

Tanulmány

Christina Hodeib

Apology Strategies in Syrian Arabic

Abstract

This paper investigates apology strategies by native speakers of Syrian Arabic. Forty-five university students participated in the study, which was conducted using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The data were analyzed within the framework of Olshtain and Cohen (1983). The results show that the apology strategies used by the participants conform to the suggested universality of apologies. Moreover, the data include strategies that are language and culture-specific such as the use of God's name and the use of proverbs and folk expressions either to magnify the apology or to blame the other participant. As far as the influence of social factors on the use of the strategies is concerned, Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) are used most frequently in relation to the age factor: when the addressee is older than the apologizer. The status of the addressee has also proved to be important in the use of IFIDs. More IFIDs are used when the addressee is of higher status, but when the social distance is low and the status is equal, IFIDs appear with lower frequency. Repairs are used, as predicted, in situations containing physical and emotional damage. The design of the DCT seems to motivate the occurrence of non-apology strategies.

Keywords: speech acts, apologies, Syrian Arabic, social distance, status.

1 Introduction

Ever since the introduction of Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969), credited as the first systematic study of language use, research on speech acts has dominated cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics (Ogiermann 2009). Scholars have largely focused on the production strategies and the internal linguistic structure of these strategies, with reference to social factors, politeness considerations, and the role of culture in the production of speech acts such as requests (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984; Ogiermann 2009; Ruzickova 2007; Rinnert & Kobayashi 1999), offers (Curl 2006; Grainger, Kerkam, Mansor & Mills 2015; Koutlaki 2002), invitations and invitation declining (Al-Khatib 2006; Bella 2009; Félix-Brasdefer 2006; Garcia 2009), and compliments and compliment responses (Golato 2002; Jucker 2009; Tang & Zhang 2009). Gass and Neu (1996) state that the notion of performing actions with words is a fundamental function of language and that the realization of different speech acts is culture-specific, despite the universality of the categories of speech acts. Such differences may lead to miscommunication and to the misinterpretation of both the act and the intentions of the performer of the act.

According to Wierzbicka (1985: 145), research on speech acts has “suffered from astonishing ethnocentrism” in its sole focus on western languages, mainly English. She maintains that the close-knit connection between language and culture goes beyond the limits of languages and into regional and social varieties. Thus, the study of speech acts is an area of

investigation in which the mutual influences of language, society, and culture can clearly be observed.

Among the speech acts investigated, apologies remain one of the most popular and most widely researched because of their social role in maintaining harmony. Cross-linguistically, apologies have been studied in native and non-native speaker use in languages such as Hebrew and English (Cohen & Olshtain 1981), New Zealand English (Holmes 1989), English, Hungarian, and Polish (Suszczyńska 1999), Persian (Shariati & Chamani 2010), Norwegian (Awedyk 2011), and Tunisian Arabic (Jebahi 2011), among others. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) recognize the failure of classical speech act theory in classifying speech acts just by looking at the performative verb: in the original formation of speech act theory, certain verbs not only serve to have things said but also to have things done. Such verbs are called performative verbs, and their presence is a marker that a sentence is a performative one. The performative verb names the speech act being performed, for example, “I request,” “I thank,” and “I apologize” for the speech acts of requesting, thanking, and apologizing respectively (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). However, in many cases a speech act is performed without the overt or covert presence of a performative verb. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) also point out that speech act theory does not provide us with a definition of what a speech act is, in terms of structure. Thus, they suggest that the notion of speech acts be expanded to include speech-act sets, which encompass all the potential realizations of a speech act in relation to speech events and specific social factors. Olshtain and Cohen’s aim is to establish a speech-act set that contains all the possible utterances and semantic formulas that make up a speech act. Olshtain and Cohen (1983: 22) claim that the basic categories for apologies may be universal, but “the number of subformulas and their appropriateness to discourse situations would vary, however, from language to language.” Indeed, many studies which adopted this taxonomy prove that it has a measure of universality but also revealed that there are language-specific properties (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan 2016).

My study attempts to build on the existing literature by investigating apology strategies in Syrian Arabic, which, to my knowledge, has not been studied before. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the apology strategies used by native speakers of Syrian Arabic? And how can these be related to the social factors of status, social distance, age, and the degree of the offense?
2. How much do the strategies conform to the suggested universality of apology strategies?
3. Are there any language-specific features in the strategies?

In Section 2, I give a detailed description of the theoretical framework of the paper as well as an overview of the literature on apologies in European languages and in other languages such as Persian and Arabic dialects. In Section 3 I explain the data-collection method and the procedures for obtaining the data, followed by an analysis and discussion of the results in Sections 4 and 5. The study concludes with a general discussion of the use of different apology strategies as influenced by social factors such as age, status, distance, and the seriousness of the offense in Section 6.

2 Literature Review

Researchers have taken different approaches to the study of apologies. Meier (1998) explains that apology studies have been influenced by social psychology, on one hand, and socio-pragmatics, on the other hand. The difference between the two fields lies in how each views

apologies, whereas the position of social psychology studies is that apologies are speaker-oriented, linguistic studies view them as hearer-oriented.

The definitions suggested for apologies by linguists reflect the above-mentioned orientation, and all have in common the underlying assumption that apologies are intended to set problems right (Olshtain & Cohen 1983). For example, Holmes (1990) stresses the affective function of apologies as primarily social acts performed to maintain social relationships. She also argues for a polite dimension to apologies based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) treatment of apologies as politeness strategies attending to the hearer's face needs. However, Holmes (1990) concedes that apologies in most cases also serve the speaker's benefit, as rational and effective communicative behavior. Similarly, Bergman and Kasper (1993) define apologies based on Goffman's (1971) conception of them as remedial interchanges that seek to change what has been considered as a deviant act into an acceptable one. Finally, Trosborg (1987) argues that any definition of apologies as face-saving strategies must take both speaker and hearer face wants into consideration.

Whatever position is taken, apologies inherently involve multiple participants-at-talk, and therefore, have many syntactic and semantic manifestations. In line with the complexities of this speech act, different apology taxonomies were devised such as Fraser's (1981), Owen's (1983), and Trosborg's (1987). In their study of the sociocultural competence of Hebrew non-native speakers of English, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) used Fraser's taxonomy (1981) to classify their data. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) modified this taxonomy to include five main strategies and a number of sub-strategies. One of the most widely used taxonomies, moreover, is Blum-kulka and Olshtain's taxonomy (1984). The latter taxonomy overlaps considerably with Olshtain and Cohen's taxonomy (1983), which is adopted for data analysis in this study. Both taxonomies are going to be discussed in detail in the next two sections.

2.1 Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) apology strategies

This taxonomy, as mentioned in the previous section, is a modification of Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) taxonomy. I adopt this taxonomy because it provides discrete apology and non-apology strategies and attempts to account for the use of different strategies in relation to multiple social factors, to be discussed below. The taxonomy, thus, allows for a more principled analysis of my data and helps reveal both universal and language-specific strategies. This modified taxonomy, as Olshtain and Cohen (1983) claim, is the result of empirical data obtained from a series of studies. Namely, based on data from Ford's (1981) study on apologies in English and Spanish, the strategy of accounts or explanations was promoted to a separate category in the (1983) taxonomy, whereas in Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) taxonomy it is a sub-strategy of "an expression of apology". Olshtain and Cohen (1983) also add "expressing lack of intent" as a sub-category of "acknowledgment of responsibility" based on Ford's (1981) observation (cited in Olshtain & Cohen 1983: 29). Moreover, Ogiermann (2009) commends the productivity of this taxonomy and its successful application to a large number of languages suggesting not only the validity of the apology categories but their potential universality (Ogiermann 2009: 56-57). Indeed, this taxonomy and various modifications to it have been used in investigating apologies in New Zealand English (Holmes 1989; 1990), a number of Arabic dialects (Ghawi 1993), Arab learners of English (Al-Zumor 2011), and Persian (Shariati & Chamani 2010).

According to Olshtain and Cohen (1983), in any apology situation, at least two people participate and an offense is observed. When the offender acknowledges the offense and takes

action to remedy it, the following apology strategies and sub-strategies, as shown in Table 1, may be used.

