often called by the term language transfer. But how important is the phenomenon, and what exactly is being transferred?). Behaviorist theorists viewed language transfer as an important source of error and interference in L2 learning, because L1 'habits' were so tenacious and deeply rooted. The interlanguage theorists who followed down played the influence of the L1 in L2 learning, however, because of their preoccupation with identifying creative processes at work in L2 development; they pointed out that many L2 errors could not lie traced to L1 influence, and were primarily concerned with discovering patterns and developmental sequences on this creative front.

Theorists today, as we shall see, would generally accept once more that cross-linguistic influences play an important role in L2 learning. However, we will still find widely differing views on the extent and nature of these influences. Some researchers have in fact claimed that learners with different L1s progress at somewhat different rates, and even follow different acquisitional routes, at least in some areas of the target grammar. 'Christopher N. Candlin and Neil Mercer, 2001, page 20'



### ***Internal structures and external influences***

Intersection with other cultural structures may be achieved in a variety of ways. Thus, an “external” culture in order to enter into our world must cease to be “external” to it. It must find for itself a name and a place in the language of the culture into which it seeks to insert itself. But in order to change from “alien” to “own” this external culture must, as we can see, submit to a new name in the language of the “internal” culture. The process of renaming does not take place without leaving a trace of that content which has received the new name. “Juri Lotman, 2009, page 132 ‘.

Cognitive linguist Ronald Langacker (1999) has described language as “an essential instrument and component of culture, whose reflection in linguistic structure is pervasive and quite significant”. Similarly, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999) have argued that cultural knowledge in the form of conventional images feeds into idioms based on metaphors. Moreover, complex categories are structured by experiential domains, which may be culture-specific.

These statements by influential cognitive linguistic theorists suggest that language is embedded in culture. Similarly, cognitive anthropologists have emphasized the cultural grounding of language and thought.

Language is a cultural activity and, at the same time, an instrument for organizing other cultural domains. Speakers take account of discourse situations, which are structured by culture. Paul Friedrich (1989) referred to this nexus of language and culture as *linguaculture* and Michael Agar (1994) called it *languaculture*. Language is shaped not only by special and general innate potentials, but also by physical and sociocultural experiences. It is the concurrence of language-as-culture and language-governed-by-culture that warrants an approach called *cultural linguistics*. “Farzad Sharifian Et.al, 2007, page 2”.

### **Objectives of the study:**

This paper aims at investigating the effectiveness of the teaching methodologies used in teaching Apology speech acts to the Sudanese EFL learners.

To answer this question the researcher has conducted a questionnaire for both learners and teachers of EFL at Sudan University of Science and Technology- College of Education- English Department.

### **Hypothesis of the study:**

The researcher hypothesis is that proper methods are used to teach apology speech act to the Sudanese EFL learners.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

*The researcher uses quantitative method of data collection using questionnaires as tools. Questionnaires are administered to gather more background information about the participants for both teachers and students. They are designed and distributed to EFL teachers and learners at Sudan University of Science and Technology- Education College –English department- 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year.*

### **Method**

#### ***Population of the study:***

*This study targets Sudanese EFL learners at Sudan University of Science and Technology, Faculty of education 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year. The number of the population is 105 candidates from both 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year. 55 at 3<sup>rd</sup> year students and 50 at 4<sup>th</sup> year.*

#### **The sample of the study:**

A random sample of 60 EFL Sudanese learners participated in this study in the final data collection stage. All of them are students at tertiary level in Sudan University of science and

technology- College of education 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year. 30 students from each class are randomly selected to participate voluntarily. The ages of the participants ranged from 20-24 years old of both genders.

### **The tools of the study:**

#### **a- The teacher's questionnaire**

It consists of three sections. Section one includes two parts, the first part includes four personal information questions about name, gender, age and level of education. The second part is about experience in English environment. Section two is a multiple-choice statement questionnaire. Teacher's questionnaire consists of 15 statements and five alternatives ranged between strongly agree to strongly disagree. Section three is two open-ended questions.

