

A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF APOLOGY IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC

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ABSTRACT

This study is dedicated to the analysis of apology in selected English and Arabic plays. The current study aims to figure out the pragmatic strategies of apology that are employed in the selected presidential plays. The study is qualitative and is based on Searle's (1969) theory of speech acts. The study comprises an investigation of two plays chosen by the researcher. The English one is entitled 'Proof, and the Arabic one is entitled Stars with Low Wages'. The major focus of data analysis will be on these two plays, which are guided by certain rules, circumstances, and themes interpreted from a pragmatic point of view. As a result of the analysis of the selected data, it has been proved that apologies are both face-threatening and self-deprecating for the speaker, and the apology strategies employed by both groups are shaped by social factors, including the status of the individuals involved. The use of illocutionary force-indicating devices, such as direct apology strategies, is quite prominent in both languages, as speakers of both believe that apologies should include this expression as an essential part, accompanied by other strategies.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Apology, Speech Acts, Plays.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a social affair through which one communicates ideas, opinions, information, beliefs, emotions, etc. It refers to sharing elements of behaviour, or modes of life, by the existence of sets of sign usage rules (Cherry, 1978). In other words, people attempt to convey a certain meaning to the interlocutors, and those, in turn, try to distinguish the speakers' significance about the context. Thus, interaction needs a deep understanding of how language is utilised from both sides: addressers and addressees. Such usage is related to the domain of pragmatics. Moreover, pragmatics is defined as the study of how language is used in communication. It also includes "a wide range of phenomena, including how language produces characteristics such as the situation of spoken word, conversational framework, and the informal work carried out when confronted with misunderstandings that are of different kinds" (Ellis, 1994, p. 27).

Crystal (2011, p. 168) defined pragmatics as "the investigation of language from the point of view of individuals, particularly about the decisions that they make, the limitations they face in using language in social interactions, and the impact that how they make use of language possesses on other people involved in the act of interaction". Furthermore, according to Fitzmaurice and Taavitsainen (2007, p. p. 30), pragmatics focuses on the contextualised use of language and uses language as a communicative tool that "responds to and is shaped by the pressures of actual situations of verbal interaction with specific communicative purposes and particular speech contexts".

Birner (2013) stated that the additional meaning is the domain of pragmatics that is concerned with analysing what someone meant by their speech in a specific context and being able to make references concerning the reason for uttering it and what intention they intend. In contrast to semantics, which is the study of literal meaning separate from context, he claims that pragmatics may be broadly characterised as the study of language usage in a situation.

1.1. The Statement of the Problem

Wherever people go, they employ language as a means of communication and use it as a currency or capital to negotiate the circumstances around them. This is because language extensively influences its recipients and can potentially empower its users (Cherry, 1978). Literature is another element present in everyday life, from our opinions to our choices. Many literary texts, particularly plays, are descended in the shape of revelations that ordinary readers and hearers cannot understand. Language users often exploit language creatively by using pragmatic aspects to affect their audiences' emotions and loyalties and reveal their ideological views.

Strauss and Feiz (2014) asserted that language could shape and reflect the actual world people live in, and it functions as a powerful tool via which people could get the help and support they need in times of struggle and conflict. Language contains different linguistic elements that can help the speakers to express their apology to their audiences to achieve certain aims. Speakers intend to exploit language to express their apology to other people and deliver certain messages that are difficult to be understood by common people (Yuzhakova & Polyakova, 2018). The characters in the English play 'Proof' and the Arabic one 'Stars with Low Wages' are believed to adopt different linguistic apology strategies via which they want to manipulate their audiences and convince them of certain implied meanings (Dyorina et al., 2024). Therefore, this study intends to explain the strategies of apology and to uncover these strategies the characters adopt in their language to present their apology.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. Identifying the forms of speech act that are used in the expressions of apology in the selected English and Arabic plays.
2. Exploring the differences between speech acts of apology in the selected English and Arabic plays.