<p>1. An expression of an apology (IFID)¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. An expression of regret, e.g. “I’m sorry.” b. An offer of apology, e.g. “I apologize.” c. A request for forgiveness “excuse me.”
<p>2. An explanation or account of the situation</p> <p>e.g. “it’s rush hour and the bus was late again.”</p>
<p>3. Acknowledgment of responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Accepting the blame, e.g. “it’s my fault.” b. Expressing self-deficiency, e.g. “I was confused.” c. Recognizing the other person as deserving apology, e.g. “you’re right.” d. Expressing lack of intent e.g. “I didn’t mean it.”
<p>4. An offer of repair, e.g. “I’ll buy you another one.”</p>
<p>5. A promise of forbearance, e.g. “this won’t happen again.”</p>

Table 1. Apology strategies according to Olshtain and Cohen (1983)

The use of one of these strategies will mostly be enough for the linguistic realization of the speech act of apology, but usually multiple strategies will also be used as an intensification of the apology. As shown in Table 2, however, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) note that there are cases in which the offender does not recognize the need to apologize and may choose to ignore the event by not saying anything or resorting to a set of strategies.

<p>1. A denial of the need to apologize</p> <p>e.g. “there was no need for you to get insulted.”</p>
<p>2. A denial of responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Not accepting the blame, e.g. “it wasn’t my fault.” b. Blaming the other participant for bringing the offense of him/herself, e.g. “why didn’t you remind me?”

Table 2. Non-apologies (when the offender does not recognize the need to apologize)

¹ The term IFID first appeared in Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), who adopt it from Searle (1969).

The choice of an appropriate strategy is sensitive to social factors such as the relative status of the participants, social distance, and the degree of the offense. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) note that a more severe offense may result in a more intense apology, marked by the use of intensifying adverbs. Similarly, people of higher status are more likely to receive more intense apologies. In a study aimed at assessing the nature and extent of the gap between native and non-native performance of apologies, Cohen, Olshtain & Rosenstein (1986) report that native and non-native speakers of English use different apologetic strategies in relation to the familiarity of the address: native speakers apologize more intensely to strangers than to a friend, unlike non-native speakers. They conclude that different behaviors may reflect different cultural assessments of social relationships. Meier (1998), however, in her survey of the literature on apologies notes that these studies give conflicting conclusions as to the influence of the degree of offense on the type of apology. She notes that some studies report a connection between elaborate apologies and severe offenses. Others find that speakers do not apologize at all in more serious offenses, and a third group concludes that more severe offenses give rise to less formulaic apologies. As far as social distance is concerned, the results of the studies show two opposing trends; whereas the first claims that closer relationships result in less intensified apologies, the second shows that with lower social distance, lengthier apologies are used. The studies are more consistent in accounting for the role of status in apology strategies. Generally, these studies show evidence that the higher status of the addressee elicits more apologies and more elaborate strategies from the lower-status offender (Meier 1998: 219-220).

An important point needs to be made here. In this taxonomy, Olshtain and Cohen are unclear about how non-apology strategies (in Table 2) are related to apology strategies. This problem is further illustrated in a subsequent paper by Cohen et al. (1986), who categorize utterances in which the participants do not apologize at all as an absence of a strategy or a no apology and the strategies of denying the responsibility and blaming the other as strategies modifying the five basic strategies.

A related and equally important issue, which has attracted much criticism, is the issue of the criteria on which the categories of classification are based. Olshtain and Cohen's criteria are mainly semantic; the criteria are an expression of regret and an acknowledgment of responsibility, and the apology speech act set must contain formulas and strategies that meet these criteria (Olshtain & Cohen 1989).

Meier (1998) criticizes apology taxonomies, whether based on social psychology studies or linguistic pragmatics studies, for the lack of justifications for the classification of the respective categories in each taxonomy. The focal point in her critique is that each category either has different sets of sub-strategies or has different labels for the same strategy, with the inevitable pitfall of low credibility and the possibility of cross-cultural comparisons based on the results of these studies rendered difficult or impossible, which goes against the shared goal of these studies of establishing universal and language-specific sets of apology strategies (Meier 1998). In the next section, I introduce Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) influential taxonomy, which adds to the (1983) taxonomy but still falls short of addressing and overcoming the issues reviewed by Meier (1998).

2.2 *Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) taxonomy*

The taxonomy is proposed as a coding scheme for the different studies under the project CCSARP, which as I already mentioned, aims to capture universal and language-specific strategies for the apology and request speech acts across many languages. Blum-Kulka and

Olshtain (1984) admit that coding poses a serious challenge to this project as they can only suggest a skeleton of basic categories and sub-categories that are subject to change as new data from different languages are analyzed. The scheme presented in their paper consists of the same basic categories found in Olshtain and Cohen (1983), but the (1984) taxonomy supersedes this one in that it accommodates intensifications. It also expands the categories and provides more fine-grained units of analysis, as I will show below.

According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), an apology is a post-event speech act intended to address a violation of a social norm. For this to happen and the apology to materialize, S must be aware of three conditions: (a) S committed an offense (X), (b) X is recognized as a breach of a social norm by S, H, or a third party, and (c) X is perceived by at least one of the parties to have offended or harmed H in some way. The linguistic realization of the apology can involve a single strategy or a combination of two strategy types: the most direct form using an IFID or the use of an utterance that makes reference to a closed set of propositions related to the three conditions mentioned earlier. The strategies, along with the sub-categories, are listed in Table 3 below.

<p>1. Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID/using a performative verb):</p> <p>a. (be) sorry, e.g. "I'm sorry that I am so late." b. excuse, e.g. "Excuse me for being late again." c. apologize, e.g. "I apologize for coming late to the meeting." d. forgive, e.g. "Forgive me for coming late." e. regret, e.g. "I regret that I can't help you." f. pardon, e.g. "Pardon me for interrupting."</p>
<p>2. Taking on responsibility:</p> <p>a. S expresses trait of self-deficiency (thus accepting responsibility, e.g. "I'm so forgetful." b. Explicit self-blame, e.g. "It's my fault/mistake." c. Denial of fault (rejecting the need to apologize), e.g. "it's not my fault that it fell down."</p>
<p>3. Explanation or account of cause:</p> <p>a. explicit, e.g. "The bus was late." b. implicit, e.g. "Traffic is always heavy in the morning."</p>
<p>4. Offer of repair:</p> <p>a. specified, e.g. "I'll pay for the damage." b. unspecified, e.g. "I'll see what I can do."</p>
<p>5. Promise of forbearance:</p> <p>e.g. "this won't happen again."</p>

Table 3. Apology strategies according to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984)

It should become clear in presenting the (1983) and the (1984) taxonomies that both have complementary merits: where one fails the other seems to make up for that failure. For example, whereas Olshtain and Cohen (1983) do not cover a wide range of IFID sub-

strategies that might account for cross-linguistic preferences and frequencies of use, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) manage to provide a fuller list of possible linguistic choices in this basic category that seems more appropriate for cross-cultural apology studies. However, both taxonomies still cannot break free from the fundamental problems of categorization and the lack of a principled account for the proposed categories, which was discussed in detail in Section 2.1. As is already established, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) are vague concerning the nature and categorization of non-apologies. It seems that, only superficially, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) offer a solution by subsuming non-apologies under the broader category of taking on responsibility, which is not without theoretical and analytical troubles. The taxonomy fails to account for cases in which the offender admits the other's right to an apology, and yet denies responsibility for the offense by ascribing it to outer circumstances. For example, an apology might be performed as follows "you're right to be angry, but it's not my fault. The bus was late again." Admittedly, both taxonomies fail to account for such apparently contradictory utterances, but in my opinion, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) contribute the better option of handling non-apologies by not assuming a straightforward relation between denials of fault and rejecting the need to apologize, as do Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984: 207). Therefore, taking into consideration the strengths and weaknesses discussed at the outset of this section, I choose to follow the (1983) taxonomy in this work.

Although Meier suggests that a way out of the problems in the study of apologies starts with "identifying underlying cultural values and beliefs as they inform perceptions of linguistic appropriateness. [...] within a framework of social interaction" (Meier 1998: 227), the absence of a clear criterion of classification or a principled account of what constitutes a category within a taxonomy continues to be a weakness in speech act research which the extensive cross-linguistic literature has hardly been successful in addressing. I introduce this literature in the next two sub-sections which concern apology studies in non-Arabic languages and in Arabic dialects respectively.

2.3 Apology studies

One of the major comparative speech act studies is the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984). The project is a collaboration among a number of different researchers to examine whether there are pragmatic universals in the realization of apologies and requests by native and non-native speakers in a number of languages such as the American, Australian, and British varieties of English, Canadian French, Hebrew, Danish, and German. The DCT is used to collect the data in all the studies, and the data are analyzed following a unified coding scheme. One of the most important findings, concerning the realization of apologies, is the participants' overwhelming tendency to use IFIDs and expressions of responsibility in most situations, despite the language and cultural differences (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989).

