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Variability in perceptions of (im)politeness in Syrian Arabic: The observers' perspective

Abstract

This paper addresses variability in (im)politeness perceptions in Syrian Arabic by looking at four naturally-occurring apologies, based on Haugh and Chang's (2019) study. It aims to investigate whether variability, if any, is related to perceptions of the (in)sincerity of the apology and the severity of the offense. The data were collected through an online survey, in which 77 native speakers of Syrian Arabic were asked to listen to four apology recordings and rate them on three 5-point Likert scales. The results of the statistical analysis show that there is variability in the participants' perceptions of (im)politeness in only one of the recordings. Furthermore, it was noted that this variability in (im)politeness perceptions was paralleled by variability in terms of evaluations of the speaker's sincerity in apologizing. The results also show that there is a positive correlation between perceptions of (im)politeness, (in)sincerity, and the severity of offense in all but one of the recordings. The overall results confirm Haugh and Chang's (2019) observation that variability in (im)politeness perceptions is not limited to intercultural settings but can be found in intracultural discourse events.
Keywords: perceptions, (im)politeness, intracultural variability, intralinguistic variability, Syrian Arabic

1   Introduction

This paper examines the perceptions of (im)politeness in Syrian Arabic in four naturally-occurring apologies, based on Haugh and Chang's (2019) study. Contemporary approaches to politeness advocate a thorough examination of politeness that focuses not only on the production and conceptualizations of politeness but also on the perceptions/evaluations of politeness. In this research, not only do I aim to shed light on the perceptions of politeness in a language variety that, to my knowledge, has not been addressed before, but I also address a gap in the literature, which has hitherto been characterized by a heavy focus on the production of politeness at the expense of exploring perceptual politeness (Eelen 2001; Haugh & Chang 2019). The general lack of attention to perceptions of politeness in favor of examining politeness production is a consequence of a speaker-oriented approach to politeness, which has been adopted in classical politeness frameworks (Brown & Levinson 1987). This approach, which assumes that speakers can produce different utterances, with variable degrees of politeness, fails to take into account that hearers can also assign different politeness ratings to those same utterances, each according to his/her individual perceptions (Eelen 2001).

In addition to the fact that perceptual studies have received considerably less attention, as Eelen (2001) explains, studies have scarcely addressed variability in politeness, whether in dealing with the production or the perceptions of politeness. In this respect, Haugh and Chang (2019) maintain that researchers have taken people, who share a language, as forming homogenous groups. Consequently, the few studies that have addressed variability in perceptions of politeness were made in a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural settings, mainly with the aim of examining non-native speaker perceptions in comparison to native speaker norms (see Bergman & Kasper (1993) on perceptions of politeness in Thai and American English; Suh (1999) for an analysis of perceptions in Korean ESL leaners and native speakers of English). However, according to Eelen (2001), variability in politeness perceptions (and production) is a fact of politeness that needs to be accounted for in a proper theory of politeness. Furthermore, Chang and Haugh (2011) and Haugh and Chang (2019) present empirical evidence in support of the observation that there is intra-linguistic and intra-cultural variability in the perceptions of politeness. Thus, one of the main aims of this paper is to investigate whether native speakers of Syrian Arabic will have different evaluations of the politeness of four apologies.

In addition to the above-mentioned gaps, analyses of politeness-related variability, as Haugh and Chang (2019) observe, have typically been made with reference to gender, age, and/or social background differences among participants. They further argue, in relation to perceptions of politeness in apologies, that it would be interesting to investigate the link between perceptions of politeness and more context-internal factors such as the sincerity of the apology and the severity of the offense for which the apology is made. The relationship between sincerity and apologies is long-standing, as Culpeper and Haugh (2014) explain that in classical speech act theory, sincerity is considered a defining feature in the felicitous performance of apologies. Furthermore, studies have linked perceived insincerity to poor politeness ratings (Blum-Kulka 2005; Pinto 2011). As for the severity of the offense, in classical theories of politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987), the overall ranking of the imposition, or the ranking of the offense in the case of apologies, is considered a determining factor in the production of politeness. Similarly, in the apology speech act taxonomies, the severity of the offense has been identified as one of three key factors in choosing the appropriate form of the apology (Blum-Kulak et al. 1989). As severity plays a central role in the production of politeness and apologies, it would be worth investigating whether it would figure as prominently in the perceptions of politeness and the apologies in this study. All in all, then, following Haugh and Chang's (2019) study, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. Is there variability in the perceptions of politeness in naturally-occurring apologies by native speakers of Syrian Arabic?
2. Is there a link between the participants' perceptions of the (im)politeness of the apologies and their perceptions of the (in)sincerity of those apologies?
3. Is there a link between the participants' perceptions of the (in)sincerity of the apologies and their assessment/perception of the severity of the offense?

In connection with these research questions, two hypotheses are made:

Hypothesis (a): there is a correlation between the severity of the offense and (in)sincerity of the apology.

Hypothesis (b): there is a correlation between the perceived (in)sincerity of the apology and its perceived (im)politeness.

The paper is organized as follows: in section 2, I outline the theoretical framework of the study and then review some of the relevant literature in section 3. In section 4, I describe the design of the experiment, including the four apologies, the online survey, the procedures for obtaining the data, and the participants. Section 5 concerns the statistical analysis of the data and the results in each recording. Then, in section 6, I discuss the results and the limitations of the study, before concluding the paper in section 7.

2 Kádár and Haugh's (2013) framework: different perspectives, multiple understandings of politeness

With the development of politeness in the discursive turn of politeness research (Eelen 2001; Watts 2003; Locher 2006), the examination of politeness was no longer restricted to decontextualized utterances. Politeness was conceived to be as much of a linguistic production phenomenon as an evaluative and perceptual one. The importance given to the evaluative and perceptual aspects of politeness meant that analyses of politeness needed to be anchored to the users' perspective, or first-order politeness, as opposed to the analyst's perspective, or second-order politeness. According to Kádár and Haugh (2013), however, the distinction is not as straightforward as first theorized by the discursivists, a position that follows from their own definition of politeness. In Kádár and Haugh's (2013) framework, politeness is not the property of verbal utterances or non-verbal behaviors. Rather, politeness is a personal evaluation that results from the social meanings associated with certain actions such as complaints. Thus, evaluations of politeness involve categorizing people and/or actions into valenced categories based on a moral point of reference that Kádár and Haugh (2013: 67) refer to as the "moral order." The moral order is constituted of the set of social norms and expectations that people have in relation to other people's behaviors in specific contexts.

Following this view of politeness as an evaluative moment, Kádár and Haugh (2013) argue that for a more comprehensive understanding of politeness, we need to look beyond the user/analyst dichotomy. Kádár and Haugh (2013) reconceptualize the distinction as follows: first-order politeness is the user's perspective and second-order politeness is the observer's perspective, and each order subsumes deeper and finer-tuned levels of understanding. As far as first-order politeness is concerned, there are four perspectives of understanding in relation to evaluations of politeness. Evaluations of politeness, impoliteness, non-politeness can be made by actual participants (perspective 1) and meta-participants, who are people involved in the evaluations of politeness vicariously through participants (perspective 2). For example, TV or radio program followers are meta-participants. Since evaluations of politeness are made with an appeal to a moral order, two other first-order layers of understanding come into the picture. Kádár and Haugh (2013) distinguish between an emic perspective, based on the moral order of people who claim an insider-status in a community, on the one hand, and an etic perspective, which is held by outsiders to a community, who adhere to their own moral order.

Second-order politeness also involves four perspectives/understandings in relation to observations and conceptualizations of politeness. First, there is the lay observer's perspective, which figures in people's casual comments on (im)politeness behaviors that may not be necessarily tied to any particular context or incident. Second, observations of politeness can be made by analysts in a scientific and systematic fashion as they analyze the phenomenon. The third locus of understanding relates to conceptualizations of politeness and involves lay

participants' attempts to account for politeness. Kádár and Haugh (2013: 86) refer to the fourth perspective as theoretical understandings of politeness, which involve rational accounts of politeness made by scientists.

As the focus of the paper is on the perspective of the observer, a few details about this perspective are in order. Kádár and Haugh (2013: 98) explain that lay people's observations about politeness are instantly elevated to interpretations of evaluative moments without any systematic attempts to rationalize those accounts, which is what differentiates lay observations from the observations of scientists. However, lay observers' understandings are important in two ways. First, the way people talk about politeness may influence the way politeness is evaluated. Second, lay observations offer invaluable insights into the evaluative moments in which politeness perceptions and evaluations arise, if they are analyzed in a systematic manner by analysts (ibid: 99).

The upshot of Kádár and Haugh's (2013) multi-layered approach to politeness is to allow the researcher to capture different understandings of politeness and to account for why differences in understandings and evaluations of politeness might arise. By accommodating more than one perspective on politeness, variability in the expression, perceptions, and metapragmatic conceptions of politeness can be better understood and accounted for through synthesizing multiple points of view. In addition to this, as Kádár and Haugh (2013) explain, in this approach the researcher assumes a central role in the analysis, in parallel with lay people's insights. In other words, the researcher's role is to examine politeness, guided by the observations, conceptions, and understandings of lay people, without being restricted by their perspective. Thus, the researcher can benefit from the perspective of the lay users/observers in confirming his/her scientific observations and analyses.

