

# NS and NNS Apology Strategies in English

Kyongseon Jeon

(Columbus State University)

**Jeon, Kyongseon. (2017). NS and NNS apology strategies in English.** *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 25(3), 1-23. The current study explores how native (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of English use different apology strategies in different contexts. Twenty NSs and 20 NNSs completed a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The analyses of data focused on various apology strategies such as the use of explicit expression of apology, explanation of situation, acknowledgment of responsibility, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance. The analysis also looked at modifications on apologies using downgraders and intensifiers. The results indicated both NS and NNS respondents used very similar apology strategies although NNSs relied slightly more on explicit expressions of apology than NSs. Both groups chose different strategies depending on the situation presented on the written DCT, indicating sensitivity to social factors such as social distance and power, and severity of offense. The current study suggests directions for future research focusing on sociocultural factors and L2 proficiency which might determine the production of L2 pragmatic conventions by NS and NNS respondents.

**Key Words:** English apology strategies, social factors and apology strategies

## 1. Introduction

There has been an increasing body of research literature in second language pragmatics which explores potential differences between pragmatic knowledge of native and non-native English speakers. Pragmatics is defined as 'the study of communicative action in its sociopolitical context' (Kasper & Rose, 2001, p. 2). According to Kasper and Rose (2001), communicative action includes using speech acts such as apologizing, complaining, complimenting, and requesting.

Pragmatics is one of the most difficult areas of language which speakers of a language become rarely aware of, but important in maintaining social relationships. When it comes to learning a second or foreign language, pragmatic learning can be very challenging but critical in mastering the social rules of language use.

In the recent years, measuring sociolinguistic competence has sparked research interest. Sociolinguistic competence is defined as ‘the ability to use the appropriate sociocultural rules of speaking, i.e., the ability to react in a culturally acceptable way in that context and to choose stylistically appropriate forms for the context’ (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981, p. 113). Bataineh and Bataineh (2008, p. 798) argued that ‘apology is the speech act through which the wrongdoer acknowledges responsibility and seeks forgiveness for what he/she has done.’ As a key component of this sociolinguistic competence, pragmatics has been studied from a second language learner’s perspective in various theoretical and empirical studies (e.g., see Rose & Kasper 2001 for a collection of studies on L2 pragmatics and language teaching).

The current research explores potential differences in the use of apology strategies used by native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS), and examines their sensitivity to social factors embedded in the context.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Pragmatics, Speech Acts and Apology

Much of the research endeavor on second language pragmatics has been devoted to the study on how speech acts are performed by second language learners from various language backgrounds (e.g., Al-Zumor, 2011; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Cheng, 2011; Cohen & Shively, 2007). Speech acts refer to how language is used to get things done and correspond to the functions of language such as requesting, thanking, complaining, apologizing, complimenting, ordering, stating, commanding, promising, offering, and threatening. Among these speech acts, apology has received research attention as it relates to other frequently studied expressive speech acts. Unlike speech acts like thanking,

complimenting, and complaining, apologies occur after the event takes place. Bergman and Kasper (1993) define apology as ‘compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S (speaker) was casually involved and which is costly to H (hearer)’ (p. 82). Goffman (1971) defines apology as a remedial exchange, which serves to re-establish social harmony after a real or virtual offense. Following Goffman’s view of apologies, Bergman and Kasper (1993) classify apologies into two types. The first is those apologies redressing virtual offenses and these are remedied by the sole offering of an apologetic formula. The second category of apologies are those redressing actual damage inflicted on the addressee, sometimes including an offer of material compensation. Bergman and Kasper (1993) also note that both kinds of apology vary from culture to culture.

## 2.2. Cross-cultural Studies on Apology Strategies

Previous studies have compared apology strategies employed by speakers of different languages (e.g., Chen, 2013; Hatfield & Hahn, 2011; Vollmer & Olshtain, 1989) and found differences in apology strategies. For instance, Vollmer and Olshtain (1989) examined apology strategies in German using data collected from 200 German speakers using the discourse completion questionnaire of the CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns, 1989) project. In this study, the speech act set (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983) was used as the main units of analysis. The speech act set consists of five main apology strategies- an IFID (illocutionary force indicating device), an expression of responsibility, an explanation or account of the violation, an offer of repair, and a promise of forbearance.