1.3. Research Questions

This study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What are the forms of speech acts of apology that are used by the characters of the selected English and Arabic plays?
2. What are the differences between speech acts of apology in the selected English and Arabic plays?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Pragmatics

Huang (2007, p. 1) defined pragmatics as "one of the most vibrant and rapidly growing fields in linguistics and the philosophy of language". Mey (2009, p. 744), in the same vein, pointed

out that pragmatics “is concerned with meaning in the context of language use.” Yule (1996) stated that pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener.

Pragmatics can be defined as the study of meaning in interaction. As such, it takes into account all three elements of a communicative process: the participants (both speakers and hearers) and the specific context in which the meaning is to be conveyed (Al-Hilu, 2017; Al-Hilu & Al-Badri, 2024). Pragmatics has its historical roots in the philosophy of language. The philosopher Charles Morris proposed a framework for the science of signs known as semiotics, which he classified into three distinct areas of inquiry: syntax, which examined the formal relationships between signs; semantics, which investigated the connections between signs and the objects to which they refer, referred to as "referents"; and pragmatics, which examined the relationship between signs and interpreters (Yule, 1996).

Every utterance an individual speaks contains not only the literal meaning of a "word" but also an implicitly intended meaning. The context in which a speaker speaks extensively influences the intended meaning of what they say. In this case, each speaker or listener may apply a unique interpretation. Thus, it is essential for language usage. The field of pragmatics investigates how individuals utilise language to convey their intentions or employ its potential for meaning as a means of communication (Yule, 1996). Pragmatics examines the expression in a real-life conversation within a particular setting to convey the intended message of communication, given that individuals may be unaware of its meaning. Consequently, to communicate effectively and correctly with other language users, it is necessary to acquire knowledge of the pragmatic aspects of an utterance, such as speech acts, implicature, and presupposition.

2.2. Speech Acts

According to Crystal (2011), the term "speech act" refers to a theory that examines the function of expressions in speakers' and listeners' interpersonal communication behaviour. Although Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) later gave it a more linguistic slant, the historical tracers of this theory assert that the German philosopher Wittgenstein originally developed it. In his widely known book, Austin (1962) begins by defining two types of utterances: constatives, which he prefers to call statements, and performatives, which he refers to as another category.

Speech acts are now more systematically divided into two categories by Searle (1969): direct and indirect. According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985), a direct speech act is one in which the structure matches the function, i.e., a sentence, an interrogative, an imperative, and an exclamative topic, or, more precisely, a statement, a question, an order, and an exclamation. A statement that contains the illocutionary indicators for one type of illocutionary act may also be pronounced to conduct another type of illocutionary deed, according to Searle (1975), to get indirect speech acts. As a result, utterances with two illocutionary forces are indirect speech acts; one is literal (direct), and the other is non-literal (indirect).

The following speech acts are categorised by Searle (1969):

1. Representatives are behaviours that are evaluated according to the truth that they represent. Assume, derive, etc. are some examples.
2. Directives are actions that the speaker uses when he or she wants the audience to do something. Verbs that fit this category of speech act include "command, order, pray, allow, and advise".
3. Commissives are actions that the speaker pledges to take in the future. This category includes vows, threats, proposals, rejections, etc. (Huang, 2007).

4. Expressives are behaviours that convey the speaker's emotional state. Examples include saying "thank you, sorry, congrats, and other similar expressions (Searle, 1969).

5. Declaratives are activities that the speaker does to convey information between speech and fact, according to Searle (1969). Examples of speech acts falling under this category include nominating a candidate, terminating employees, and declaring war (Huang, 2007).

2.3. Implicatures

Mey (2001, p. 45) stated that "the word 'implicature' is derived from the verb 'to imply', as is its cognate 'implication'; etymologically, 'to imply' means to fold something into something else; hence, that which is implied is 'folded in', and has to be 'unfolded' in order to be understood." In Grice's sense, speakers reflect what is said mainly by means of the conventional meaning of the sentence they say (Grice, 1978). Grice distinguished between implicating and saying, but he did not elaborate much about how to arrive at what is said.