In the next section, I attempt to further clarify how the lay observer's perspective and other loci of understanding of politeness can offer insights into evaluations and perceptions of politeness as well as be used to confirm researchers' initial observations in data analysis. I do this by reviewing a number of studies that shed light on the perspective of both observers and participants in addition to addressing inter- and intracultural variability in perceptions.

3   Perceptions of politeness: previous studies

I start this brief overview of studies on perceptions of politeness by explaining the details of two studies, which are particularly relevant to the current research; Chang and Haugh (2011) and Haugh and Chang (2019). Chang and Haugh's (2011) study shows well how the perspective of the observers played an important role in confirming the researchers' initial observations about variability in the perceptions of an intercultural apology. The results of this study set the background for Haugh and Chang's (2019) study, in which again the researchers consulted observers in order to examine intracultural variability in the perceptions of the same inter-cultural apology.

Chang and Haugh's (2011) study concerns an apology which was issued from an Australian man (Wayne) to a Taiwanese woman (Joyce). The apology was occasioned by the fact that Wayne and his wife failed to come to a dinner invitation at Joyce's. When Joyce had called Wayne on the day of the dinner, he did not respond to the call; he sent a text message to Joyce the next day explaining that he was busy and forgot. A couple of days later Joyce calls Wayne in an attempt to further clarify the situation.

During the phone call, Wayne only made one apology to which Joyce offered an absolution. However, Joyce kept pushing the conversation in a way so that she could elicit another apology from Wayne, which was not successful. Wayne's reaction to this is to enquire about her family and offer a repair by suggesting a make-up appointment. Both Wayne and Joyce's attitudes in the conversation reveal their respective evaluations of Wayne's apology. On the one hand, Wayne appears to evaluate his apology as 'polite,' since he tried to show 'friendliness' by asking Joyce about her family and offering a repair. On the other hand, as Joyce herself later explained, she seems to evaluate the apology as 'impolite,' which is evident in her attempt to get Wayne to repeat his apology. A repetition of an apology, or any other speech act, is a sign of 'sincerity,' which is linked to politeness, from Joyce's perspective.

As Joyce and Wayne's evaluations differed, Chang and Haugh (2011) were interested in examining whether this difference is culturally rooted. Thus, a group of 25 native speakers of Taiwanese Mandarin and a group of 25 native speakers of Australian English were invited to participate and were asked to evaluate the politeness of Wayne's apology on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'very polite' to 'very impolite.' The results of the study showed a marked difference in evaluations between the two groups. Whereas the Australian group rated the apology as not impolite by choosing the values 'neither polite nor impolite' or 'polite,' the Taiwanese group rated the apology as impolite. Chang and Haugh (2011) argue that these ratings reflect the same evaluation, which was indexed by the verbal behaviors of both Wayne and Joyce, respectively, during the phone conversation. Thus, the Taiwanese and Australian observers' ratings helped confirm Chang and Haugh's (2011) analysis that Wayne and Joyce's divergent perceptions of Wayne's apology are due to intercultural difference.

The above-conclusion was further confirmed in follow-up interviews, which Chang and Haugh (2011) conducted with the participants/observers, in which the latter offered explanations for their respective ratings of Wayne's apology. The interviews again showed that the participants' rationales invoked culturally-motivated differences in understandings and evaluations of the "sincerity" of Wayne's apology, which have led to diverging ratings/perceptions. In addition to intercultural variability, Chang and Haugh (2011) noted a degree of variability among the Australian observers' relative to their evaluations of Wayne's apology. This was further examined in Haugh and Chang (2019).

Haugh and Chang (2019) wanted to test whether the intracultural variability noted in the previous study can also be attested with a larger number of Australian informants. In this study 80 Australians rated Wayne's apology and then the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with a sub-part of the population. The results of the study showed that, indeed, there was variability in the rationale's that the participants' offered in explaining their ratings of the (im)politeness of Wayne's apology. All in all, the interviews revealed that the participants appealed to similar moral rationales but that they had different understandings of how such moral rationales/orders are to be interpreted in context.

In addition to Chang and Haugh's (2011) and Haugh and Chang's (2019) studies, other studies have also addressed intralingual perceptions of politeness by tapping into first-order participant perspectives as well as second-order observer perspectives. However, it should be noted that the two studies I will outline in what follows do not target variability of perceptions as the central research objective. Rather, variability of perceptions is noted in the context of examining perceptions of politeness.

Fink and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) consult two baristas, one male and one female, and investigate their perceptions of the (im)politeness of customers' orders/requests at a Mid-

western café in the US. They looked into how the form of the request and the presence and/or absence of request internal and external modification influences baristas' perceptions. The two baristas were given a perception questionnaire in order to rate the politeness of 14 recorded requests, and they were asked to comment on their ratings.

The results showed that the request form did have an influence on the baristas' perceptions of its (im)politeness and that internal and external modifications increase the level of politeness of all request forms. Both baristas considered conventional indirect request forms to be the most polite and imperatives to be the most impolite. They also both perceived a request in the form of a suggestion negatively. However, the results also indicated that there was a variability in perceptions between the two baristas regarding some of the other request forms. For example, the female barista found requests put in the form of a possibility questions such as "is it possible to VP?" to be polite, but the male found them either neutral or impolite. Moreover, the baristas disagreed in their perception of "need" and "want" statements. Whereas the female barista rated both as impolite on the grounds that such request forms made the barista feel "inferior," the male participant perceived "want" statements as polite and "need" statements as average requests among customers in that area. It is also interesting to note that the baristas appealed to similar reasons in their explanations of the ratings. They both explained that the completeness and/or the specificity of the order were crucial factors in the way the rated the orders, regardless of request form. In other words, orders that fail to specify certain aspects such as glass size, for instance, were deemed less positively.

Savić's (2018) study examines the perceptions of (im)politeness and (in)appropriateness of emails written in English in lecturer-student correspondence at a Norwegian university. Norwegian professors of English were asked to rate five emails in terms of (im)politeness and (in)appropriateness. The researcher aimed to examine the influence of opening and closing sequences, the content of the emails, and other external contextual factors on the professors' perceptions. The results indicated that the professors tended to agree more on perceptions of politeness and appropriateness and less so on the perceptions of the negative values. The results also showed that opening sequences such as greetings influenced the professors' ratings, whereas closing sequences did not have the same decisive role. Ratings also converged on what qualifies as polite and proper email content in a student-professor dyad.

However, what is most relevant to the present research is that Savić's (2018) refers to a considerable degree of individual variability among the professors in their perceptions of what counts as a polite and appropriate opening sequence. For example, one of the faculty members evaluated "hi" as polite and appropriate, whereas another professor thought that it was "annoying," especially if not followed by the addressee's first name. In addition to this attested variability, the findings reveal that the lecturers had two opposing views about institutional e-mail communications, which indicates their different orientations to student-professor relationships. Such views were invoked in their explanations of their ratings. On the one hand, a group of lecturers thought that institutional emails should be formal and professional, no matter what relationship there is between the student and the professor. On the other hand, another group of lecturers thought that a more informal style of communication reflects a developing relationship between students and lecturers. Having overviewed Kádár and Haugh's (2013) model and showed how it can be useful in teasing out various perspectives, which might account for possible variability in (im)politeness perceptions, I now move on to present the details of the experiment in the next section.

4   The experiment

In order to examine perceptions, I used four naturally-occurring apologies, which participants were asked to listen to and evaluate on three 5-point Likert scales. In the following sub-sections, I will present the details of the recordings and the design of the online survey, which was used to collect the data. I also outline the procedures for obtaining the data and the participants.

4.1   The apologies

Perceptual studies have often relied on "artificial contextual cues" (Baxter 2015: 190). This poses a problem in studying perceptions of politeness in that, without a naturally-occurring context and contextual factors, perceptions may not show any variability. In order to avoid this problem, following Chang and Haugh (2011) and Haugh and Chang (2019), I have used four naturally-occurring recordings, each containing an apology. The four apologies were voice messages sent or received by my friends on two chat platforms: WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. I obtained and used those recordings with the permission of my friends and the people involved in the recordings. As each of the apologies was issued in a friend/friend context, social distance and social status are fixed. However, the severity of the offense, which is one of the targeted contextual variables, was left for the participants to assess on a Likert scale.

In the first recording, the apology was issued from a female speaker to a group of male and female friends on Messenger. The group had agreed to go on a trip and bought tickets. One week before the planned trip, the apologizer decides not to go and tries to sell the ticket to someone that the group members do not know. She apologizes for the inconvenience and explains the situation. In the second recording, the apology is related to money-issues. The speakers are one female and one male, who are friends. The male friend asks whether the female friend's family can lend money to his friend's family in Syria. The person who wants to borrow the money is not a mutual friend and the one who is asked to lend the money does not know the borrower either. The friend who was asked, having proposed her aunt could help, replies to her friend and apologizes for not being able to help.

The third recording involves two male friends. The occasion is that one of them had recently graduated and sent the voice message as an invitation to the other to attend his graduation ceremony. The inviter and invitee live in different cities in Hungary, so the invitation was rejected, accompanied by an apology. In the fourth and final recording, the occasion of the apology, between two female friends, is a very late response to a voice message. When one sends the other a voice message, the other one unwittingly views the messages but neither listens to them nor replies. A couple of days later, she realizes that she had not responded, and she apologizes for that.