The use of an IFID is an explicit apology strategy choice available to the speaker in any language. Sugimoto (1990) also found some significant cross-cultural difference in the way Americans and Japanese apologize. For instance, an explanation or account of the violation was more frequently used by Americans than by Japanese and this difference was found to be statistically significant. Furthermore, Sugimoto noted that Japanese participants included statements of remorse (regret) in their apologies more than did Americans in all 12 situations presented and she interpreted this observation that Japanese are

more likely to apologize than US Americans. More recently, Wu and Wang (2016) examined the strategies of responding to apologies from a cross-cultural perspective by comparing them adopted by English native speakers, Chinese native speakers, and Chinese EFL learners. It was found that all three groups favor the strategy Indirect Acceptance to show politeness when responding to apologies. Indirect Acceptance strategy involves responses of providing solutions, accepting promises, remedies, and explanation and downgrading. One important difference found was that the three groups displayed different patterns of strategies, depending on contextual factors such as social power, social distance, and severity of offense.

Shariati and Chamani (2010) examined 500 naturally occurring exchanges to identify apology strategies in Persian. The results revealed that explicit expression of apology with a request for forgiveness was the most common one in Persian. This strategy in combination with acknowledgement of responsibility was the most frequent combination. The authors noted that the same set of strategies identified in other languages was frequently used by speakers of Persian. It seems important to note that not only have previous studies reported on the cross-cultural differences in apology realization, but they also provided evidence for universally valid apology strategies. Sugimoto (1990) found that American and Japanese students were similar in the frequency of use of four apology strategies: statement of remorse, accounts, description of damage, and reparation.

### 2.3. Effect of Social Factors on Apology Strategies

According to Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), apology is a face-threatening act (FTA) that is linked to the addressee's negative face and FTA is often influenced by three contextual factors-social power, social distance and the imposition of acts. Following up with this theoretical point, a number of previous studies demonstrated there are social and contextual factors which determine a speaker's selection of apology strategies. For example, Bergman and Kasper (1993) examined how contextual factors determine Thai and American informants' selection of apology strategies. According to the results, upgrading was the strategy that was most sensitive to contextual factors; the more

obligation and face-loss involved in an offense, the more upgrading of apology would be provided. In addition, in this study, informants were more likely to explicitly express responsibility for the offense if the relationship between the offender and the offended was close. In a comparative study of English and Dutch speakers, Trosborg (1987) found that both groups of speakers at three difference levels of proficiency (intermediate, lower advanced and higher advanced) reacted to the social parameters of dominance and social distance in their apologies.

Using data collected from apologies from conversations in television soap operas and media, Hatfield and Hahn (2011) analyzed apologies in Korean. Hatfield and Hahn (2011) confirmed that social factors such as relative power, social distance, and the severity of the act are relevant in form selection in Korean apology. In addition, the formality of a situation was a strong determinant in the choice of apology terms. What was noticeably different in the case of Korean apology was the notion of group face, as opposed to individual face which is more important in apologies in Western culture. Koreans apologize for actions they were not directly involved in or to individuals who were not directly threatened. Multiple pieces of evidence were found in their data set to demonstrate that the groups that can bear face are culturally defined.

A study by Bataineh and Bataineh (2008) identified gender differences in apology strategies in a comparison of American and Jordanian undergraduate students. Especially in Jordanian speakers, male and female differed in their use of apology strategies, which was a consistent finding with previous studies (e.g., Lukasik, 2000). Chen (2013) investigated the speech act of apology responses by English native speakers, Chinese native speakers, and Chinese EFL learners and her finding indicated that the speech act of apology is influenced by social power, social distance, and the imposition of acts, as Brown and Levinson (1987) argued.

#### 2.4. NS vs. NNS Apologies in English

Some studies elicited apologies from both native and non-native speakers of English with the goal of identifying the differences and similarities in their use of various apology strategies. Studies of ESL apologies have mainly addressed whether NNS have an access to various apology strategies appropriate in

English. For instance, Rintell and Mitchell (1989) examined NS and NNS use of apology strategies in their response to written and oral Discourse Completion questionnaires. The differences found between the two conditions were slight. Bergman and Kasper (1993) compared how Thai NNS of English differed from NS of Thai and American English in realizing apology. They also reported a pragmatic transfer from Thai apology patterns was responsible for more than half of the differences in apology suppliance.

A recent study by Ugla and Abidin (2016) set out to explore apology strategies of English used by Iraqi EFL students. Using an interview, this study reported that Iraqi students translate apologies from Iraqi Arabic to English when performing apology acts in English due to their lack of proficiency in English. Confirming the previous findings, Ugla and Abidin's study found that Iraqi EFL learners use a variety of apology patterns to match hearers' social status and social distance.