Olshtain and Cohen (1990) also report the results of one of the studies in the project which compares strategy preferences in seven apology situations. They notice striking similarities in Hebrew, Canadian French, and Australian English, in that the participants use explicit apologies and expressions of responsibility with a similar range of percentages across the seven situations.

Outside the project, apologies have been investigated extensively as well. Focusing mainly on gender differences, Holmes (1989) examines apologies in New Zealand English using a corpus of 183 remedial interchanges and a categorization system that draws on several taxonomies such as Fraser (1981), Olshtain and Cohen (1983), Owen (1983), Blum-Kulka

and Olshtain (1984), and Trosborg (1987). The aim of the paper is to establish a pattern of gender-related differences that might have implications for teaching socio-communicative competence. The results of the study indicate a significant gender difference in the distribution of apologies: women apologize much more than men and are also apologized to more than men. Overall, although men and women use the same apology strategies, differences are found relating to a number of factors, such as distinct perceptions of what warrants an apology. For example, while women apologize more in situations involving a violation of the other's personal space and right to talk, men view "inconvenience which costs another time, and damage to another's possession" as more offensive (Holmes 1989: 202). The seriousness of the offense, and the power and the social distance relations with the offended are also sources of difference. The conclusion that might be drawn from the data, as Holmes (1989) argues, is that men and women evaluate the need for apologies differently.

In another study, following Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) taxonomy, Holmes (1990) investigates the range of apologies and the syntactic and semantic formulas used in a corpus of 183 remedial exchanges of naturally occurring data in New Zealand English. The analysis also accounts for the relationship between the weightiness of the offenses and the apologies. The results show that direct apology forms account for almost half of the strategies. Holmes (1990) also notes that, although combinations of strategies are common in apologies, rarely any study has been devoted to the investigation of how the different strategies combine.

Suszczynska (1999) investigates English, Hungarian, and Polish with the aim of establishing differences in terms of the linguistic forms, semantic content, and the sequential arrangement of the strategies used in the realization of the speech act of apology. As far as IFIDs are concerned, the three languages have as forms of direct apologies expressions of regret, asking for forgiveness, or "pleading to withhold anger" (Suszczynska 1999: 1058). The study is also one of the few to look at strategy orderings in strategy-sets. In English, IFIDs are followed by an expression of concern and an offer of help. In Hungarian, however, the IFID is almost always followed by an implicit acknowledgment of responsibility in the form of self-dispraise, self-deficiency, and lack of intent. These forms are then followed by expressions of concern and offers of help. The Polish data show a similarity with the Hungarian data in as far as offering help is concerned. However, in the remaining strategies, the Poles exhibit a wider range of choices than the Hungarians. All in all, Suszczynska (1999) claims that the English apology strategy-sets are more routine-like, unlike the Hungarian and the Polish apology sets, which are more diverse and cannot be said to have a generic form.

Shariati and Chamani (2010) use ethnographic observation to study apologies in Persian. Their data reveal that the most common strategy is the explicit expression of apology combined with asking for forgiveness. In terms of strategy combination patterns, the most common pattern to appear is the explicit expression of apology and the acknowledgment of responsibility.

Awedyk's (2011) study of Norwegian native speaker production of apologies suggests a routinized nature of apology strategies in Norwegian. Mainly, the study points out that IFIDs are the most common strategies, and that even in situations demanding genuine apologies, Norwegians seem to use formulaic and rather limited sets of linguistic choices.

2.4 Apology studies on Arabic dialects

In Arabic, a number of dialects have been investigated in a growing body of literature on apologies. Bataineh and Bataineh (2008) compare apology production by native Jordanian Arabic speakers and native speakers of American English. The analysis shows that although

the two groups use the same basic categories (namely, IFIDs, accounts, and reparations), they differ in how frequently they use these categories and how they combine them. The researchers note, for example, that both groups use explicit expressions of apologies but that the Jordanian group uses more instances of them combined with the use of intensifiers such as “so” and “very.” The same goes for other apology categories, which are used with higher frequencies and intensifications by the Jordanians. Bataineh and Bataineh (2008) explain that this could be due to the Jordanians’ tendency to exaggerate apologies in order to “win the victim’s sympathy” (ibid. 815). Moreover, the Jordanians use more non-apology strategies such as blaming the other to avoid having to apologize.

The study also looks at gender differences inter and intra-groups. American females use more instances of explicit apologies and fewer non-apologies than their male counterparts. The study, however, reveals sharper male/female differences in the Jordanian group. The differences appear in different percentages of the use of each strategy, different strategy preferences, and an overall tendency among the females to use fewer non-apologies. The difference is accounted for in terms of cultural differences in the ways boys and girls are raised in Jordan and in the USA: American females are raised more or less like males, which is not the case in Jordan, where girls are more socially pressurized and urged to take responsibility for their mistakes toward girls and boys alike (Bataineh & Bataineh 2008).

Nureddeen’s (2008) study of Sudanese Arabic seems to further confirm the universality of the apology as a speech act and that of the apology strategies suggested in different taxonomies. Nureddeen (2008) shows that explanations and IFIDs are the most frequently used apology strategies in her data. She also notes a language-specific dimension to apologies; the participants use various religious expressions such as hedges, fillers, or softening devices, and they use the literal term for ‘face’ in Sudanese Arabic *?el wef.f*, which has the effect of “an explicit admission of the offense or self-humbling” (ibid. 297).

Finally, in Tunisian Arabic, Jebahi (2011) lists statements of remorse and accounts as the most used strategies, and he relates their high frequency of use to situations in which the addressee is a close friend, someone of older age, or someone who can yield future-changing power over the offender. The study also shows that blaming the offended and not taking responsibility figure quite frequently in the data.

This brief review of the literature shows that despite the growth of the research on apologies in Arabic dialects, the number of studies remains relatively limited compared to the wealth of literature on western languages, which is undoubtedly the case for Syrian Arabic. Thus, as mentioned before, this study attempts to bridge this gap by analyzing Syrian Arabic data collected through a DCT. In the next section I introduce the data-collection method along with the participants and conclude the section with a presentation of the procedures for obtaining the data.

3 Methodology and Data Collection

3.1 Instrument

Different research tools are used in speech act research. They include role-plays, naturally occurring data, and recently corpus methods. Despite the wide range of data collection methods available, the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) remains one of the most popular tools in speech act research. A DCT is a subtype of written questionnaires. The basic format consists of a brief description of the situation followed by an empty slot that needs to be filled

in by the participants, in accordance with the desired speech act (Kasper & Dahl 1991). DCTs have been widely criticized for lacking the pragma-linguistic element of natural speech, and for not reflecting social situations in that important details of social relationships may be left out for the personal speculation of the participants or for ambiguity at the intended relation (Cyluk 2013). Moreover, as Ogiermann (2009) points out, participants do not write what they say but what they think they would say.

Still, the DCT has proved to be a very beneficial tool in speech act research. According to Cyluk (2013), a DCT can be used to reach a large number of participants in studies which look for some speech act that may not appear frequently in a corpus of naturally occurring data. It also allows for the investigation of a wide range of variables and the comparison of the respective effect of each variable over the production of participants. Translatability of DCTs is also useful for cross-linguistic comparisons of speech act production patterns in different languages. Above all, DCTs are invaluable when the purpose of the research is to establish speech act strategies in languages that received little to no attention or in languages which have otherwise been heavily investigated with regards to specific speech acts but not others (Ogiermann 2009). For the reasons listed above, I found the DCT to be the most appropriate method for generating base data that would allow me to come up with a preliminary taxonomy of apology strategies in Syrian Arabic, which has not been researched before.

3.2 Participants

Forty-five (33 females and 12 males) students participated in the study. The participants are all students at Al-Baath University in Homs, Syria. They all have a BA degree in English Language and Literature and are currently registered at one of two MA programs: MA in English Literature and MA in English Language Teaching (first and second year students). Only four of the students are enrolled in a Translation and Arabization diploma program. Ages range from 22 to 44.

3.3 Procedures

The data are collected using an 8-item DCT, which is a translation into Syrian Arabic of the role-play situations used in the Cohen and Olshtain (1981) study. The reason for choosing this DCT is that its reliability has been established in many studies, and that the situations are realistic. According to Cohen and Olshtain (1981), four situations are used to test the strategy of showing regret by presenting various degrees of the severity of the offense. These situations are 4, 5, 6, and 8. Situation 5, in which the addressee is a stranger, contains a rather grave offense: backing into the stranger's car and denting it. Situations 4, 6, and 8 have as the offended an elderly woman in a supermarket and the offense is bumping into her. The situations, however, represent a continuum along which the degree of the offense changes from the highest level in 4, in which the elderly woman's package is dropped and spilled and her leg is hurt, to the lowest level in 8, in which the elderly woman blocks the apologizer's way and bumping into her is unavoidable. Situation 6 is the middle ground, and the woman is only shaken up a bit.