Whereas in Chang and Haugh (2011) and Haugh and Chang (2019) the researchers used one recorded phone conversation with rich contextual details, the recordings in this study only contain the apology itself, with no prior talk to set the background of the offense/context for the apology. However, I have made sure to include a detailed description of the context, the speakers, and the offense for which the apology is made in order to provide the participants with enough contextual information to base their ratings of the scales on, as I will show in the details of the online survey in the next section.

4.2   The survey

In order to collect the data for the experiment, I designed an online survey using Google Forms (see Appendix A for the original version of the form and Appendix B for the English translation). In the first section of the survey the participants are asked to convey information about their age, gender, the degree they were pursuing at the time they participated, and the university at which they are studying. In the second section, the participants are provided with a brief description of the design of the survey, which is divided into four sections, each devoted to the assessment of one apology recording. In the individual sections, the participants are given a detailed description of the context of each apology and the relationship between the speakers, and then they are asked to listen to the apology by clicking on a Google Drive link, which contains the audio recorded apology. As I have mentioned, I use a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very impolite) to 5 (very polite), to examine the participants' perceptions of the (im)politeness of the apologies. In addition to this scale, the participants are asked to assess the severity of the offense in each situation on a 5-point Liker scale that ranges from 1 (very offensive) to 5 (very mild). The participants are also asked to assess the sincerity of each apology by choosing a value on a third 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very insincere) to 5 (very sincere). At the end of the survey, the participants are asked to indicate whether they are interested in doing follow-up interviews.

4.3   The procedures

Before administering the survey to the main participants, I did a mini-pilot study with two male and two female MA students at the University of Debrecen in Hungary. The aim of the mini-pilot was to make sure that the participants understood the tasks well and that they did not encounter any technical problems. For the main study, I posted the survey online to two Facebook groups; the members of one group are Syrian students in Hungary, and the members of the other group are Syrian teaching assistants, studying in different countries around the world, including Syria. I gave the participants a short explanation of the aims of the experiment and assured them that their responses are anonymous and would be used for research purposes only. Furthermore, they were told that they could opt out of participation at any point. In order to test the reliability and the internal consistency of the survey, Cronbach's alpha was run on the four apology situations (see Appendix D).[1] The values for the four situations ranged from 0.63 to 0.86, indicating the reliability of some items and the high reliability of other items in the instrument.

4.4   The participants

The participants are 77 Syrian students in different universities around the world, including universities in Syria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, India, Russia, and China. The participants' ages ranged between 22 and 35. There are 50 female participants (64.9%) and 27 male participants (35.1%). 31 of the participants are MA students, 25 are doctoral students, and the rest are BA students.

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5   Data analysis

In this section, I present the results of the statistical data analysis of the four naturally-occurring apologies. In each of the following sub-sections, I start by analyzing the apologies that the participants rated and categorizing the apology strategies used following Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) (see Appendix C). Then, I outline the participants' ratings, and the results of the correlation tests that were conducted to test the hypotheses. A note about the dataset is in order. Except for one apology, all the apologies in this study are not the primary speech act in the context in which they were used. Roughly speaking, apologies are divided into primary and subordinate speech acts (Robinson 2004; Davies et al. 2007). In a similar vein, Deutschmann (2003) maintains that apologies may appear in the vicinity of other speech acts, such as requests and refusals, and their function is influenced by their sequential position as anticipatory or retrospective apologies (also see Robinson (2004) for a detailed exploration of the sequential organization and functions of primary and subordinate apologies). What is important for the present research is that the status of apologies as primary or subordinate speech acts does not discredit their status as apologies proper, which is the position expounded by the above-mentioned studies. As the main aim of this paper is to analyze perceptions of (im)politeness in apologies, generally, the choice of the recordings was based on the availability of naturally-occurring data and the presence of explicit IFIDs, taken as evidence that the speech act is indeed an apology, notwithstanding performing different pragmatic functions.

5.1   Apology one

The offense, as explained earlier, concerns a friend who is unable to join the group on a trip at the last moment. Thus, the primary speech act in this recording is not the apology but a backing out of a promise or previous agreement. Deutschmann (2003: 70) argues that apologies of this sort address offenses he categorizes as "breaches of expectations." He further notes that some of these apologies are made prior to the offense taking place, which is the case in Apology One as well. Apologies of this type were also noted by Robinson (2004: 296–298) as being subordinate to another action. Seen in this light, the function of the apology is to address a possible offense, backing out of an agreement, and to do so before the potentially offensive act has actually occurred is more polite, according to Davies et al (2007: 47). The apology goes as follows:[2]

> القصة بدا تصير لبكة مشان تجديد جواز السفر بعدين.. بحكيلكن بعدين.. ففضلت إنو.. قالولي أهلي أهلي أبعتيه
> خلص.. بحكيلكن بعدين إنو هيك شوي أموري مكربة هالفترة عنجد ما كنت متوقعة هيك يصير أبداً. كل
> الأمور صارت عكس توقعاتي. أنا كتير كنت حابة كون معكون... أنا اليوم الضهر شافتني رفيقتي في احتمال تاخد
> التيكت مني. إذا ما قدرت, إذا ما اشترتا بركي بخبركن إذا بتخبروا حدا من رفقاتكن. عنجد أنا كتير آسفة وبعرف
> إنو الفصل ناقص وما حلو يعني بس إنو هيك صار شو بدي أعمل.

> I'm gonna have a lot of trouble with getting my passport renewed later… I'll tell you the details later… I preferred to… my parents told me to just send it… I'll tell you about it later. I've been a bit confused. I do apologize. I wasn't expecting this to happen at all. I

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[2] Prior to issuing the apology in a voice message, the apologizer had sent a text message to the group informing them that she decided not to join them after giving the issue some thought. Hence, the beginning of the recording does count as an account proper, not as an explicit withdrawal from the agreement, which had already been established in writing.

> really wanted to be with you guys. Anyway, today at noon, I met a friend of mine, and she might use my ticket. If she doesn't, if she doesn't buy it, I'll perhaps tell you and you might offer it to your friends. I'm really so sorry, and I know that's awful, but that's what happened. There's nothing I can do.

The recording starts with an account of the situation in which the speaker explains that she cannot go on the trip because of issues related to her passport in that she does not want to take the risk of travelling with an almost expired passport. This is combined with multiple reassurances, which might also be interpreted as deferrals, that she would explain the issue in more detail later. After the account, she offers an intensified IFID 'I do apologize,' followed by an expression of lack of intent. The function of this strategy is to shift responsibility from herself to external circumstances, ultimately, dissociating herself from the offense and invoking the group's understanding. Then, her insistence that 'she wanted to be with them,' is an expression of concern to further intensify the apology. The recording ends with another instance of an intensified IFID 'I'm really so sorry,' an expression of embarrassment 'I know that's awful,' and, finally, ascribing the offense to external circumstances/expressing lack of intent. However, it should be noted that the expressions of apology are interrupted by the speaker's announcement that there might be another person who would join them. This is then hedged by what appears to be an indirect request for the group to find someone who can travel with them and, so, buy her ticket, in case she did not manage to sell the ticket to her own friend.

As is already established, the participants' perceptions are elicited in relation to three aspects of the apology; (im)politeness, the severity of the offense, and the (in)sincerity of the apology. The participants' perceptions of (im)politeness are presented in Figure 1 below.
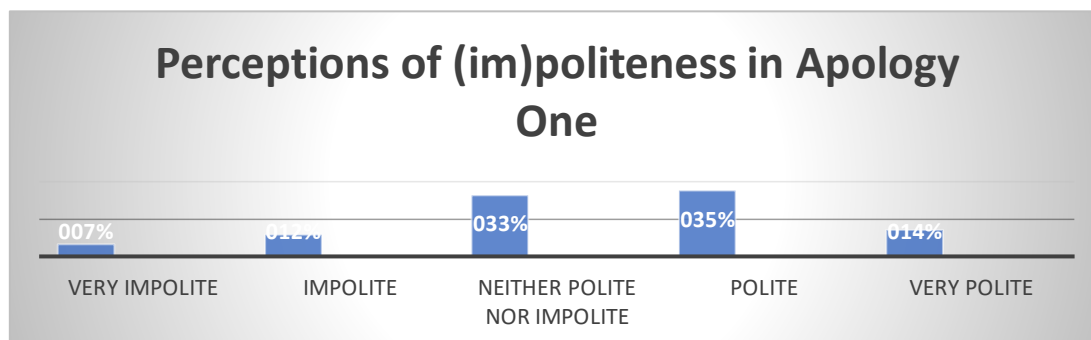

Figure 1. Perceptions of (im)politeness in Apology One

Figure 1 shows that despite the fact that 32.5% rated the apology as 'neither polite or impolite,' the participants overall seem to perceive the apology as 'polite,' (35.1%) and 'very polite,' (14.3%). Thus, combined, 49.4% of the participants rated the apology as '(very) polite, as opposed to 18.2%, who rated it as '(very) (im)polite.'[3]

As for the participants' perceptions of the severity of the offense, Table 1 below, which also presents the ratings of (in)sincerity, shows a similar trend. Generally, the assessments, which mostly oscillated between 'neither severe nor mild' and 'mild,' indicate that the participants

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[3] Following Haugh and Chang's (2019) methodology, and based on observations made by Eelen (2001), I do not report mean and standard deviation values.

evaluate the situation as 'mild.' More precisely, 37.7% chose 'mild,' 33.8% chose 'neither sever nor mild,' and, as can be seen, a nearly equal percentage of the participants rated the severity of the offense as severe (14.3%) and very mild (13%). Only one participant rated the offense as very severe (1.3%). Thus, combined, half of the participants perceived the offense as '(very) mild.' Finally, the results of the participants' perceptions of the (in)sincerity of the apology point out that the majority of the participants (40.3%) rated the apology as 'neither sincere nor insincere,' revealing lack of precision on the part of the participants, which is further confirmed by the fact that 22.1% rated the apology 'insincere' and 'sincere,' respectively for each.