#### **b- Students' questionnaire**

It consists of two sections. Section one includes two parts, the first part includes four personal information questions about name, gender, age and level of education. The second part is about experience in English environment. Section two is a multiple-choice statement questionnaire. It consists of 15 statements and five alternatives ranged between strongly agree to strongly disagree.

### **The reliability of the questionnaires:**

To establish the reliability of both teacher's and student's questionnaire; the researcher has distributed the questionnaire for the same candidates twice to ensure that the same responses were gained when distributing the questionnaire at different times.

### **The validity of the questionnaires:**

A panel of six professors was consulted to judge on the face, content and constructs validity of the questionnaires. Dr. Amna Mohammed Abdalkareem Albadri (Ahfad University for women), Dr. Tag-Elsir Bashoum (Sudan University of Science and Technology), Dr. Khaliel Mohammed Ibrahim, Dr. Ahmed Alhaj Omer (Alnilien University), Dr Sami Hussien (University of the Holley Quran) and Hassan Mahil Abdallah. The amendments they recommended were made and approved by the supervisor.

### **Statistical Reliability and Validity:**

A panel of six professors was consulted to judge on the face, content and constructs validity of the questionnaires. Dr. Amna Mohammed Abdalkareem Albadri( Ahfad University for women) , Dr. Tag-Elsir Bashoum ( Sudan University of Science and Technology), Dr. Khaliel Mohammed Ibrahim, Dr. Ahmed Alhaj Omer ( Alnilien University), Dr Sami Hussien (University of the Holley Quran) and Hassan Mahil Abdallah.

The amendments they recommended were made and approved by the supervisor. The validity is counted by a number of methods, a mong them is the validity using the square root of the (reliability coefficient).

The researcher calculated the validity statistically using the following equation:

$$\text{Validity} = \sqrt{\text{Re liability}}$$

Finally, the (reliability coefficient) was calculated according to Spearman-Brown Equation as the following:

$$\text{Reliability Coefficient} = \frac{2 \times r}{1 + r}$$

r = Pearson correlation coefficient

For calculating the validity and the reliability of the questionnaire from the above equation, the researcher

distributed about (10) teachers' questionnaires and (15) student's questionnaires to respondents. In addition, depending on the answers of the pre-test sample, the above Spearman-Brown equation was used to calculate the reliability coefficient using the split-half method; the results have been showed in the following table:

**Table 1**  
**The statistical reliability and validity of the study questionnaire**

Hypotheses	Reliability	Validity
Techers	<b>0.80</b>	<b>0.89</b>
Student	<b>0.85</b>	<b>0.92</b>

We note from the results of above table that all reliability and validity coefficients for pre-test sample individuals about each questionnaire's theme, and for overall questionnaire, are greater than (50%), and some of them are nearest to one. This indicates to the high validity and reliability of the answers, so, the study questionnaires are valid and reliable, and that will give correct and acceptable statistical analysis.

### **1- Results:**

The researcher hypothesis is that proper methods are used to teach apology speech act to the Sudanese EFL learners.

### **A: The questionnaire's results:**

To test this hypothesis, we should know the trend of respondents' opinions about each question from the hypothesis's questions, and for all questions. The median is computed, which is one of the central tendency measures, that is used to describe the phenomena, and it represents the centered answer for all respondents' answers after ascending or descending order for the answers.