Situations 2, 3, and 7 test the influence of social status, and the theme of the offense, which is forgetting a meeting, is held constant. The situations involve lower, higher, and equal status addressees respectively (son, boss, and friend). Situation 1, insulting a colleague at a meeting, is contrasted with situation 2 in terms of familiarity, where the context of the meeting is the

most formal and an interaction with the son is the most relaxed. In the original version of the DCT, the elderly woman situations come consecutively and so did the forgetting situations. I changed the order of the situations so that the participants won't feel bored. The English and the Arabic versions of the DCT can be found in Appendices A and B.

The DCT was administered to the participants in class over a period of two weeks for the two groups. The participants were instructed to use the language they use in everyday speech, in text messages, and in social media (Syrian Arabic). They were also told to write down whatever comes to mind without overthinking it, and that any response is a correct response. After collecting the data, I classified it according to Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) taxonomy. A second researcher (who has an MA degree in English Linguistics) did an independent classification of the data. Inter-rater reliability was 72.6% agreement across all the situations.²

In the next section, I present a detailed analysis of the data and an account for the use of the different strategies, in light of the social factors discussed above and the underlying cultural perceptions that inform the choice of the different strategies.

4 Data Analysis and Discussion

In presenting and discussing the data, I use numbers of occurrences of each strategy rather than percentages or frequencies. This method is in line with the primary goal of establishing broad categories of apology strategies and not patterns of use, which requires larger data sets.

4.1 Situation 1 (meeting/personal insult)

The data in Table 4³ indicate that as far as apology strategies are concerned, two strategies are used. IFIDs are used most frequently, alone or combined with acknowledgments of responsibility (lack of intent). In most cases, as forms of a direct expression of apology, the participants rely on the use of the performative verb *biḥtizer*⁴ 'I apologize,' the adverb *ḥafwān* 'pardon,' which is used to ask for forgiveness, and the use of *a:sef/a:sfi* for 'sorry' to express regret. The lack of intent is expressed using a variant of 'I didn't mean it' *ma: ka:n heik ḥas'de*.

However, the data show that the participants tend to deny the need to apologize and to blame the colleague for bringing the offense on him/herself in a considerable number of cases, nearly accounting for half of the responses. To do this, the participants use explanations relating to the setting, a business meeting, *niḥna bi ḥiḥtima:ḥ* 'we're at a meeting' to justify why they do not think an apology is called for. Moreover, they support their stance by saying that they are making a general point that is not directed personally at anyone. For example, one of the participants says the following *la: ḥabādān. ma:ne ḥa:s'dək bnə:b. ḥəm ḥiḥke bḥikəl ḥa:m.m* 'not at all. I don't mean you at all (I'm not talking about you). I'm speaking generally.'

² In comparison with the classification of the other rater, within a single response, only the strategies that we disagreed on were discarded with.

³ During classification, responses that had the same strategy repeated twice were counted as one instance of the strategy (e.g. if the same expression of an apology was repeated, I considered it as one instance of the strategy). This, in addition to discarding with the strategies that the other rater and I did not agree on, would explain any discrepancy in the number of responses in each table.

⁴ The in-text data from Syrian Arabic are translated literally into English. The near equivalents in English are given between brackets.

These choices make sense if we consider the following: most of the participants explain that the situation is not worthy of an apology because they attribute it to a misunderstanding, on the part of the colleague. This seems to be an effect from the data collection method as the situation specifies that the offense is an interpretation by the colleague, which means that there is a margin for this not to be meant as offensive at all by the speaker, which explains why non-apologies are used most frequently. Moreover, the influence of the formal relationship is obvious in the choice of *biʕtizer* ‘I apologize,’ which is a formal apology in Syrian Arabic. The formal relationship could also explain why IFIDs are used frequently too.

Strategy	Number of occurrence
Apologies	
IFIDs	15
Accounts	0
Acknowledgments	11
Offer of Repair	0
Promise of forbearance	0
Non-apologies	
A denial of the need to apologize	20
A denial of responsibility	1
a. Not accepting responsibility	0
b. Blaming the offended	1

Table 4

4.2 Situation 2 (child/shopping)

As can be seen in Table 5, the participants in this situation use the strategy of offering repair almost exclusively, except for the marginal cases where they use a combination of repairs and IFIDs, acknowledgments, and accounts, respectively in order of decreasing frequency of occurrence. The category of offering repairs is situation and context-dependent, as Olshtain and Cohen (1983) explain, and it is only possible and relevant in case of physical injury or other types of damage. For example, an offender can make up for a damaged book by buying the offended another copy but showing up late to a meeting cannot be compensated for. Similarly, the emotional damage that results from forgetting a meeting with the son, which is the offense in this situation, can be repaired.

The nature of the offense, then, motivates the choice of repairs as the most frequently used strategy. The participants address the damage and lessen the degree of the offense by offering repair and compensating by offering the child a better alternative, such as buying him candy or taking him to a more exciting place than the market. For example, one of the participants says *rəħ ninzəl bukra inshallah. Waʕd*, which means ‘we’re going to go tomorrow God willing. It’s a promise.’ What is interesting about this response, and other similar responses, is that it is lengthy and uses supportive moves such as ‘don’t be sad’ *la: tizʕəl* as attempts to pacify the child. Other responses include endearment terms such as *ħ əbi:be* ‘my love.’ The use of supportive moves and endearment terms is significant as 44% of the respondents use one variant or more of these expressions. The range of expressions used include what Brown and Levinson (1987: 107) categorize as the positive politeness strategy of using in-group identity markers such as *ħ əbi:be* ‘luv, sweetheart’, *ma:mə* ‘mom’, *ya: ʔibne* ‘son’, and *ba:bə* ‘daddy.’ Mom and daddy are language and culture-specific ways that parents in Syrian

families use in addressing children of all ages. Some of the participants use ‘daddy’ and ‘mom’ as a way of addressing the son as follows: *ya: ba:bə ħəʔ.ʔək ʕliy.ye* ‘daddy, it’s on me’ and *a:sfi ma:mə, elʔinsa:n ma: la:zem yinsə elwəʔd* ‘sorry mom, one should not forget a promise.’ The function of using this positive politeness strategy in this low distance environment is to assert a common ground between S and H as a way of lessening the gravity of the offense and placating the child (Brown & Levinson 1987). This way of addressing the child along with the relatively low frequency of direct apology forms is related to the parent/child dynamics in the Syrian society, on one hand, and to the age factor, on the other. It is not customary for older people to apologize directly to young children, especially when the child is a son/daughter. This behavior may be because the parents are role models, and openly admitting fault is face-threatening (Brown & Levinson 1987). This tendency of not using explicit apologetic forms to children is found in Jebahi (2011), who notes that Tunisians are not likely to apologize to children as children will get over the offense by forgetting it over time.

Strategy	Number of occurrence
Apologies	
IFIDs	11
Accounts	4
Acknowledgments	7
Offer of Repair	40
Promise of forbearance	0
Non-apologies	
A denial of the need to apologize	0
A denial of responsibility	0
a. Not accepting responsibility	0
b. Blaming the offended	0

Table 5

4.3 Situation 3 (boss/meeting)

In this situation, all the apology strategies can be found in Table 6, but the most frequently used strategies are IFIDs and accounts, which together account for 70% of the strategies. IFIDs are most frequently used with accounts ascribing the offense to unforeseen circumstances in order to alleviate it. In up to 38% of the strategies the apology is intensified exclusively through the use of adverbs internal to the IFID. In other responses, we see the use of IFIDs in combination with other strategies, which counts as intensification, according to Blum-kulka & Olshtain (1984). The most frequent adverbs in the data are *kʔi:r* ‘very’, *ʕid.dən* ‘so’, and *ʕənʕəd* ‘really.’ It may be the case that the intensification in this situation is related to the seriousness the participants assign to the offense and their assessment of the power relations with the addressee. As Brown and Levinson (1987) propose, the higher the status of the address is, the more social distance will be, which will increase the ranking of imposition of the FTA, resulting in a weightier offense, which calls for an intensified and possibly more convincing apology. The social status factor mainly accounts for the use of polite and deferential address forms, which are not only used in their normative communicative function in this context but as negative politeness facework strategies addressed to the boss’s negative face (Brown & Levinson 1987). But the polite and deferential language may also be motivated by the high social distance between the boss and the speaker. Instances of such

terms include *ʔusta:z* ‘sir’ and *ħədʔrtək* ‘your presence,’ which overtly mark the higher status of the addressee. For example, some of the participants use the verb *btuʔmər* ‘you command’ in the following context of an offering of repair: *ʃu: btuʔmər ħədʔrtək ʔana ʒa:hzi* ‘whatever your presence commands, I am ready to do.’ Moreover, in most of the IFID responses, the participants use the formal expression of apology ‘I apologize’ or a phrase embedding the word ‘apology’ as in one of the responses, which goes as follows *bitmən.nə tiʔbəl ʔiʕtiza:re* ‘I hope you’d accept my apology’.