Scales	1	2	3	4	5
Severity	1.3%	14.3%	33.8%	37.7%	13%
(In)sincerity	9.1%	22.1%	40.3%	22.1%	6.5%

Table 1. Perceptions of severity and (in)sincerity in Apology One

Spearman correlation test (Appendix E) was run in order to examine whether there is a correlation between the severity of the offense and the perceived (in)sincerity of the apology (hypothesis (a)). The results do not support the hypothesis, as there is no correlation between the two factors. However, the test shows that there is a correlation at 0.05 between the perceived (in)sincerity of the apology and its perceived (im)politeness, supporting hypothesis (b).

5.2 Apology two

In this recording, the apology concerns failure to lend money to the addressee's friend. It is important to take two things into consideration with regards to this apology, which may have influenced the participants' perceptions. First, it is a money-related context, and requesting money is considered a high imposition. Moreover, in addition to being a request about money, the request involves a stranger, even if he is a friend of a friend. Second, the apologizer is not apologizing for an offense that was brought about by herself. Rather, she is apologizing on behalf of her father and then her aunt, which may have caused her to issue a "less passionate" apology.

Similar to Apology one, this apology can also be analyzed as subordinate to the speech act of non-compliance with a request, which again has been reported in Deutschmann (2003). As will be seen, the apology only implicitly embodies the speaker's refusal to comply with the request as the IFID does not specify the offense being apologized for. This may be because the speakers are both aware of the context of the apology, and, thus, there is no need for an explicit mentioning of the offense. As for the function of the apology, using classical terminology, it seems to be used as a way to lessen the face-threatening caliber of the refusal (Brown & Levinson 1987). The apology goes as follows:

هلأ حكيت أهلي.. البابا مانو عم يطلع. حكيت خالتي بعدين وبدا تعتذر منك وأنا بعتذر منك لأنو هيي عندا شبين واحد بجامعة خاصة وواحد بلبنان فمانا مستفضاية كتير عليون بس هلأ قريت رسالتك. هلأ بسألا إذا جوزا في إلو معارف هنيكي أو حسب شغلو لشوف إذا إلو حدا بطرطوس نفسا المحافظة. هلأ هوي قلتلي وين الشب بالدريكيش؟ بشفلك أنا شو الموضوع وبردلك خبر.

I just talked to my parents… Dad is not going there (to another city). I also spoke with my aunt later. She apologizes to you and I apologize too. It's because she has two sons;

> one is in a private university and the other is in Lebanon, so money's tight, but I just read your message. I'll ask her if her husband has people there… depends on his job. I'll see whether he knows people in Tartus, the governorate. Where did you say the guy lives, Draykish? I'll see what I can do and let you know.

The speaker first gives an account of why her father cannot help, and then reports her aunt's IFID 'she apologizes,' followed by her own IFID 'I apologize too.' She, then, gives another account, concerning her aunt's inability to lend the sum to his friend. Finally, the speaker resorts to an offer of repair/compensation by explaining that she will try to find other ways to sort things out. In Figure 2 below, I present the distribution of the participants' perceptions of (im)politeness in this apology.
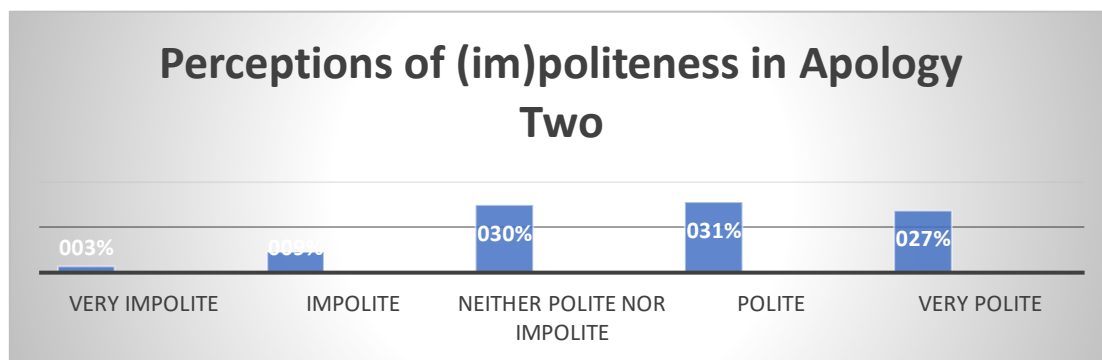

Figure 2. Perceptions of (im)politeness in Apology Two

As can be seen, most of the participants rated the apology as either 'polite' (31.2%), 'neither polite nor impolite' (29.9%), or 'very polite' (27.3). 9.2% of the participants rated the apology as 'impolite,' and only 2.6% as 'very impolite.' Thus, again, there does not seem to be a lot of variability in perceptions for this apology, similarly to Apology One. Also, in terms of the severity of the offense, only a number of participants, making up 9.1% of the overall ratings, evaluated the offense as 'very severe' and 'severe.' On the other hand, just under half of the participants (49.4%) rated it as 'very mild.' An equal percentage of participants rated the offense as 'mild' and 'neither severe nor mild' (20.8%). As for the scale of (in)sincerity, ratings also converge on a perception of 'sincere' (45.5%) and 'very sincere' (23.4%). The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Scales	1	2	3	4	5
Severity	1.3%	7.8%	20.8%	20.8%	49.4%
(In)sincerity	5.2%	1.4%	15.6%	45.5%	23.4%

Table 2. Perceptions of severity and (in)sincerity in Apology Two

The results of Spearman correlation test lend support to both hypotheses (a) and (b); there is a statistically significant correlation between the severity of the offense and the (in)sincerity of the apology ($p < 0.01$). The correlation between the (in)sincerity of the apology and its perceived politeness is also statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

5.3 Apology three

The occasion for the apology in this recording is that the speaker declines an invitation to attend the graduation ceremony of the addressee, which involves going to another city. Robinson (2004) analyzes this type of apology as embodying a potential offense, which is the speech act of declining the invitation. The apology is subordinate to the declination speech act and prefaces it, so it is "not an apology to be responded to in its own right" (ibid: 298). This analysis can also be found in an earlier work by Beebe et al. (1990), who focus on transfer effects in the production of refusals by Japanese learners of English. Beebe et al. (1990: 57) point out that refusals consist of a sequence of semantic formulae in which the refusal may be preceded by an expression of regret, an IFID such as "I'm sorry," or "I apologize." Their dataset shows that their informants tended to integrate apologies in the refusal sequence, citing invitations as one exemplary speech act. Furthermore, other semantic formulae included thanking the inviter, expressing positive feelings as "I'd love to...," and suggesting alternative, future plans with the addressee. These elements can be found in the situation used in this study, where a refusal is preceded by an apology. The speaker says the following:

حبيب القلب والله عراسي ما تآخزني حبيبي الله يعطيك ألف عافية. حبيبي والله العظيم أنا ما... يعني ما فاضي والله و إلا كنت بتشرف. على كل حال. خليني أنا كنت بدي بس رد عليك المسا. خليني احكي مع أبو الميس شوف شو الوضع عندو. إذا أبو الميس بيقدر يجي يعني منطلعلنا هيك رحلة قصيرة منباركلك فيا ومنرجع بس خليني شوف شو وضعو أبو الميس.

Thanks dear, I appreciate it! Pardon me, but I swear to God I… I'm busy. Otherwise, I would be honored (to attend). Anyway, let me just… I've been meaning to respond to you in the evening. Let me just speak to Abu Elmees and see what he has in mind. If Abu Elmees can make it, maybe we can make a short trip to congratulate you and then go back. Let me just check with Abu Elmees.

The refusal starts with the expression of apology, *ma: tʔa:xezne* or literally 'do not blame me,' which has been reported in Hodeib (2019: 694) as an example of Syrian Arabic-specific apologetic expression on a par with other IFIDs. The expression functions as the speaker's informing the addressee of his regret for not being able to accept the invitation. At the same time, the speaker explicitly appeals to the addressee's understanding of his situation of being busy by not holding this act of refusal against him personally. Then, the refusal proper is interspersed with the speaker's use of endearment terms and invoking God's name to strengthen his account of being busy. This account is counterbalanced by an appeal to the addressee's positive face, or an expression of positive feelings, that it would be an honor for the speaker to attend the ceremony. Then the speaker attempts to hedge the refusal by making a contingent promise to attend the ceremony as an alternative to a straightforward refusal.