Implicature is a part of the speaker's meaning that denotes an aspect of the speaker's intention of utterance, independent of the content of the speech. The intended meaning of a speaker is often significantly more profound than the literal expression; linguistic meaning significantly underestimates the message that is actually conveyed and comprehended (Horn & Ward, 2006). Grice (1975) defines two significant types of implicature:

2.3.1. Conventional Implicature

Levinson (1983) defines Conventional implicatures are non-truth-dependent inferences that are conventionally associated with specific words or phrases; they do not depend on more sophisticated pragmatic principles like maxims. Grice presents a mere two examples. The word "but" has a conventional implicature that denotes a distinction between the conjuncts, in addition to an equivalent truth-conditional (or truth-functional) meaning to "and".

2.3.2. Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicature, as proposed by Grice (1975), tries to account for inference patterns in natural language that challenge comprehensive explanation through formal logical devices. On an additional level, Grice differentiated conversational implicature into different kinds: generalised implications emerge spontaneously, free of any specific context or unique scenario. Grice provides the following illustration: For example, whenever I say I walked into a house, I'm going to be implicated because the house was not my house; thus, a generalised conversational implicature appears to result from the presumption that the topic in question is not closely associated with the speaker. Further particularised implicatures require such a unique context (Levinson, 1983).

2.5. Definition of Apology

Apologies have been characterised from a variety of perspectives. According to some linguists, it's a kind of corrective measure. According to Olshtain (1983, p. 235), an apology requires an action or statement meant to make amends. Apology and a sense of responsibility are linked by certain linguists. According to Holmes (1995, p. 155), offering an apology is a speech act meant to atone for the offence for which the apologisee accepts responsibility. As a result, social interactions between interlocutors are rebalanced.

Many researchers and linguists define apology as an expression of regret. Fraser (1981) argues that apologising is at least taking responsibility for the infraction. However, relating an apology to taking responsibility appears doubtful, as people sometimes apologise for bad weather, as in England, or for other acts. Additionally, saying "I'm sorry" when hearing the news of someone's death does not imply taking responsibility for that death. Accordingly, the idea of defining apology as an expression of regret looks, to a certain extent, arguable. Many linguists think that apologies are not always an expression of regret. Thomas (1995, p. 100) claims that the Searlian rules, which Searle (1969) demonstrated that they control the performance of talking, cannot be applied to an example like: "I'm sorry, I broke your nose."

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative, where the researcher intends to investigate the language of presidential speeches on the recent events in the Mid-East. It describes the pragmatic strategies used in the language of presidential speeches on the recent events in the Mid-East. The researcher employs a qualitative approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation rather than merely connections between variables (Moleong, 2009).

Data collection is defined by Wang (2006) as the process by which the researcher extracts valid information from extensive data. Researchers employ specific methodologies to collect and analyse data. The researcher must use analytical reasoning, enquire about relevant aspects of the data to gain comprehension, and finally conduct comparisons among the data items to identify those related to the study. Lincoln and Denzin (2000) assert that qualitative research enables investigators to examine phenomena in their authentic environments while attempting to comprehend or analyse them from the perspective of the meanings that individuals associate with them. The study comprises an investigation of two plays chosen by the researcher. The English one is entitled 'Proof', and the Arabic one is entitled 'Stars with Low Wages'. The major focus of data analysis will be on these two plays, which are guided by certain rules, circumstances, and themes interpreted from a pragmatic point of view. The selected data have been analysed according to Searle's (1969) theory of speech acts.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Analysis of Apology in English

Extract (1)

"Claire: Mitch says Hi."

"Catherine: Hi Mitch."

"Claire: He's really sorry he couldn't come."