It is interesting to note that a lot of participants use self-humiliation and shame to intensify the apology. Such responses include utterances like *ma: baʕref ʃu: ʔul.lək* ‘I don’t know what to say to you (because I’m so ashamed),’ *ʔana kti:r xəʒla:ni min.nak* ‘I am so ashamed of you,’ and *bitman.nə tʕzirne w law ʔin.ne ma: bista:hel* ‘I hope you would excuse me although I don’t deserve it.’ Expressing embarrassment and shame, although not categorized in the Olshtain and Cohen (1983) taxonomy, is counted as an instance of taking on responsibility in the Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) coding scheme in which the category of taking responsibility comprises four categories that range from explicit self-blame to refusal to acknowledge guilt (cited in Marquez Reiter 2000: 95). Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) mention that taking on responsibility is a face-threatening act to S intended to placate H. In the present data set, the strategy of expressing embarrassment and the humbling of self can only be seen in this situation, except for two other instances in the elderly woman situations (4 and 6) to be discussed below. If we accept the argument that this strategy is culture-specific (Suszczyńska 1999) and that it is inherently face-threatening, then we may assume that the participants are only willing to go that far in their apology when the addressee is in a position to negatively influence them.

The use of IFIDs and accounts in apologizing to a higher status addressee seems to be common in other Arabic Dialects. For example, Ahmad (2017) reports that in apologizing to a boss for losing important documents, native speakers of Iraqi Arabic use intensified IFIDs alone or combined with taking on responsibility. Similar to the frequent use of accounts in this study, in Sudanese Arabic, Nureddeen (2008) notes that when apologizing to a prospective boss for showing up late for a business interview, the participants use accounts in 92% of the cases.

Strategy	Number of occurrence
Apologies	
IFIDs	24
Accounts	24
Acknowledgments	7
Offer of Repair	7
Promise of forbearance	6
Non-apologies	
A denial of the need to apologize	0
A denial of responsibility	0
a. Not accepting responsibility	0
b. Blaming the offended	0

Table 6

The three situations discussed so far all aim to test the influence of social distance and status on the strategies, taking into consideration the formal/informal nature of the interaction, as is already mentioned in Section 3. I will now attempt to make a brief sketch of the influence of social distance over the choice of apology strategies and the linguistic style used in the first three situations. But before I do that, it should be taken into consideration that social distance is a rather fluid category. As Koczogh (2012) explains, in discussing social distance, different researchers use different labels to refer to the same concept or they “conceptualize the same term differently” (ibid 2012: 48). A host of social factors are used to pin down the term, such as physical, metaphorical, and geographical proximity (Bichi 2008). Trust, length of acquaintance, and the frequency of contact are also among the factors that count towards a calculation of social distance (ibid 2012: 48). However, the researcher’s task of defining the term is ridden with difficulty: Bichi (2008) distinguishes between objective social distance, as constructed by the researcher based on social organization and hierarchy, and subjective social distance, which is perceived, expressed, and undergone by people who evaluate it as the lack of relational openness to others in the social group (ibid 2008: 489). If researchers do not take both aspects of social distance into account, they would at best end up with idealistic results. Moreover, although social distance is inseparable from social status (Brown & Levinson 1987), it cannot be given fixed values with reference to definitive values on the scale of social status. In other words, one might jump to the default conclusion that a higher social status equals high social distance; this conclusion is obviously not always the case. In many of the cases, a boss might be close or a family friend. The same goes for a colleague. Bearing in mind the above limitations, in the absence of any reference to a close relationship between the interlocutors in situations 1 and 3, my discussion is based on the concept of social distance as stemming from an assessment of relationship type (friends and family vs. colleagues and acquaintances) and power differentials.

The three situations can then be contrasted in terms of social distance as follows: the first and third situations are characterized by high social distance and the second one has low social distance. As far as the influence of social distance is concerned, the observable effect overall is not so much on the choice of strategies as it is on the linguistic style adopted by the participants. The participants use IFIDs across the three situations, although much more so in Situation 3. Still, the main difference lies in the formality of the sub-categories of IFIDs chosen in situations 1 and 3 as opposed to Situation 2. Specifically, the participants rely on the strategy of offering an apology “I apologize,” which is formal in Syrian Arabic, whereas the preferred sub-type in Situation 2 is the unmarked form “sorry.” Moreover, low social distance between the interlocutors in Situation 2 prompts the use of informal address terms and positive politeness. The exact opposite is seen in the boss situation, in which negative politeness is at work through the use formal address forms. The formal language in situations 1 and 3 must, however, be explained with reference to other factors as well. In situation 1, the formal setting requires the use of formal language, and in Situation 2 the higher social status of the addressee calls for the use of deferential language and honorifics. The next four situations (4, 5, 6, and 8) aim to test the influence of the seriousness of the offense on strategy choice and linguistic style, which will be discussed in detail in the next two sub-sections.

4.4 Situations 4, 6, and 8 (elderly woman in market situations)

As mentioned before, across the three situations, the offended is an elderly well-dressed woman in a market, but the degree of the offense decreases gradually from 4 to 8, where the offense is the woman’s fault. The participants are consistent in their use of IFIDs more than

any other strategy. In Situation 4, IFIDs are combined with a lot of offers of repair, in contrast with Situations 6 and 8, in which offers of repair are negligible. Acknowledgments of responsibility, on the other hand, are also used consistently throughout. The details of strategy use can be seen for each situation in Table 7 below.

Strategy	Situation 4	Situation 6	Situation 8
Apologies			
IFIDs	39	44	36
Accounts	0	0	0
acknowledgments	17	14	5
Offers of repair	26	1	1
Promise of forbearance	0	0	0
Non-apologies			
A denial of the need to apologize	0	0	0
A denial of responsibility	0	0	0
a. Not accepting responsibility	0	0	0
b. Blaming the offended	0	0	15

Table 7

The high frequency of IFIDs and offers of repair in Situation 4 is accounted for in terms of the high severity of the offense and the fact that elderly women enjoy respect and higher status in the Syrian society. Similarly, the normalcy of the offense in Situation 6 explains why, in the majority of cases, IFIDs are used as the only strategy. However, in Situation 8, the non-apology strategy of blaming the offended is frequent, despite the presence of an explicit apology. This frequency of use could be a reaction to what looks like an unfriendly comment by the elderly woman “oh, my!” In other words, pointing out to the woman that the accident is her own fault might be caused by her reaction. For instance, one of the respondents says *tʿayyib ya reit ħadʿrtik tintibhe ʕə tʿari:ʔik mar.rə tanyie* ‘fine, wish your presence would pay more attention where you’re going next time.’

In a study, which uses the same situations as in this study to examine apologies by native speakers of English, native speakers of Arabic, and transfer effects in Arab speakers of English, Ghawi (1993) reports similar findings to the data found here. He shows that all the three groups of participants use direct forms of apologies frequently and consistently. What is of concern here, however, is the behavior of the native speakers of Arabic in Situation 8, which parallels the behavior of the present participants: one of them uses sarcasm embedded

in an acknowledgment of responsibility and another responds angrily in reaction to the woman's response to the accident (Ghawi 1993: 46). Although Ghawi's participants come from a variety of Arab countries, this unified reaction to the lady's comment seems to reveal an underlying cultural perception that it is not impolite in this circumstance to refer to the fault of the offended, even if she is an elderly woman. By appealing to this cultural perception, we can better understand the responses of the Syrian participants, who behave more or less in line with a broader Arab code of moralities and behavior.⁵

Two strategies remain constant across all three situations: the participants use a formal and respectful address term "madam" to address the woman. They also resort to apology intensification in the majority of the responses. Apologies are intensified by adverbials internal to the strategy, and/or using the strategy of showing concern for the hearer, which is considered an external intensification strategy in Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) but listed as a separate apology strategy in Trosborg (1987). For example, the participants often ask questions such as *s'arlik fei lis.sə ʕəm tu:ʒəʕik riʒlik?* 'are you okay? does your leg still hurt?' or make the following comments *ʔsude fwai w rta:ħe* "sit down a little and take a rest" and *inshallah ma: ku:n ʔəzeitik* 'I hope I didn't hurt you.' Ogiermann (2009) explains that listing concern for the hearer, whether as an apology strategy by itself or as an intensification for the main strategy, is problematic. On one hand, if they are not used with another apology strategy, expressions of concern for the hearer cannot intensify anything. On the other hand, if they are used by themselves, they might not qualify as apologies. The participants in the present data seem to show concern for the hearer as a way to further placate the offended, which is Trosborg's (1987) account of their function. Additionally, repeating the same strategy twice appears to be another intensification device. Some of the responses, for instance, are as follows *ʕəfwən, ʕəfwən* 'pardon, pardon,' *biʕtizir biʕtizir* 'I apologize, I apologize,' and *ʔa:sfi ʔa:sfi* 'sorry, sorry.'