The results of the participants' perceptions of (im)politeness in this recording, unlike the first two apologies, show clear variability. In Figure 3 below, it can be seen that there is a near-equal distribution of ratings, from 'impolite' through to 'very polite.' On closer examination, the perceptions are mostly divided between 'impolite' with 19.5% of the participants choosing it, and 'polite' with 22.1% of the overall ratings.

Perceptions of (im)politeness in Apology Three

VERY IMPOLITE 012% **IMPOLITE** 020% **NEITHER POLITE NOR IMPOLITE** 023% **POLITE** 022% **VERY POLITE** 023%
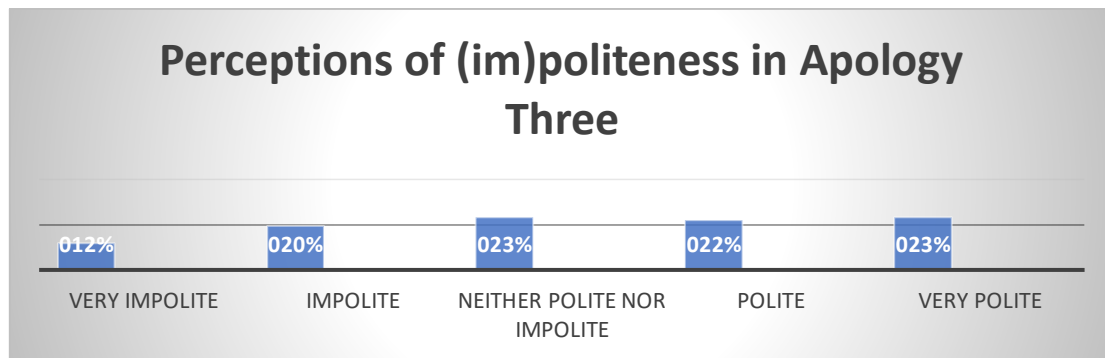
Figure 3. Perceptions of (im)politeness in Apology Three

On the scale of severity, as shown in Table 3, it can also be seen that the participants' ratings vary between 'neither severe nor mild' (24.7%) and 'very mild' (28.6%). 25% of the participants rated the severity as 'mild,' and a total of 20.8% of the participants perceived the offense as 'very severe' and 'severe.' In addition to variability of (im)politeness and severity perceptions, the ratings on the scale of (in)sincerity show the most variability; most of the ratings verge towards the negative end of the scale. 20.8% of the participants rated the apology as 'very insincere,' 22.1% rated it as 'insincere,' and most ratings went for the middle value (24.7%). 18.2% of the participants perceived the apology to be 'sincere,' and lastly 14.3% of the participants chose 'very sincere.'

Scales	1	2	3	4	5
Severity	7.8%	13%	24.7%	26%	28.6%
(In)sincerity	20.8%	22.1%	24.7%	18.2%	14.3%

Table 3. Perceptions of severity and (in)sincerity in Apology Three

The ratings point to variability of perceptions on the three scales, which invites the question of whether variability on one scale is linked to variability on the other. As for the correlation test, the results show that there is a statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) between the perceived severity of the offense and perceptions of (in)sincerity. Thus, hypothesis (a) is supported. Hypothesis (b) is also supported, as the test shows a statistically significant positive correlation between the perceived (in)sincerity of the apology and its perceived (im)politeness ($p < 0.01$).

5.4 Apology four

In the last apology recording, the apology is the primary speech act, issued by the speaker for having forgotten to respond to the addressee's voice message for a long time. She gives the following, rather lengthy apology, which is prefaced by conventional greetings:

يسعدلي صباحك كيفك حبوب شو أخبارك؟ لك أنا آسفة كتير كتير كتير كتير بتعرفي هلأ عم افتح بدي اكتبلك إنو
بدي اطمن عنك ولا شفت التسجيلات ما بعرف إيمتى فاتحتن ولا بعرف ليش ماني رادة عليون عنجد ما بعرف
أبدا حتى ولاني منتبهة عليون. اطلعت هيك العمى من خمس تيام فأنا آسفة كتير كتير شكلي فاتحتون أنا يعني أنا
وعم بعمل شي أو حدا عم يحكيني ونسيانة ارجع اسمعون أو شي. كيفك طمنيني عنك أمورك كلا تمام؟

> Good morning, sweetie, what's up? I'm so, so, so, so sorry. You know, I was going to text you, and just now I saw the voice messages. I don't know when I received them or why I didn't reply. I really don't know… I wasn't even aware they were there. I just saw them, and I was like wow! Five days… so, I'm so very sorry. It looks like I viewed them while doing something else, or talking to someone else, and I have forgotten to listen to them, or something. How are you? everything's okay?

The apology is composed of three main strategies, two of which are repeated throughout the recording. The speaker first uses the IFID 'I'm sorry,' intensified by four repetitions of the adverb 'so.' This is followed by an account of the offense, prefaced by an appeal to understanding 'you know,' which involves speaker-internal justifications ascribing the offense to lack of awareness. Then the speaker repeats the IFID 'I'm so, so sorry,' and offers another explanation of the offense, based on forgetfulness and getting caught up in another business. The speaker concludes the apology by checking on the addressee.

The participants' perceptions of the three targeted aspects of the apology are characterized by a general preference for the positive end of the scale(s). As far as the perceptions of (im)politeness are concerned, as presented in Figure 4, 50% of the participants perceive the apology as 'very polite.' On the other hand, only 10% rated the apology as 'very impolite' and 'impolite,' and 13% chose 'neither polite nor impolite.' This indicates the participants' general agreement that the apology is '(very) polite.'
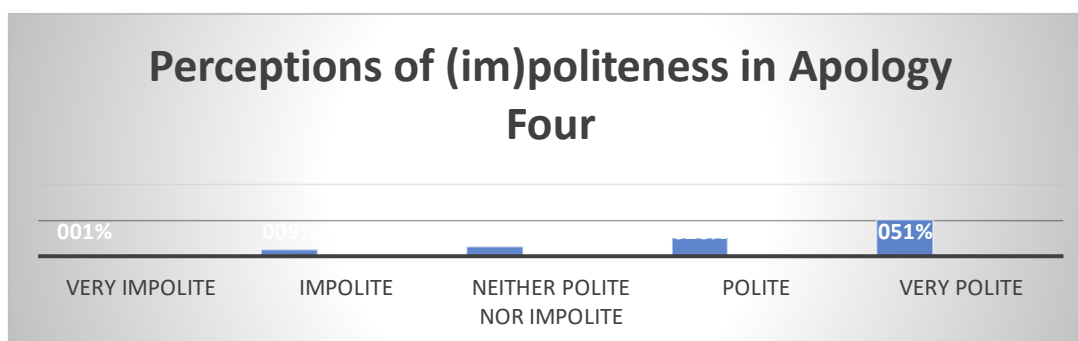
Figure 4. Perceptions of (im)politeness in Apology Four

In addition to agreement on the politeness of the apology, the participants' ratings of the severity of the offense reveal that they also seem to perceive the situation as rather mild. Only 3.9% rated the offense as 'very severe,' as opposed to 31.2%, who rated it as 'very mild.' Moreover, 24.7% and 26% rated the situation as 'neither severe nor mild' and 'mild,' respectively. Finally, on the scale of sincerity, the distribution of the ratings resembles that on the scale of severity. Whereas 35.1% of the participants rated the apology as 'very sincere,' only 5.2% rated it as 'very insincere.' Again, 24.7% rated it as 'neither sincere nor insincere,' and 27.3% chose 'sincere' on the scale. The ratings are presented in Table 4 below.

Scales	1	2	3	4	5
Severity	3.9%	14.3%	24.7%	26%	31.2%
(In)sincerity	5.2%	7.8%	24.7%	27.3%	35.1%

Table 4. Perceptions of severity and (in)sincerity in Apology Four

Finally, the correlation test shows that there is a positive correlation between the scales of severity and (in)sincerity, and the correlation is statistically significant (p < 0.01). Similarly, for the scales of (in)sincerity and (im)politeness, the test indicates a statistically significant positive correlation (p < 0.01). After presenting the results of each apology recording, in the next section, I discuss these results with respect to the question of variability in perceptions, the hypotheses, and the implications of these results on the perceptions of politeness in Syrian Arabic.

6   Discussion

As mentioned in the introduction, the study of (im)politeness perceptions is based on previous literature that presents evidence for intracultural and intralinguistic variability of perceptions. Thus, one of the main research questions at the outset of this research was whether native speakers of Syrian Arabic will have different perceptions of four naturally-occurring apologies. Similarly, taking up recommendations made by Haugh and Chang (2019), I sought to investigate whether there is a correlation between perceptions of (im)politeness and such contextual variables as the (in)sincerity of the apology and the severity of the offense. The two main hypotheses are that there is a correlation between the severity of the offense and the (in)sincerity of the apology and that there is a correlation between the perceived (im)politeness of the apology and its perceived (in)sincerity.

In examining whether there is variability in (im)politeness perceptions, the results of this experiment show that there is visible variability of perceptions only in Apology Three. The results in this apology recording, thus, are similar to the results of Haugh and Chang (2019) and support Eelen's (2001) argument that variability is an empirical and statistical fact about politeness. Despite the fact that perceptions of (im)politeness are varied only in one recording, this result is interesting in two respects. First, the variability of (im)politeness perceptions in Apology Three is clearly paralleled by an equal variability on the scale of (in)sincerity. Second, this parallel variability in perceptions of (im)politeness and (in)sincerity is only found in Apology Three. In the rest of the apology recordings, in which no variability in (im)politeness perceptions is attested, there was no parallel variability on the (in)sincerity scale.