In this extract, Claire tells Catherine about her difficult past, and she mentions that the man she plans to marry, "Mitch", inquires about Catherine and apologises for being unable to attend their father Robert's, burial. Claire uses an intensifier and the word "sorry" to apologise on Mitch's behalf to her sister for being unable to attend the funeral. She communicates Mitch's sincere apologies to her sister.

Extract (2)

"Claire: I'm sorry, I just ... The book was in the... You told him where to find it ... You gave him the key... You wrote this incredible thing, and you didn't tell anyone?"

"Catherine: I'm telling you both now. It was hard, but I did it. "

"Claire: Catherine, I'm sorry, but I just find this very hard to believe. "

"Catherine: Claire. I wrote. The proof."

"Claire: I'm sorry."

The conversation between Claire and Catherine provides another illustration of this tactic. Claire apologises to her sister because she doesn't think Catherine wrote this challenging mathematical proof, and the fact that the book was in their father's drawer and that only a genius like their father could write such a proof makes her suspicious. Claire makes a concerted effort to believe that her sister can write such a proof, but she is unable to do so, so she repeats "sorry" to show her regret.

Extract (3)

"Claire: Catherine, I'm sorry, but I just find this very hard to believe. "

"Catherine: Claire. I wrote. The proof."

Claire reveals in this chat why she doesn't think her sibling is real. It is impossible to write a book as amazing as this one, she claims. She therefore reveals her attitude toward Catherine and apologises to her. "I just find this very hard to believe" is Claire's excuse for not believing Catherine, which she uses in addition to her apologies since she feels bad for her. She justifies her circumstances by using this explanation as an implicit apology.

Extract (4)

"Catherine: I shouldn't have called the police."

"Hal: It was my fault."

One instance of overt self-blame is in the dialogue that Hal performs with Catherine. Hal admits to Catherine that he was the one who made the error. He accuses himself of causing Catherine to contact the police after he stole one of her father's manuscripts. "It was my fault" is Hal's overt manner of expressing his sorrow. He apologises for his actions by acknowledging his guilt in front of Catherine.

Extract (5)

"Claire: Why'd you do it? You know what she's like. She's fragile, and you took advantage of her. "

"Hal: No. It's what we both wanted. I didn't mean to hurt her. "

Hal's behaviour with Claire is an example of lack of intent. In this exchange, Claire fears for her sister and believes Hal takes advantage of her. He responds that since they both feel something for one another, he doesn't want to hurt her. There is an indirect apology in this exchange, which is an absence of intent; that is, the speaker does not aim to hurt the hearer with his deed. "I didn't mean to hurt her" is Hal's attempt to defend his treatment of Catherine in front of her sister Claire.

4.2. Analysis of Apology in Arabic**Extract (1)**

"الأستاذ فتحي: أنا أسف يا جماعة، فالحق ليس عليّ، بل على آلة التصوير والكهرباء."

"Mr. Fathi: Sorry folks, it is not my fault, it's the camera & electricity."

In this interaction, Mr. Fathi apologizes to his acting team for arriving late. He wants to copy some papers for them, but the machine unexpectedly stops, so he is late for his meeting with the team. Here, he uses the term "Sorry folks" to show his great remorse for arriving late for them.

Extract (2)

"عبد الغفار : وهكذا فإننا نخالف مع الكاتب في أن نصه سلمي تماماً ولا يمكن قبوله (يضع التقرير جانباً)، أنا أسف أستاذ."

"بهجت : شكراً يا أستاذ على تلاوتك للتقرير."

"Abdul-Ghaffar: Thus we disagree with the author that his text is rather negative and it cannot be accepted (he puts the report aside), I am sorry, Sir."

"Bahjat: Thank you teacher for reciting the report."

In this extract, Bahjat meets with Abdul-Ghaffar to see whether they approve his script. Abdul-Ghaffar informs him that their theatrical advisor did not agree on his script. Following that, he apologises to him for refusing it. Abdul-Ghaffar conveys his regret directly with the remark, "I am sorry, Sir". He attempts to mitigate the impact of the unpleasant news on Mr. Bahjat by employing one of the illocutionary force signalling gadgets.