4.5 Situation 5 (driver/car dent)

In this situation, in which the offense is severe and causes physical and economic damage to a stranger, the participants choose offers of repairs as the most frequently used strategy, followed by acknowledgments of responsibility, and IFIDs, as can be seen in Table 8. No accounts or promises of forbearance are used, and non-apologies are used only twice. Responses are characterized by using strategy sets: repairs are rarely used by themselves, and they are often accompanied by IFIDs, accepting the blame, recognizing the other as deserving an apology, or all of these strategies. If a strategy is used alone, it is often repeated or intensified by means of adverbs. For example, one of the participants acknowledges responsibility and offers a repair by saying *ħəʔək ʕliyye. xər.rəbtil.lək sy.ya:rtək w l.li bijtrat.tab ʕliyye bidʕəʕ ltsʕli:ħ etʕ.tʕeʕʒ w xeir inshallah* 'it's on me (I take responsibility). I ruined your car, and whatever I have to pay I'll pay to fix the dent. It's gonna be fine, God willing.'

Two trends are noticeable in this situation. First, the participants often use utterances that roughly translate as giving thanks to the fact that the driver is not hurt and that it is good luck that it is only physical and money-related damage. One response goes as follows *bil-ma:l w la:*

⁵ Forthright criticism can be taken very seriously by Arabs because it involves loss of dignity (Nydell 2006). The concept of dignity is ultimately related to face loss, which would explain why the participants did not find it impolite to retort in Situation 8, especially that the criticism is not warranted and it is the woman's fault. For more on culture and face, see Suszczyńska (1999).

bil-ʔəħwa:l ‘in money but not in physical conditions.’ Another respondent expresses gratitude that the driver is not hurt and that it is only damage to the car by saying *mni:ħ infadet bs.sy.ya:rə w kul.lu ħədi:d ʔel muhim.m səla:mtək w sʕəħ.ħ tək* ‘it’s a good thing it’s just the car.. it’s all iron. What’s important is your safety and health.’ The participants use these expressions as a supporting move to pacify the offended and to take away some of his anger, especially that these phrases are used in combination with offers of repairs. Moreover, a few of the participants resort to downgrading the offense by saying that ‘it’s a hollow matter’ *fəyli fa:dʕiyi* or insisting that accidents ‘happen to the best of people’ *bittʕi:r məf ʔəħsən en.na:s*. However, in this context the participants do not mean to avoid taking the responsibility as those downgraders are not used alone but with other apology strategies. Rather, in saying these things, the participants are appealing to the strong belief in destiny and fate to lessen their responsibility and invoke the understanding of the addressee. Broadly speaking, this belief in fate is expressed in people’s surrender to whatever happens as part of God’s bigger plan for everyone since creation (Brosh 2013). Thus, whatever evil happens, it is God’s will for it to happen and therefore has to be accepted as fate, which is beyond anyone’s ability to change or control.

Second, despite the high frequency of the use of typical and elaborate apologies, which suit the severity of the offense in terms of politeness, the responses contain chunks that may, had there been intonation, be indicative of hostility and tension. For example, the participants often address the driver saying *tʕaw.wel ba:lək. Leif ʕəm tʕə.iytʕ* ‘calm down. Why are you shouting?’ and *la: tsəm.miʕne sʕə:tək* ‘don’t let me hear your voice,’ among many similar responses. The use of such phrases serves as a face-saving strategy. Locally, even if it is your own fault, it is highly face-threatening to have someone shout at you (Brown & Levinson, 1987). So, by asking the offended to keep his voice down, the participants are redressing their own face-damage. It means that if both parties are not mature and rational enough, situations like this can easily turn into a scene. However, the participants seem to be aware of such a possibility, especially men, who counteract what seems like hostility by using in-group, male address terms such as the very common *ʔəxe* ‘bro.’ The face-saving strategies of telling the driver to calm down are used in the same responses along with the basic apology strategies. Thus, they do not qualify, at least in my data, as non-apologies; they are better interpreted as negative facework strategies to balance out the FTA of getting shouted at, which damages the participants’ negative face.

Strategy	Number of occurrence
Apologies	
IFIDs	19
Accounts	0
Acknowledgments	26
Offer of Repair	39
Promise of forbearance	0
Non-apologies	
A denial of the need to apologize	2
A denial of responsibility	0
a. not accepting responsibility	0
b. Blaming the offended	0

Table 8

4.6 Situation 7 (friend/get together)

As seen in Table 9 below, except for promises of forbearance, all the apology strategies are used along with five instances of non-apologies (denial of the need to apologize and blaming the other). It can be noticed that no significant differences in the instances of use exist among the strategies: offers of repair are used the most and IFIDs are the least used. Generally, the offers of repair center about the basic move of telling the friend to get ready because the offender is coming right away. In the same way, the accounts offered are almost single-themed and address the issue of forgetfulness by saying, for example, *nsi:t ?in.nu fi: bein.na mawʕed* ‘I forgot that we agreed to meet.’ Although the offense is by no means acceptable, the general lack of direct apologies is related to the close relationship and the equal status of the interlocutors. Whatever seriousness the offense has, it can be overlooked for the sake of friendship. As a collectivist culture in which social distance is low (Ogiermann 2009), the Syrian society can be described as oriented towards positive politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987). As South (2011) describes Syrians, they are people who put so much energy into personal relationships and who have little regard for personal space, physical or psychological. This orientation towards positive politeness is expressed in the data by using familiar and in-group address forms to signal closeness such as *xəy.yə* ‘bro,’ and *ħ əbi:bna ?il.lazam* ‘our closest beloved’, and *sʕəba:ya* ‘girls.’ The entitlement with which the participants seem to treat their friends, by not apologizing directly and by making excuses based on just forgetting, can then be accounted for with reference to the set of accepted behaviors associated with positive politeness societies.

Again, some of the participants resort to minimizing the offense by adding utterances such as *kəl-ʕa:di* ‘as usual,’ and *ma: btəʕrfi:ne yaʕne bdʕəl məʕlu:fi w nsya:ni ħ a:le* ‘don’t you know me, I’m always clumsy and occupied’ to the accounts they provide. These phrases have the overall effect of diminishing the offense to a predictable and normal behavior because, as friends, it should come as no offense or surprise to the offended, that the offender is always late.

Unique to this situation is the use of humor, sarcasm, and derogatory terms not just as non-apologies but as accompanying comments. For example, one of the participants pretends not to know what the friend is asking about in the previous turn “what happened?” to which the response is *fu: sʕa:r mfa:n fu:* ‘what happened with what?’ Another participant asks the friend *bəs la: tħzʕrne* ‘just don’t block me (on Facebook),’ another blames the offended for having trashy luck, and yet another admits the offense but dismisses it as intentional saying: *ma: sʕa:r fei. bəs ?əna za:blək ?əsʕdən Allah wəki:lək* ‘nothing happened, but I swear to God, I’m ignoring you on purpose as they would ignore trash.’ Brown and Levinson (1987) identify banter and sarcasm as positive politeness strategies among people who are close to each other. Accordingly, in this situation, we are justified in assuming that such expressions are positive politeness devices intended to make the friend feel better about the offense and to lighten up the mood of the offended a little by joking and banter.⁶

⁶ One of the reviewers suggested that I reinterpret banter and sarcasm from a different perspective than non-apologies, as positive politeness strategies. If that comment implies that the use of positive politeness amounts to an apologetic strategy, I will have to disagree. Watts (2003) dubs such usages of positive politeness in these contexts as politic behavior, which he claims does not equal politeness, of which apologies would be an instance. The function of positive politeness is simply to restore the balance with the interlocutor without including extra verbal payment in the form of the discrete apology categories identified in the taxonomies (Olshtain & Cohen 1983; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984).