Overall, the correlations noted and the observed parallel variability on the scales of (in)sincerity and (im)politeness support the already noted link between evaluations of politeness and perceptions of (in)sincerity (Blum-Kulka 2005). However, it should be noted that the exact nature of the correlation(s), on the one hand, and whether the participants think that potential (in)sincerity does give rise to a perception of (im)politeness, on the other hand, can only be teased out by conducting follow-up interviews, which elicit the participants' views and explanations of their ratings in the first place and their opinions about the relationship between (im)politeness and (in)sincerity.

However, although there seems to be a link between perceptions of (im)politeness and (in)sincerity in Apology Three, the results of Apology One suggest that this link is not as straightforward and requires further investigation as to whether it invariably holds in perceptions of politeness. Although the participants' ratings of the (im)politeness of Apology One show no variability, their perceptions of (in)sincerity point to a lack of agreement; aggregate ratings are almost equally distributed between '(very) insincere' (31.2%) and '(very) sincere' (28.6%). The result of Apology One contradicts views that associate politeness with sincerity (Mills 2003) and in fact support Xie, He, and Lin's (2005) argument that politeness does not necessarily entail sincerity. The variability of (in)sincerity perceptions, combined with overall perceptions of the apology as polite, also seems to support Pinto's (2011) remarks on perceptions of (in)sincerity and their correspondence to perceptions of (im)politeness. Pinto (2011) argues that some seemingly insincere communicative acts such as routine exchanges and small talk can still be perceived as polite from a rapport-based point of view. That is to say, even if people say things they do not sincerely mean, out of social expectations/obligations, they may still be regarded as polite, and by extension their utterances, because their communicative intention is to maintain rapport and to make sure that communication is smooth (Pinto 2011: 228–229).

As far as the two hypotheses are concerned, the results, except in Apology One, support both hypotheses; there is a statistically significant correlation between the perceived degree of offense and the perceived (in)sincerity of the apology (hypothesis (a)). There is also a statistically significant correlation between the perceived (in)sincerity of the apology and its perceived (im)politeness. These correlations resonate with Haugh and Chang's (2019) suggestion that perceptions of (im)politeness might be related to perceptions of (in)sincerity.

Although the results support the hypotheses, they fall short of revealing the exact nature of the positive correlation between the above-mentioned variables. As we have seen, the participants' perceptions of (im)politeness and (in)sincerity reveal their orientation to two different perspectives on the relationship. The first is that perceptions of (im)politeness are related to perceptions of (in)sincerity. The second is that perceptions of politeness may be separate from perceptions of sincerity. In addition to this, it is not clear whether the positive correlation between the severity of the offense and the sincerity of the apology holds between the positive or negative ends of the scales. This can be clearly seen in the perceptions of sincerity and assessments of the degree of offense in Apologies Three and Four. In apology Three, the participants' evaluations of the severity of the offense seem to point to an overwhelming agreement that the offense is 'mild' and 'very mild.' Still, on the scale of sincerity, the participants' perceptions are mixed at best, with up to 44% of the participants rating the apology as 'very insincere' and 'insincere.' By contrast, in Apology Four, there is no such variability in the perceptions of (in)sincerity, and the overwhelming majority perceives the apology to be 'very sincere.' At the same time, the participants also assess the offense as 'very mild.' Thus, by looking at the perceptions in both of these recordings, it can be seen that the dynamics of the positive correlations are not clear.

The participants' ratings of severity and (in)sincerity in Apology Four might be explained in terms of Goffman's (1971) proportionality principle. Roughly speaking, the principle states that the format and structure of apologies correspond to the gravity of the offense as perceived, first and foremost, by the speakers. Heritage and Raymond (2016) found mixed evidence for the workings of this principle, but in Heritage et al. (2019), it was found that this principle is best looked at as a constitutive principle through which speakers assess the offense and according

to which they construct "proper," in the sense of proportional, apologies. Looking back at the apologies in the recordings, it can be seen that they tend to be rather elaborate and are composed of a wide range of apology strategies. Thus, the construction of the apologies as such might be indicative of the speakers' assessment of the offenses as more than just 'mild,' which is not how the participants perceived them. In light of the proportionality principle, it seems that the participants/observers rate the apology as sincere, simply because it is disproportionate to the mildness of the offense. The speaker appears to invest more than is necessary for the apology to be accepted, given the normality of the offense. Thus, the speaker's lengthy apology might have been interpreted as sincere because it was phrased in a more elaborate frame than is usually expected for the offense type, as the participants see it.

In addition to Goffman's (1971) proportionality principle, the suggested contrast between participants' evaluations of the severity of the offense and the speaker's own evaluation, as assessed through her construction of the apology turn, can be accounted for with reference to Kádár and Haugh's (2013) multi-loci approach to understandings of politeness. More specifically, in their framework, Kádár and Haugh (2013) argue that different understandings of politeness may arise from the different perspectives of the participants/users, on the one hand, and lay observers, on the other hand. This proposal may also explain that, as lay observers, the participants have different perceptions of the severity of the offense from the speaker herself, as a ratified participant. The two perspectives represent second-order and first-order understandings of the apology situation, respectively.

As can be seen, the results of this experimental study raise more questions than answers. In addition to the uncertainty regarding the nature of the correlation between the three variables, the results only present a sketchy view of the perceptions of politeness in Syrian Arabic without offering further insights into the underlying norms that motivate the participants' perceptions of the three scales. The variability, not only of (im)politeness perceptions but in the participants' perceptions of (in)sincerity and the severity of offense, might be underlain by a host of factors, contextual and sociolinguistic. The situations themselves and the nature of the offense may be grounds for the participants' perceptions of the (im)politeness of each apology. As Chang and Haugh (2011) mention, part of the way their participants evaluated the sincerity of the apology is motivated by the extent to which the offense lies out of the control of the apologizer. Thus, this point might be worthy of further investigation, in addition to other features of the situation such as the occasion of the apology and the topic of the apology. For example, Apology Two involves a money-related request, which might be considered a sensitive request by many Syrians and warrants refusals. Seen in this light, the apology might be felt to be polite, given the sensitivity of the request.

In a similar vein, the lexical and structural format of the apology might be one of the factors that influenced the participants' perceptions. The relationship between the form and the structure of apologies and social variables is a topic that has attracted a lot of attention in the literature. For example, in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the production of apologies is influenced by power, distance, and the severity of the offense, which Brown and Levinson (1987) argue are autonomous factors. The overall insight is that more weighty offenses elicit more elaborate apologies, which resonates with Goffman's (1971) proportionality principle. Moreover, Bergman and Kasper (1993) note that certain apologetic forms are associated with ritual apologies, whereas other apologetic forms are more frequent in substantive/real apologies. For instance, in American English, "excuse me" is used in the context of ritual apologies, but "I'm sorry" is much more frequent in real/post-offense

apologies. The association between lexical choice and social factors has also been addressed in East Asian languages. For example, in a recent, corpus-based study on apologies and politeness in Korean, Hatfield and Hahn (2010) note that the severity of the offense can be evaluated/detected based on the speakers' lexical choices. They maintain that "stronger" lexical items are more likely to be used with weightier offenses, and this observation is supported by corpus data. Thus, in Korean, *coysong*, a stronger apologetic form, is more likely to be used in highly offensive situations than *mian*, the milder form. Based on these observations, it might be reasonable to assume that the participants in this study are aware of such lexical differences and that their perceptions are a direct consequence of the speakers' lexical choices.

In addition to the relationship between the form of the apology and various contextual factors, research on apologies from different perspectives, both linguistic pragmatic and social psychological, have dealt with the question of what really constitutes an apology. The main concern of such line of research is what apology strategies are most prototypically associated with apologies for the speech act to be considered an apology proper, by both speakers and hearers. Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones (1989) explain that one of the difficulties in studying apologies cross-culturally lies in the different linguistic manifestations that apologies have cross-culturally. For example, native speakers of American English consider accounts, on their own, as constituting proper apologies, without them being combined with IFIDs (*ibid*: 180). Olshtain and Cohen (1983), however, maintain that any strategy within the apology speech act set counts as an apology, with IFIDs and taking on responsibility considered situation-neutral, while offers of repair, accounts, and promises of forbearance taken as situation-specific. The implications of the above discussed perspectives on what counts as an apology is that the participants in this study might have rated the apologies with reference to what they think counts as an apology and what does not qualify as a proper apology, both in terms of strategy choice and in relation to the respective offenses in the recordings.

Finally, research on impoliteness suggests that impoliteness is a multi-modal phenomenon and that it is not only what is said that gives rise to perceptions of impoliteness but also the way it is said (Culpeper 2011a). For example, Culpeper (2011b) suggests that a mismatch between the content of the words said and the prosody of speech is interpreted as an instance of politeness. More specifically, if words of excitement are said in a tone suggestive of boredom, this will be interpreted as impoliteness. Generally, perceptions of (im)politeness, as Culpeper, Haugh, and Sinkeviciute (2015: 324) add, are related to mock politeness, banter, and insincere or manipulative politeness. Clearly, a mismatch between content and prosody involves insincerity, which may explain the correlation between the participants' perceptions of (in)sincerity and (im)politeness. Moreover, there might be other paralinguistic cues such as the quality of the voice, the pitch, and even the local accent of the apologizers that may have motivated the participants' perceptions.