Taken together, previous studies on apology provided evidence for a universally valid apology speech act. At the same time, these previous findings point to the interesting cultural and pragmatic differences performing the speech act of apology. Studies also point out that different social factors determine a speaker's choice of apology strategies. The complexity of social factors at work might explain the level of difficulty involved in acquiring pragmatic competence in a second language. It seems critical in learning a second or foreign language that pragmatic competence is independent of grammatical competence, as it was claimed by researchers such as Bardovi-Harlig (1999) and Thomas (1983). According to Bardovi-Harlig (1999), 'high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitant high levels of pragmatic competence' (p. 686). In a review of literature, Bergman and Kasper (1993) point out that in a cross-cultural study of apology, it is 'essential to establish what constitutes an offense, how members of different cultures perceive contexts, and how these perceptions are reflected in output strategies' (p. 86). One of the difficulties in L2 pragmatic research is how to establish the norm of native speakers which requires accurate assessment of offense specific to that culture. Many of the previous studies were conducted without the baseline NS data. However, the current study includes the baseline data collected from native speakers as it sets out to explore differences in the use of strategies by both NS and NNS speakers of English as

they are reflected in the different ways of apologies in different situations and ultimately shed light on the way we perceive socially appropriate linguistic behaviors. The following research questions guided the current investigation:

a) Do non-native speakers (NNS) of English use similar strategies in apologizing as their NS counterparts?

b) Do these strategies vary depending on the contextual factors such as social distance and power?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants

The total of 40 college students (both traditional and non-traditional) participated in this research. The native speaker (NS) group consisted of 20 college students who were enrolled in a regional university in the Southeastern part of the United States and all of them were born and raised in the United States. There were 15 female and 5 male students and their age ranged from 19 to 24 and one male participant was 52 years old. This group of native speakers of English was included in the study so that their data can serve as baseline for a possible comparison with NNS data. Age and gender were not intended variables for this study. Thus, 52 year old male was not excluded from study as it was meant to include participants from various backgrounds.

The nonnative speaker group (NNS) consisted of 20 learners of English who were currently enrolled in the university's intensive English as a second language program or were foreign exchange students. There were 11 female and 9 male participants and their age ranged from 19 to 45. Also their proficiency levels varied from beginning to advanced as it is determined by their TOEFL or IELTS scores or in-house placement test. The amount of time spent in English-speaking country varied from 2 weeks to 25 years. The first languages of the NNS participants were Korean (14), Arabic (3), Chinese (1), Spanish (1) and Ewe (1). The participation was voluntary. Proficiency level or first language was not controlled at the onset of the study as the study aims to be more descriptive of various strategies of NNSs at this time.

### 3.2. Instruments

A background questionnaire was given to all participants before they completed the main questionnaire. Background questionnaire was to obtain some basic information about the participants, such as nationality, gender, first language, age, and experience using English language outside classroom and TOEFL or IELTS scores for NNS participants.

The main data in the current study were elicited using the written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) which was constructed to elicit instances of apology from NS and NNS speakers of English. DCT is one of the most commonly used instruments used to elicit the realization of specific speech acts (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). On DCT, each item consists of a brief description of a situation and a scripted dialogue from which one turn has been omitted. Participants are typically asked to fill in the missing turn to provide the target speech act. According to Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), three points need to be considered in constructing such a test: contextualization of the speech act to be elicited, manipulation of external and internal contextual features, and finally cultural transposition.

DCT created for this study had the total of 12 scenarios. Eight of them were targeting apology elicitation and 4 of them were distractors. The following (1) is an example of the scenario aiming to elicit an apology.

- (1) Context: *You are about to miss your bus to your next class when you bump into an older woman causing her to drop the heavy bags she is carrying:*  
 Older woman: Oh no! I dropped all my bags!  
 You: \_\_\_\_\_

The researcher made certain these scenarios vary in terms of status, degree of offense, age, distance in the relationship between both parties involved in the situation. Table 1 summarizes the types of offense and summary of each scenario on DCT used for this study and Appendix A shows the complete version of DCT used for this study.