The data in this situation are similar to what Bella (2014) reports in a study of apologies produced by native speakers of Greek and English learners of Greek as a foreign language. In that study, the participants use considerably less IFIDs than foreign learners of Greek, they use accounts based on personality characteristics of forgetfulness that “their interlocutor is supposed to be familiar with,” and use humor as an apology strategy to a friend for being late for an appointment (Bella 2014: 693). This similarity between participants of different cultural backgrounds may be indicative of a cross-cultural similarity in the assessment of the nature of social distance and its role in eliciting certain apology strategies.

The data in this section show that the basic categories of apologies as suggested by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) are all used by the participants, which seems to further consolidate universality claims. However, the responses also contain strategies that are unique to the Syrian Arabic dialect. I present these strategies in the next section.

Strategy	Number of occurrence
Apologies	
IFIDs	7
Accounts	15
Acknowledgments	12
Offer of Repair	22
Promise of forbearance	0
Non-apologies	
A denial of the need to apologize	3
A denial of responsibility	2
a. Not accepting responsibility	0
b. Blaming the offended	2

Table 9

5 Language-specific Strategies

In addition to the strategies listed above, there are a number of language-specific strategies that are uniquely related to the Syrian society in particular and to the broader context in which Arabic dialects are used, in general. Two main strategies are to be discussed:

5.1 Using God's name

This strategy is pervasive in Arabic dialects. The use of God's name has been noted by Nureddeen (2008) in Sudanese Arabic, Jebahi (2011) in Tunisian Arabic, and Ahmad (2017) in Iraqi Arabic. In the present data, using God's name figures invariably in every situation, sometimes without an obvious semantic content beyond the function of a response initiator when the name of God is used in response-initial positions as in *wəl.la sʕa:r məʕe ʃəyli*, which literally means ‘by God something came up.’ However, a general pattern of use can be seen. Most of the participants use this strategy in swearing to God in order to intensify the apology or to assert whatever claim they are making. Intensification through swearing to God is not limited to one apology strategy, but it accompanies all the basic categories such as IFIDs, accounts, expressing self-deficiency, and offers of repair. The intensification is in the form of a prepositional phrase ‘by God’ which prefaces the strategy used to perform the apology and

functions as an appeal to the addressee to accept the apology. The data in this paper abound with instances of similar usage. For instance, one participant intensifies her account of the situation in Situation 2 by swearing *bəs wəl.la dʕəytʕ ʃəyl* ‘but by God, it’s the pressure of work.’ One Syrian form of apology appears especially frequently preceded by the phrase ‘by God,’: it is a form of IFID which translates roughly as ‘don’t blame me’ or *bəl.lah ma: twa:xezne* in Syrian Arabic. This particular use in swearing to God has also been noted by Ahmad (2017), who explains that the basic formula of swearing to God in Iraqi Arabic is saying “by God.”

Another way in which the participants use God’s name is in the context of repairs and promises of forbearance, not as an intensification, but as a way of leaving the execution of future plans to the hands of God. This use appears in utterances such as *inshallah mə ʕəd titkər.rər* ‘if God is willing, it will not happen again,’ for instance, as a reflection of people’s general belief in destiny and that the best course of action is to leave things to God, who controls everything. Because using God’s name is so common in Syrian Arabic, even though it has religious connotations, its use is by no means limited to religious people and to the meaning discussed above. Everyone, including atheists, uses this particular expression “God wills” in its other meaning, which in the right contexts, has the function of deferring future plans and of evading solid commitments. Other uses of God’s name include thanking God for keeping health intact (in Situation 5), and making exclamations *ya: ʔila:he* ‘Oh my God!’

5.2 Using proverbs and folk expressions

Bataineh and Bataineh (2008) note that in Jordanian Arabic apologies, Jordanians often use proverbs and sayings to “ease their responsibility and pacify the victim” (p. 816). In the present dataset, proverbs are used differently. They are used as an-other-blaming strategy in a context that utilizes their meaning for the purpose of shifting the blame to the other. One of the proverbs is *el.li fi: ʃə:ki btinxəzu*, which roughly translates as ‘whoever has a thorn underneath will feel its prick.’ The participants use this strategy in Situation 1, in which it is used as if they were saying that the colleague is feeling that the comment was directed at him/her because of an inner feeling of inadequacy and guilt at having made a mistake that deserves criticism. Moreover, related to the use of proverbs is the use of folk expressions, which express underlying mentalities. One of these expressions, which functions as taking on responsibility, according to (Ahmad 2017), is *zrəʕə bdəʔne* ‘plant it in my beard.’ The meaning of this expression is that the offender is taking full responsibility, pleading for forgiveness, and asking the offended to let it go. Although I agree with Ahmad (2017) that the expression can be used to acknowledge responsibility, I suggest that it cannot always be classified as such. In contexts, in which a third party apologizes on behalf of the offender, it is more likely that the speaker is performing a generic apology without claiming responsibility for an offense s/he did not cause. Such a behavior is normal in collectivist societies such as the Japanese (Leech 2014). The expression in this dataset is an IFID, although, I reiterate, it cannot always be categorized as one strategy rather than the other. Further research may shed light on the nature, use, and interpretation of this fixed folk expression.

The cultural significance of “plant it in my beard’ goes way back in time when facial hair was one fundamental aspect of a man’s masculinity. Hassan Daoud, a contemporary Lebanese journalist, discusses the historical symbolism of the mustache as a marker of manhood in a Lebanese village. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the area was not yet divided into Syria and Lebanon, but the entire region was called Natural Syria. Thus, the observations Daoud makes of Lebanese men are also valid for Syrian men. He explains that “in the popular

sayings and folktales that have come down to us through the ages a man swears to another man on his moustache, a symbol of his honor and nobility” (Cohen-Mor 2018: 60). This may well indicate that the popular saying “plant it in my beard” has its roots in folklore and tradition; to “swear by the beard” is like taking an oath related to the man’s sense of honor as a part of his masculinity. Therefore, given these cultural associations, using this expression as a plea for forgiveness and as an apology strategy, especially among men, increases the sincerity of the apology making it more powerful and persuasive overall.

6 General Discussion of the Strategies

A relationship can be mapped out with respect to the use of the different strategies and the influence of the social factors of status, distance, and the severity of the offense. First, IFIDs are used most frequently in the elderly woman situations (4, 6, 8), and although, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) devised the situations with the varying degrees of severity specifically to examine expressions of regret (a sub-type of IFIDs), the data here show that their use is solely motivated by the age gap between the offended and the apologizer. The influence of age is evident in the fact that IFIDs do not appear as frequently in Situation 5, in which the offense is severe and the offended is a total stranger. However, it must be noted that the higher status of the addressee is correlated with a higher frequency of use of IFIDs (Situation 3), and, on the other hand, the low social distance and the equal status between the speaker and the addressee in Situation 7 account for the low number of occurrences of IFIDs, despite the fact that the offense is not mild. Another effect that seems to be associated almost exclusively with social distance is the style of language, where it is observed that the participants use more formal language in situations 1 and 3 in which social distance is high. On the other hand, the language is informal and casual in Situation 2 in which the relationship between the interlocutors is close. It should also be noted that expressions of shame and self-humiliation, as instances of taking on responsibility, are exclusively motivated by social status as those expressions are only used in Situation 3 (boss/meeting).

As far as offers of repairs are concerned, their use is predictable and related to situations in which the offense causes not only physical damage (Situations 4 and 5) but also emotional damage (Situation 2). I argue, however, that the high number of occurrence of repairs in Situation 2 is to make up for the lack of direct apology forms, in addition to their appropriateness to the context and to the type of the offense. Furthermore, repairs are used with accounts also in Situation 7 in which IFIDs are rarely used.

The use of non-apology strategies of all types seems to be, first and foremost, an effect of the DCT design. Non-apologies appear mainly in situations 1 and 8 in which the description of the situation makes it clear that the offense may be a misunderstanding (Situation 1), and hence, no need for apologies, or that the offense is largely caused by the offended (Situation 8), hence, blaming the offended is used. However, given the limitations of the research tool, this pattern cannot be verified, and further research is needed, probably for non-apologies by themselves. Moreover, as I already mentioned in Situation 8, cultural considerations may help explain non-apologies and what may be considered instances of impoliteness.