Concerning the last point about local accents, the speakers on the recordings use four different local accents, one of which is the accent found in the Syrian capital, Damascus. Sociolinguistic studies on attitudes towards languages, varieties of languages, and regional dialects/accents suggest that people are influenced by social differences in what they hear (Meyerhoff 2011). Furthermore, it has been suggested that people perceive their own local dialects more favorably than other dialects in terms of correctness and pleasantness (Preston 1999). Other aspects that figure in people's perceptions of people based on speech include sincerity. Thus, it might be worth considering whether the participants, who come from all cities

in Syria, were influenced by accent variations in their perceptions of the (in)sincerity, and, overall, of the (im)politeness of the apologizers.[4]

However, the discussion of the results presented above remains tentative at best, and the results can only be validated by follow-up interviews. The results only confirm the hypotheses and show patterns, so to draw any meaningful conclusions regarding the variability of perceptions, follow-up interviews are invaluable. In addition to eliciting the participants' insights and explanations of their ratings, the interviews will confirm/shed light on my own/the analyst's observations, as outlined above (Kádár & Haugh 2013; Haugh & Chang 2019). The central questions should aim to elicit the participants' rationale for rating the apologies in the way they did, how the three scales/variable correlate in their point of view, and whether they thought of them as collectively adding to their overall perceptions of politeness, or as autonomous variables. Most importantly, the follow-up interviews would confirm whether the participants view (im)politeness and (in)sincerity separately, to what extent, and in what contexts. In addition to these important questions, it would be interesting to know whether the structure of the apologies and the lexical choices of the speakers influenced the participants' perceptions of (im)politeness. Moreover, the follow-up interview is expected to shed light on the participants' opinions of what the components of a polite apology are.

To wrap up this discussion, two main limitations need to be pointed out. First, the study does not take into consideration the perceptions of the speakers and the addressees, as ratified participants, who represent a user, first-order perspective. The study examines variability in perceptions from a second-order, observers' perspective. As I mentioned earlier, Kádár and Haugh (2013) explain that different participation/observation statuses encode different layers of understanding and perceiving politeness. Thus, the study can be enriched by interviewing the users to examine their perceptions and understandings of the apology situations. Second, the recordings are not interactional. Both politeness and apologies are interactional communicative acts, the production and the perception of which is contingent on the input of the speaker and the uptake of the hearer (Davies et al. 2007; Haugh 2007). Such co-constructed nature means that apologies and politeness might be rephrased and reconstructed in accordance with the addressees' interactional responses. Obviously, the perceptions of the observers are bound to be influenced by how the interaction unfolded, by how the addressees received the apologies, and by how both speakers and addressees negotiated the apologies.

7   Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the perceptions of politeness in Syrian Arabic. The main objective was to investigate whether there is intra-language variability in the participants' perceptions of the (im)politeness of four naturally-occurring apologies. Another aim of this research was to test whether there is a correlation between perceptions of (im)politeness and perceptions of other contextual factors such as the (in)sincerity of the apology and the severity of the offense. The results of the statistical analysis of the data, which were collected using an online survey, show that there was variability in the perceptions of (im)politeness in only one of the four recordings. In this respect, the results are in line with the results in Haugh and Chang (2019) and support Eelen's (2001) claim that variability is bound to occur in perceptions of

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[4]   In a personal communication with one of the participants, he mentioned to me that he thought his local accent, used by one of the apologizers, contributed to the authenticity and congeniality of the survey.

politeness. As for the correlation between perceptions of (im)politeness, (in)sincerity, and the degree of offense, the results show that there is indeed a positive correlation between the three scales in all but one apology recording in which there was no correlation between the (in)sincerity of the apology and the severity of the offense. Following the discussion and the presentation of the results, I noted that the results need to be complemented by follow-up interviews in order to identify how those variables are inter-related and to tap into the participants' rationales for the ratings they made. This is important in order to understand the underlying norms that motivate the participants' perceptions of (im)politeness and to verify my own analyses/observations. Finally, I argued that the results can be enriched and seen from another perspective, if the perceptions of the participants, who are directly involved in the apology recordings, are analyzed and taken into consideration.

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Appendix A: The online survey in Arabic

أعزائي المشاركين:
يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقصي مدى التباين في تقييم درجة اللباقة في أربعة اعتذارات, حيث سوف تستخدم البيانات في إطار مشروع بحثي لنيل درجة الدكتوراه. إن المشاركة في هذا البحث طوعية بالكامل ويمكنكم أيضا التوقف عن الإجابة على الأسئلة متى شئتم ولن يتم في هذه الحالة تسجيل أي من إجاباتكم السابقة أو البيانات الشخصية المتعلقة بكم. لكن إن أردتم المشاركة أرجو الإجابة على جميع الأسئلة الواردة في الاستبيان والتي لن تستغرق أكثر من عشر دقائق. سوف يتم التعامل مع الإجابات والبيانات الشخصية الواردة في هذا الاستبيان بسرية تامة ولأغراض بحثية فقط. من أجل الحصول على بيانات متجانسة, يرجى المشاركة فقط إن كنت طالبا\طالبة في أي مرحلة جامعية.

بيانات شخصية

الجنس:
1. ذكر.
2. أنثى.

العمر: _____

الدرجة العلمية (يشير هذا السؤال إلى الدرجة العلمية التي يسعى المشارك إلى نيلها حاليا):
1. إجازة.
2. ماستر.
3. دكتوراه.

الجامعة التي يدرس فيها المشارك/المشاركة:

الاستبيان

يحتوي الاستبيان الآتي على أربعة أقسام, كل منها يحتوي على شرح مكتوب لواقعة حصل فيها اعتذار. الشرح مرفق بمقطع صوتي للتسجيل الذي تم فيه الاعتذار. يرجى قراءة التفاصيل التوضيحية للسياق الذي وقع فيه الاعتذار ومن ثم الاستماع إلى المقطع الصوتي والإجابة على كل من الأسئلة الواردة في كل قسم.

الاعتذار الأول

السياق:
مجموعة من الرفقات اتفقوا يروحوا رحلة سوا واشتروا البطاقات. قبل أسبوع من الرحلة وحدة من الرفقات بتقرر تبطل تروح عالرحلة فتبعت هالتسجيل الصوتي عمجموعة الماسنجر اللي هني عليا لحتى تعتذر منن وتبرر الموقف. الرجاء الاستماع إلى الاعتذار الأول عبر الضغط عالرابط المرفق تحت.
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1OakXnBnabqMSqVDPzoNbu2w4oWL-sjLy

السؤال الأول: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 كيف بتقييم الاعتذار بهالموقف؟

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

كتير مهذب   كتير غير مهذب

السؤال الثاني: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 أديش بتقييم درجة الإساءة بالموقف اللي حصل مشانو الاعتذار؟

1	2	3	4	5

إساءة كبيرة كتير   إساءة خفيفة كتير

السؤال الثالث: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 برأيك أديش كان الاعتذار صادق؟

1	2	3	4	5

غير صادق أبدا   صادق جدا

الاعتذار الثاني

السياق:

في رفيق ورفيقة. الرفيق بيسأل رفيقتو إذا أهلها بسوريا بيقدروا يدينوا مصاري لعيلة رفيقو بسوريا (الشخص اللي رح يتدين المصاري مانو رفيق مشترك و البنت اللي بدا تطلب من أهلها ما بتعرف الشب). الرفيقة بتقترح إنو خالتا ممكن تساعد وبتتصل بخالتا اللي بتقلا إنو ما عندا قدرة تدين حدا حاليا. الرفيقة بدورا بتعتذر من الرفيق وبتبعتلو هالتسجيل. الرجاء الاستماع إلى الاعتذار الثاني عبر الضغط عالرابط المرفق تحت.