Extract (3)

"الأستاذ فتحي: لقد وعدتكم أن أوزع عليكم المقال الذي ترجمه الدكتور سامح حول المسرح الياباني، وبالفعل ذهبت إلى المكتبة قبل ساعتين.. إلا أن الآلة تسخن بعد تصوير عشرين ورقة ويجب أن تترتاح بعدها ربع ساعة، والكهرباء أيضاً أرادت أن تترتاح نصف ساعة."

"Mr. Fathi: I've promised you to distribute the article on you, the one Dr. Samih had translated about the Japanese theatre, and indeed I went to the library two hours ago... but the machine gets hot after working on 20 papers, and it must have rest, and the same situation with the electricity; it also wants to have half an hour's rest."

Mr. Fathi's speech to his group serves as an illustration of an explanation or narrative. Since he is late for their appointment, Mr. Fathi tries to justify his tardiness. Mr. Fathi provides his parents with a clear justification for his delay. By providing this lengthy explanation, he indirectly apologises to them by adding, "But the machine gets hot after working on 20 papers, and it must have rest, and the same situation with the electricity; it also wanted to have half an hour's rest."

Extract (4)

"عبد الغفار: اتصل بالجميع الصغير والكبير.. شكراً.. إلى اللقاء. (يضع السماعة يلتفت إلى الضيفين) أنا أسف ولكن كما تلاحظون، فإن القضية مستعجلة ومهمة جداً.. بعدما اتفقنا مع الممثل، اكتشفنا أنه متفق مع ثلاثة مخرجين في وقت واحد."

"Abdul-Ghaffar: Call everyone: the young and the adults... thank you... bye bye. (He puts the speaker back and turns towards the two guests.) I am sorry, but as you can see, the case is extremely urgent and important... after we had agreed with the actor, we discovered she had already dealt with three directors at the same time."

In this extract, Abdul-Ghaffar spends the whole time talking to Mr. Fawzi, leaving his visitors waiting. After that, he hangs up and apologises for leaving them waiting. Mr. Abdul-Ghaffar defends his approach toward them by adding, "But as you can see. The situation is really urgent and serious..." He provides a clear description to help explain the problem.

Extract (5)

"عبد الغفار : نحن نتعامل مع السوق.. والسوق له قوانينه يأستاذ إبراهيم. أنت صديق قديم وتعرف هذا الأمر جيداً، وأرجو أن تشرحه للأخ بهجت."

"Abdul-Ghaffar: We deal with the market... and the market has got its laws Mr. Ibrahim. You've been an old friend and aware of this fact, so if you please explain to Mr. Bahjat this matter."

For the hearer, Abdul-Ghaffar's performance of the excerpt for Ibrahim serves as an illustration of worry. A protracted dispute between Ibrahim, Bahjat, and Mr. Abdul-Ghaffar ensues after Mr. Bahgat's script is rejected. Abdul-Ghaffar then makes an effort to diffuse the conflict by apologising to Ibrahim and Bahjat and providing explanations. In this excerpt, Abdul-Ghaffar tells his friend about what happened and demands that he inform Bahjat about the issue.

6. CONCLUSION

After analysing the selected data, it can be concluded that the English and Arabs differ in how they apply apology strategies based on their pragmatic views. Generally, English speakers accept and trust individuals who apologise for any wrongdoing, often acknowledging their mistakes. In contrast, Arabs often provide detailed explanations instead. Both language speakers, particularly Arabs, strive to maintain their positive image by avoiding certain apology strategies, such as promises of forbearance, which can be highly damaging to the offender's face. Apologies are both face-threatening and self-deprecating for the speaker, and the apology strategies employed by both groups are shaped by social factors, including the status of the individuals involved. The use of illocutionary force-indicating devices, such as direct apology strategies, is quite prominent in both languages, as speakers of both believe that apologies should include this expression as an essential part, accompanied by other strategies.

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