**Table No (2)**

**The median of respondents' answers about the questions of the first hypothesis**

No	Question	Median	Result
1	Apology is included in the Sudanese University syllabus.	4	Agree
2	The textbook or materials is suitable for the needs of your own students.	3	Not sure
3	Communicative activities such as role play, pair work and group work are used in teaching apology.	4	Agree
4	Apology exponents are presented in the context of an authentic sequence.	4	Agree
5	As a Sudanese Teacher of English you had training on teaching apology.	4	Agree
	Overall	4	Agree

From table (2), it has shown that:

- The calculated value of the median for the respondents' answers of the 1st question is (4). This value means that, most of the respondents' agree with that "apology is included in the Sudanese University syllabus".
- The calculated value of the median for the respondents' answers of the 2nd question is (3). This value means that, most of the respondents' are not sure with that "The textbook or materials is suitable for the needs of your own students".
- The calculated value of the median for the respondents' answers of the 3rd question is (4). This value means that, most of the respondents' agree with that "Communicative activities such as role play, pair work and group work are used in teaching apology".
- The calculated value of the median for the respondents' answers of the 4th question is (4). This value means that, most of the respondents' agree with that "Apology exponents are presented and practiced in the context of an authentic sequence".

- The calculated value of the median for the respondents' answers of the 5th question is (4). This value means that, most of the respondents' agree that "As a Sudanese Teacher of English you had training on teaching apology".
- The calculated value of the median for the respondents' answers about the all questions that related to the first hypothesis is (4). This value, in general, means that most of the respondents' agreed with what is mentioned about the first hypothesis.

The results above do not mean that all the respondents in the sample agree with the questions because as mentioned in the table no.(1) there are some respondents who are (not sure) from the questions.

So, to test the statistical significance of the differences among the answers of the respondents for the first hypothesis, the chi-square test is used to indicate the differences for each question.

**Table No. (3) explains the results of the test for the questions as follows:**

No	Questions	Degree of freedom	Chi-square value
1	Apology is included in the Sudanese University syllabus.	3	16.13
2	The textbook or materials is suitable for the needs of your own students.	4	22.00
3	Communicative activities such as role play, pair work and group work are used in teaching apology.	3	19.20
4	Apology exponents are presented in the context of an authentic sequence.	3	19.20
5	As a Sudanese Teacher of English you had training on teaching apology.	4	17.67

According to the table, we can demonstrate the results as follows:

- The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences between the respondents' answers in the 1<sup>st</sup> question is (16.13) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (3) and the significant value level (1%) which is (11.34).
- According to what is mentioned in table no. (3-12), this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (1%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondents who agree with that “Linguistic politeness (apology) is included in the Sudanese University syllabus”.
- The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> question is (22.00) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (2) and the significant value level (1%) which is (9.21).
- According to what is mentioned in table no (3-13), this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (1%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondents who are not sure with that “The textbook or materials is suitable for the needs of your own students”.
- The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences between the respondents' answers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> question was (19.20) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (3) and the significant value level (1%) which is (11.34). According to what is mentioned in table no.(3-14), this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (1%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondents who agree with that “Communicative activities such as role play, pair work and group work are used in teaching apology”.



- The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the 4<sup>th</sup> question was (19.20) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (3) and the significant value level (1%) which was (11.34). According to what is mentioned in table no.(3-15), this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (1%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondents who agree with that “ Apology exponents are presented and practiced in the context of an authentic sequence ”.
- The calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the 5<sup>th</sup> question was (17.67) which is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (1%) which was (13.28). According to what is mentioned in table no.(3-16), this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (1%) among the answers of the respondents, which support the respondents who agree with that “ As a Sudanese Teacher of English you had training on teaching apology”.

### **Recommendations:**

After conducting this study the researcher would like to recommend the following:

- 1- More time should be allotted to teaching pragmatics and speech acts.
- 2- Textbooks should include more activities on speech acts.
- 3- EFL teachers should be trained in a proper way to teach.
- 4- EFL teachers should use authentic materials to ensure the e
- 5- Exposure to the target language.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of the EFL teaching methodology. From the results above, we see that the first hypothesis that proper methods are used to teach apology speech act to the Sudanese EFL learners is approved. The Sudanese EFL learners managed to adapt the English language culture and use apology strategies in the right way.

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