Apology intensification is another universal feature that Syrian Arabic exhibits. Intensification is either internal to the apology strategy and is expressed in the form of adverbials or shows concern for the hearer, which is an external intensification device. Additionally, it is also possible to intensify the apology externally by combining any two or more strategies (Blum-kulka & Olshtain 1984). The participants also intensify the apologies

by repeating the same strategy twice, which virtually characterizes every situation. However, as the distribution of the intensified apologies suggests, internal and external intensification (exclusive of the strategy whereby the interlocutors combine strategies) seems to be related to the severity of the offense (situation 4 and 5) and the higher social status of the addressee, whether it is perceived as a result of an age difference (situations 4, 6, and 8) or a difference in hierarchy (Situation 3).

A general comment may be added in relation to all the strategies. Facework and politeness strategies accompany the different types of apology strategies, which is indicative of the close relationship between apologies and politeness. The participants' choice of negative or positive facework strategies seems to be motivated mainly by social distance. Where there is low social distance (situations 2 and 7), addressee-specific positive politeness is used: the participants use in-group and familiar address terms with the son as opposed to banter, sarcasm, and derogatory terms with the friend. On the other hand, the participants use negative politeness in the form of formal address forms in situation 3 (boss/meeting). The negative and positive politeness strategies in these situations do not by themselves count as apologies, but they are used to support the apology either by placating the offended (Situation 2), asserting common grounds (Situations 7), or showing due respect (Situation 3). The participants' awareness of the importance of facework strategies to restore equilibrium is evident, moreover, in their use of face-saving strategies directed at their own negative face when they are yelled at (Situation 5).

7 Conclusion

This paper is a first attempt to establish a taxonomy of apology strategies in Syrian Arabic. The results of the study suggest that all the basic categories of apologies, as found in many other languages and classified by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) are found in the data. Moreover, a clear relationship is observed between the use of IFIDs and the social factors of the older age of the addressee, social status, and the degree of social distance. The use of more IFIDs is positively correlated with the older age and the higher status of the addressee (the elderly woman situations and the boss situation, respectively). However, the opposite is true when the speakers are close and have an equal status (the friend situation), where IFIDs are much less frequently used. As far as the gravity of the situation is concerned, no particular strategy is systematically related with the severity of the situation, whether low or high. However, specific types of apology intensification, which is another universal feature exhibited by Syrian Arabic, are related both to the severity of the situation and the social status of the addressee. Additionally, the influence of social distance appears in the participants' alternation between the formal and the informal styles of language in relation to higher and lower social distance respectively. The participants also use language-specific strategies such as invoking God's name to intensify the apology and use proverbs and folk expressions, which in the relevant contexts serve either as intensifiers or other-blaming strategies. Moreover, the participants show an orientation towards the concept of face in relation to apologies, as can be seen in the use of positive and negative politeness to support the apology in situations of low and high social distance, in which the choice of the appropriate facework strategy is bound to the participant's estimation of social distance. The results cannot be used conclusively, and further research is needed in order to map out a distributive relationship between the use of the strategies and the social factors mentioned before. The study also sheds light on the values of the Syrian society and on the way they are reflected in the realization of the speech act of apology.

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Christina Hodeib
University of Debrecen
Doctoral School of Linguistics
Pf. 400
H-4002 Debrecen
christinahodeib@gmail.com

Appendix A: The Discourse Completion Test in English

1) You're at a meeting and you say something that one of the participants interprets as a personal insult to him.

He: "I feel that your last remark was directed at me and I take offense."

You:

2) You call from work to find out how things are at home and your kid reminds you that you forgot to take him shopping, as you had promised. And this is the second time that this has happened. Your kid says over the phone.

Kid: "Oh, you forgot again and you promised!"

You:

3) You completely forget a crucial meeting at the office with your boss. An hour later you call him to apologize. The problem is that this is the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. Your boss gets on the line and asks:

Boss: "What happened to you?"

You:

4) You accidentally bump into a well-dressed elderly lady at an elegant department store, causing her to spill her packages all over the floor. You hurt her leg, too. It's clearly your fault and you want to apologize profusely.

She: "Ow! My goodness!"

You:

5) Backing out of a parking place, you run into the side of another car. It was clearly your fault. You dent in the side door slightly. The driver gets out and comes over to you angrily.

Driver: "Can't you look where you're going? See what you've done?"

You:

6) You bump into a well-dressed elderly lady at a department store, shaking her up a bit. It's your fault, and you want to apologize.

She: "Hey, look out!"

You:

7) You forget a get-together with a friend. You call him to apologize. This is already the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. Your friend asks over the phone:

Friend: "What happened?"

You:

8) You bump into an elderly lady at a department store. You hardly could have avoided doing so because she was blocking the way. Still, you feel that some kind of apology is in order.

She: "Oh, my!"

You:

Appendix B: The Discourse Completion Test in Syrian Arabic (Phonetic Transcription)

1) ʔinti bi ʔiʔtima:ʕ w bitʔu:l ʃæʕli bifas.sirə wa:ħ ed min elmauju:di:n ʕələ ʔin.na ʔiha:ni ʃæxsʕi.iye ʔilu.

hu.ui: “ħ a:ses ʔin.nu mula:ħ izʕtək elʔæxi:rə ka:net mwaʒ.ʒħə ʔile w hæʃ.ʃe ʔiha:ni ʔile.”

ʔinti: _____

2) btit.tisʕel mnæʃ.ʃæʕl ʕəl beit lætitʕəm.mæn ki:f elwadʕʕ ʕəbizæk.kræk ʔibnæk ʔin.næk wəʕədtu ta:xdu ʕəs.su:ʔ w nsi:t. w hai elmar.rə elta:niyi ʔilli btinsə fi.iyə. ʕət.teleʕ:n elwələd biʔu:l: elwələd: “ya ʔəl.lə! wəʕədetne w nsi:t mar.rə ta:niyi!”

ʔinti: _____

3) btinsə təma:mæn ʔiʔtima:ʕ məktəb kti:r muhim.m maʕ mudi:ræk. bæʕd ʃei sa:ʕə btit.tisʕel lætiʕtizir min.nu bæʕ elmijkli ʔin.no hai ta:ne mər.rə btinsə heik ʔiʔtima:ʕ. Elmudi:r wəʔt biʒa:web ʕət.teleʕ:n biysʔələk:

elmudi:r: “ʃu: sʕa:r məʕək?”

ʔinti: _____

4) Min du:n ʔəsʕdək btisʕʕidim bi mada:m ʔəni:qə w kbi:ri bilʕəmr bi supermarket mrət.təb w bsəbəb elʔisʕʕida:m beina:tkən btwəʔ. ʔiʕ hi.ie elʔəkya:s w muħ təwəya:tun ʕəl ʔərdʕ w riʒla btsʕi:r tu:ʒəʕa. ʔilħ əʔ ʕleik w ħ a:bib tiʕtizir bħ əra:ra.

elmada:m: “uf.fl! Ya: ʔəl.lə!”

ʔinti: _____

5) Bid.dək tiʕləʕ bsya:rtək min məħ əl ma: btku:n sʕa:ʕef. W ʔinti ʕəm tirʒəʕ læwərə btidʕrəb ʒənəb sya:rə ta:nie. Min elwa:dʕiħ ʔin.nu elħ əʔ ʕleik w edʕ.dʕərbi bitsəbib dʕərbi xəfi:fi bilba:b. ʕufeir es.sya:rə et.ta:nie biynzel w biyʒe mʕəsʕ.sʕib læʕəndək.

əʃ.ʕufeir: “ma: fi:k tʃu:f wein ra:yeħ ? ʃu:f ʃu: ʕəməlt!”

ʔinti: _____

6) btisʕʕidim bʕəkl xəfi:f bi mada:m ʔəni:qə w kbi:ri bilʕəmr bi supermarket. elħ əʔ ʕleik w bid.dək tiʕtizir.

elmada:m: “ʔeih! Intibih!”

ʔinti: _____

7) btinsə tʕələʕ məʕ rfi:ʔək lælmər.ra et.ta:nie w btit.tisʕel lætiʕtizir biyʒe rfi:ʔək biysʔələk.

rfi:ʔək: “ʃu: sʕa:r?”

ʔinti: _____

8) btisʕʕidim bi mada:m bi supermarket w ma: ka:n mumken ʔin.næk titfa:də elħ a:dis læʔən.nu ka:net wa:ʔfi btʕri:ʔək. w rəkm heik btħ es ʔin.nu læ:zem tiʕtizir btʕri:ʔə ma:.

elmada:m: “ʔəx! ya: ʔəl.lə