Table 1. The Scenarios Warranting Apology on DCT

<b>Item</b>	<b>Scenarios</b>	<b>Social Dimensions</b>
<b>1</b>	Running into the professor whose lab class having been missed	high status/older
<b>2</b>	Arriving late at an appointment with a tutee	low status/distant
<b>3</b>	Bumping into an older woman causing her to drop heavy bag she is carrying	distant/older
<b>4</b>	Running into a close friend after having missed his/her birthday party	close/equal status
<b>5</b>	To a younger brother after having not kept the promise to take him for ice cream	close/younger
<b>6</b>	To a friend after having forgot to show up for coffee with him/her	close/equal status
<b>7</b>	To a neighbor who came to your door to complain about your loud music	distant/equal status
<b>8</b>	To the person behind you after you cut to the front of the line in the cafeteria	distant/equal status

### 3.3. Coding/Data Analysis

To identify and tabulate the different apology strategies, the coding scheme was adapted and modified from the CCSARP's (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns, 1989) project coding manual. The CCSARP project was initiated in an attempt to pursue the line of research which focuses on the issue of universality in the use of speech acts and their rules which govern the use of language in context (Blum-Kulka & Olshtian, 1984). And the suggested coding scheme provides a comprehensive outlook of apology strategies possibly used by speakers of various languages.

The categories study are as follows:

Expression of Apologies (EOA): Explicit apologies include the apologies done with illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDS). IFIDS are formulaic, routinized expressions in which the speaker's apology is made explicit. Such examples include expressions such as *sorry*, *excuse me*, *I apologize*, *forgive me*, *pardon me*, *I regret* and *I am afraid*.

Explanation of Situation (E): This category covers any external mitigating circumstances offered by the speaker, i.e., 'objective' reasons for the violation at hand. For instance, the expressions such as *I was sick*, *the traffic was terrible*, and *I had a paper due* are coded under this category.

Acknowledgement of Responsibility (AOR): In an attempt to mitigate the offense committed, the speaker chooses to express responsibility for the offense which created the need to apologize. This can be done in a couple of different ways. For instance, the speaker can self-blame by saying *my mistake*, express the lack of intent by saying *I didn't mean to upset you*, or justify the hearer by saying *you're right to be angry*.

Offer of Repair (OOR): An apologizer may offer to repair the damage which has resulted from his or her infraction. Repair might be offered in its literal sense or an offer to pay for the damage. This offer must be directly related to the offense committed. For instance, the apologizer might say *I will pay for the cleaning* or *you can borrow my dress instead*.

Promise of Forbearance (POF): Whenever the speaker's sense of guilt is strong enough, he or she may feel the need to promise that the offensive act will never occur again or improve his or her behavior in various ways. The examples include expressions like *this won't happen again*.

The current analysis also looked to find differences in the use of intensifying and downgrading expressions in the apologies by NS and NNS participants.

Intensifier (INTS): Intensifiers of the apology can be within IFIDs using adverbials. For instance, *I'm very/terribly/so/really/awfully sorry*. They can also be emotional expressions and exclamations (*oh, oh Lord, God*), expressions marked for register (*I do apologize*), and use of *please* (*please forgive me*).

Downgrader (DG): Downgrading is done to distract the hearer from the offense. It is a tactical move by which the speaker tries to divert the hearer's attention from his or her own responsibility for the offense at hand. Speakers can attempt to throw doubt on the modalities of the previous arrangement which he or she broke as in *Are you sure we were supposed to meet at 10?* or act innocently or pretend not to notice the offense as in *am I late?*

NS and NNS participants' written responses to all 8 scenarios in the DCT were coded based on the first five coding categories with regard to the occurrence of apology strategies and then tabulated for occurrence of each strategy use for each situation. Furthermore, each instance of apology was coded whether downgrading or intensification strategies were used and their frequency was tabulated.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. NS vs. NNS Apology Strategies

Table 2 shows the overall frequency and percentages of each strategy use by both groups. There is the total number of 330 strategies used by NS respondents and 338 by NNS respondents. Out of the total 330 NS apologies, there were only 22 apologies which consist of a single apology strategy and for the NNS group, 26 out of the total NNS 338 apologies relies on a single strategy, meaning the majority of NS and NNS apologies were expressed using a combination of strategies. It is worth noting that there was a higher number of explicit apologies used by NNS than by NS across situations (130 vs. 94), although the differences between NS and NNS frequency were found not to be significant (chi-square=13.29, df 7,  $p < 0.065$ ). This finding indicates NS participants relied more on the less explicit form of apology than NNS counterparts. Explanation of situation and offer of repair were also popular strategies used by both NS and NNS respondents.

#### (2) Example of Expression of Apology (EOA) Strategy

For loud music to a neighbor

*Oh, I am sorry!* (NS).