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1CuogwKh6BED9eU6UDJeHI9hs8M997GkN

السؤال الأول: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 كيف بتقييم الاعتذار بهالموقف؟

1	2	3	4	5

كتير غير مهذب   كتير مهذب

السؤال الثاني: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 أديش بتقييم درجة الإساءة بالموقف اللي حصل مشانو الاعتذار؟

1	2	3	4	5

إساءة كبيرة كتير   إساءة خفيفة كتير

السؤال الثالث: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 برأيك أديش كان الاعتذار صادق؟

1	2	3	4	5

غير صادق أبدا   صادق جدا

الاعتذار الثالث

السياق:

شخص عزم رفيقو ع حفل تخرجو. الرفيق بيسكن بمدينة تانية فبيعتذر عن الجية على حفل التخرج. الرجاء الاستماع إلى الاعتذار الثالث عبر الضغط عالرابط المرفق تحت.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cEKyWH0LjcjSGT_2KLAkOxssc7TRGPLp/view?usp=sharing

السؤال الأول: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 كيف بتقييم الاعتذار بهالموقف؟

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

كتير غير مهذب   كتير مهذب

السؤال الثاني: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 أديش بتقييم درجة الإساءة بالموقف اللي حصل مشانو الاعتذار؟

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

إساءة كبيرة كتير   إساءة خفيفة كتير

السؤال الثالث: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 برأيك أديش كان الاعتذار صادق؟

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

غير صادق أبدا   صادق جدا

الاعتذار الرابع

السياق:

رفيقة بتبعت لرفيقتا تسجيل صوتي عم تسلم عليا وتسأل عن أمورا. الرفيقة التانية بتفتح الرسالة بس بتلتهي بشغلة وبتنسى تسمع التسجيل أو ترد عالرسالة. بعد كذا يوم بتنتبه لوجود الرسالة الصوتية اللي ما سمعتا ف بتبعت تسجيل لرفيقتا لتعتذر منا. الرجاء الاستماع إلى الاعتذار الرابع عبر الضغط عالرابط المرفق تحت.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ugo-pmDcQgscCeWN2aJUz2kwRKRNItsz/view?usp=sharing

السؤال الأول: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 كيف بتقييم الاعتذار بهالموقف؟

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

كتير غير مهذب   كتير مهذب

السؤال الثاني: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 أديش بتقييم درجة الإساءة بالموقف اللي حصل مشانو الاعتذار؟

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

إساءة كبيرة كتير   إساءة خفيفة كتير

السؤال الثالث: على مقياس من 1 ل 5 برأيك أديش كان الاعتذار صادق؟

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

غير صادق أبدا   صادق جدا

الأعزاء المشاركين, يرجو إبداء رأيكم في إجراء مقابلات لاحقة معي من أجل تسليط المزيد من الضوء على إجاباتكم.

1. أرغب في إجراء مقابلة.

2. لا أرغب في إجراء مقابلة.

إن كنت ترغب/ترغبين في إجراء مقابلة, يرجى تزويدي بعنوان بريدكم الالكتروني من أجل التواصل معكم لاحقا. (إن كنتم اخترتم الخيار 2 في السؤال السابق, يمكنكم كتابة لا أرغب مجددا هنا).

شكرا جزيلا على مشاركتكم في هذا الاستبيان

Appendix B: The online survey in English

Dear participants:

The aim of this research is to examine variability in (im)politeness perceptions of four apologies, and the data will be used in a PhD dissertation project. Participating is voluntary and you can opt out participation at any time you want. In this case, your responses and your personal data will not be recorded. However, if you wish to participate, please answer all of the questions in the survey, which should take no more than 10 minutes of your time. All responses and personal information will be kept anonymous and will be used for research purposes only. For me to obtain a homogeneous sample of answers, please respond to this survey only if you are an undergraduate or graduate university student.

Personal information:

Gender: 1. Male   2. Female

Age:

Education level (which the participant is currently studying to obtain):

1. BA   2. MA   3. PhD

Name of your university:

The Survey:

The following survey consists of four section, each containing a description of an apology situation. The description is followed by a link to the apology recording. Please read the description of the context of the apology first, then listen to the voice recording and answer each question in the following sections.

Apology one

Context:
a group had agreed to go on a trip and bought the tickets. One week before the planned trip one of them decides not to go. So, she sends the following group voice message to Messenger. She apologizes and tries to explain the situation. Please listen to the first apology by clicking on the hyperlink below.
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1OakXnBnabqMSqVDPzoNbu2w4oWL-sjLy

Question 1:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the apology in this situation?

1	2	3	4	5
Very impolite				Very polite

Question 2:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the severity of the offense?

1	2	3	4	5
Very severe				Very mild

Question 3:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how sincere do you think the apology was?

1	2	3	4	5
Very insincere				Very sincere

Apology two

Context:

Two friends. One of them asks the other if her family can lend money to his friend's family in Syria (the person who wants to borrow the money is not a mutual friend and the one who is supposed to lend the money doesn't know the borrower). The friend who was asked proposes her aunt can help and she calls her aunt, who tells her that she cannot lend the required sum. The friend in turn apologizes to her friend and sends the following voice message. having proposed her aunt can help, responds later to the request with a rejection. She sends a voice message to her friend and apologizes. Please listen to the second apology by clicking on the hyperlink below.
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1CuogwKh6BED9eU6UDJeHI9hs8M997GkN

Question 1:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the apology in this situation?

1	2	3	4	5
Very impolite				Very polite

Question 2:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the severity of the offense?

1	2	3	4	5
Very severe				Very mild

Question 3:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how sincere do you think the apology was?

1	2	3	4	5
Very insincere				Very sincere

Apology three:

Context

A friend invites his friend to attend his graduation ceremony. The other friend lives in another city, so he declines the invitation. Please listen to the third apology by clicking on the hyperlink below.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cEKyWH0LjcjSGT_2KLAkOxssc7TRGPLp/view?usp=sharing

Question 1:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the apology in this situation?

1	2	3	4	5
Very impolite				Very polite

Question 2:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the severity of the offense?

1	2	3	4	5
Very severe				Very mild

Question 3:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how sincere do you think the apology was?

1	2	3	4	5
Very insincere				Very sincere

Apology four:

Context

A friend sends a voice message to the other to ask about how she's doing. The other one unwittingly views the messages but neither listens to them nor replies. The latter, a couple of days later, realizes that she hadn't responded to the messages and send a voice message apologizing to her friend. Please listen to the four apology by clicking on the hyperlink below.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ugo-pmDcQgscCeWN2aJUz2kwRKRNItsz/view?usp=sharing

Question 1:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the apology in this situation?

1	2	3	4	5
Very impolite				Very polite

Question 2:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the severity of the offense?

1	2	3	4	5
Very severe				Very mild

Question 3:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how sincere do you think the apology was?

1	2	3	4	5
Very insincere				Very sincere

Thanks a lot for your participation

Appendix C: Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) apology coding scheme (as cited in Hodeib 2020)

1) Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID)

- Sorry
- Excuse me
- I apologize for
- Forgive me
- Pardon me for
- I regret that
- I am afraid

2) Taking on responsibility
- Explicit self-blame e.g. my mistake
- Lack of intent   e.g. I didn't mean to upset you
- Justify hearer   e.g. you're right to be angry
- Expression of embarrassment   e.g. I feel awful about it
- Admission of facts but not responsibility   e.g. I haven't read it
- Refusal to acknowledge guilt
  - Denial of responsibility e.g. It wasn't my fault
  - Blame the hearer e.g. It's your own fault
  - Pretend to be offended e.g. I'm the one to be offended

3) Explanation or account
e.g. The traffic was terrible

4) Offer of repair
e.g. I'll pay for the damage

5) Promise of forbearance
e.g. This won't happen again

Appendix D: Reliability test

Reliability test for Recording 1:

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	77	100.0
	Excluded[a]	0	.0
	Total	77	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.631	3

Reliability test for Recording 2:

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	77	100.0
	Excluded[a]	0	.0
	Total	77	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.706	3

Reliability test for Recording 3:

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	77	100.0
	Excluded[a]	0	.0
	Total	77	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.864	3

Reliability test for Recording 4:

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	77	100.0
	Excluded[a]	0	.0
	Total	77	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.864	3

Reliability test across the four recordings:

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	77	100.0
	Excluded[a]	0	.0
	Total	77	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.689	3

Appendix E: Correlation Matrices

Correlation matrix in Recording 1:

Correlations

			How would you rate the (im)politeness of the apology?	How would you rate the (in)sincerity of apology?	How would you rate the severity of the offense in the situation?
Spearman's rho	How would you rate the (im)politeness of the apology?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.272*	.600**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.017	.000
		N	77	77	77
	How would you rate the (in)sincerity of apology?	Correlation Coefficient	.272*	1.000	.216
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.	.059
		N	77	77	77
	How would you rate the severity of the offense in the situation?	Correlation Coefficient	.600**	.216	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.059	.
		N	77	77	77

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation matrix in Recording 2:

Correlations

			How would you rate the (im)politeness of the apology?	How would you rate the (in)sincerity of apology?	How would you rate the severity of the offense in the situation?
Spearman's rho	How would you rate the (im)politeness of the apology?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.452**	.602**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	77	77	77
	How would you rate the (in)sincerity of apology?	Correlation Coefficient	.452**	1.000	.415**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	77	77	77
	How would you rate the severity of the offense in the situation?	Correlation Coefficient	.602**	.415**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	77	77	77

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation matrix in Recording 3:

Correlations

			How would you rate the (im)politeness of the apology?	How would you rate the (in)sincerity of apology?	How would you rate the severity of the offense in the situation?
Spearman's rho	How would you rate the (im)politeness of the apology?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.661**	.715**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	77	77	77
	How would you rate the (in)sincerity of apology?	Correlation Coefficient	.661**	1.000	.686**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	77	77	77
	How would you rate the severity of the offense in the situation?	Correlation Coefficient	.715**	.686**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	77	77	77

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation matrix in Recording 4:

Correlations

			How would you rate the (im)politeness of the apology?	How would you rate the (in)sincerity of apology?	How would you rate the severity of the offense in the situation?
Spearman's rho	How would you rate the (im)politeness of the apology?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.295**	.707**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.009	.000
		N	77	77	77
	How would you rate the (in)sincerity of apology?	Correlation Coefficient	.295**	1.000	.378**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.	.001
		N	77	77	77
	How would you rate the severity of the offense in the situation?	Correlation Coefficient	.707**	.378**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.
		N	77	77	77

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).