*I am terrible sorry* (with an intensifier, NNS).

#### (3) Example of Explanation of Situation (E) Strategy

For being late to an appointment with a tutee

*I am running late because of traffic* (NS).

*I met a traffic jam* (NNS).

#### (4) Example of Offer of Repair (OOR) Strategy

For missed appointment with a younger sibling

*I pinky swear that we will go tomorrow night* (NS).

*I will get ice cream next time* (NNS).

Other notable NS-NNS difference was found in the use of acknowledgement of responsibility. There were more uses of this strategy for NS (12%) than for NNS (9%). Similarly, NSs used 5 % more offer of repair in their apologies (24% vs. 19%) and 3.4 % more downgraders than NNS (4% vs. 0.6%). Along with explicit expressions of apology, NNS respondents used more promise of

forbearance (0.9% vs. 0%), and intensifiers (10% vs. 8%). Interestingly, NSs did not use any promise of forbearance in their apology. However, none of these differences in frequency were statistically significant.

Intensification (INTS) and Downgraders (DG) were also the strategies used by NSs although there is a slight difference (8%-INTS and 4% DG). Examples of intensifying expressions were most commonly *so* as in *I am so sorry* and *why am I so unbelievable*, *terribly* as in *I am terribly sorry*, *oh no*, *oh my gosh*, and *it's crucial*. They had fewer instances of downgrading expressions and they were *no problem* (for dropped bags), *happy belated birthday*, *thank you for letting me know*, and *that was yesterday?* Intensification was also used by NNSs but it was used more frequently than downgraders by NNS respondents (10% vs. 0.6%). The only two instances of NNS' downgrading expressions used were *don't worry* (for bumping into an older woman causing her to drop her bags), and *please don't be mad* (for missed appointment with younger sibling).

Table 2. Numbers and Percentages of NS and NNS Respondents' Apology Strategies

Scenarios		BOA	E	AOR	OOR	POF	INTS	DG	Total
Missed class/professor	NS	12	17	4	6	0	0	2	41(12%)
	NNS	17	9	1	0	0	5	0	42(12%)
Running late/tutee	NS	11	19	2	12	0	1	0	45(14%)
	NNS	16	12	1	13	1	2	0	45(13%)
Bumping into stranger	NS	15	2	0	17	0	9	1	44(13%)
	NNS	16	5	2	3	0	5	1	42(12%)
Missed birthday/friend	NS	12	19	8	6	0	6	3	54(16%)
	NNS	14	13	8	5	0	3	0	43(13%)
Missed appointment/sibling	NS	4	7	9	14	0	0	2	36(11%)
	NNS	11	7	5	15	1	2	1	41(12%)
Missed appointment/friend	NS	13	7	12	2	0	8	0	46(14%)
	NNS	20	9	4	3	0	7	0	44(13%)
Playing loud music/neighbor	NS	15	0	2	18	0	1	1	37(11%)
	NNS	20	1	5	15	0	3	0	45(13%)
Cutting in line/stranger	NS	12	6	3	4	0	1	1	27(8%)
	NNS	16	11	4	0	0	5	0	36(11%)
Total	NS	94 (29%)	77 (23%)	40 (12%)	79 (24%)	0 (0%)	26 (8%)	14 (4%)	330 (100%)
	NNS	130 (39%)	77 (23%)	30 (9%)	64 (19%)	3 (0.9%)	32 (10%)	2 (0.6%)	338 (100%)

The first research question asked if NNSs use similar strategies in apologizing as their NS counterparts and what the most frequent strategies are. As it is shown in the results reported in this section, NNS respondents did vary

in the choice of their apology strategies, meaning they were capable of using all the strategies used by NS. For instance, previous studies on NNS apology demonstrated that there was a low number of explanations used by learners (e.g., Trosborg, 1987) and this tendency might be an outcome of insufficient linguistic knowledge. Unlike this previous observation, the learners in this study did use the equal number of explanations in their apologies as their NS counterparts. This might be due to the fact that the majority of NNS participants were at an advanced level of proficiency of the NNS participants in the current study. With a high degree of proficiency, they did not have to resort to the use of ritual language use, semantic formula, in performing apology and were able to provide a convincing explanation or give an adequate account for the offense committed. On the other hand, one beginning level learner (L1-Korean) showed heavy reliance on routine apologies such as *I'm sorry* in conducting apologies. Out of 10 apologies expressed for all the scenarios presented, 9 of them were EOAs and the other one was AOR. Eight of these apologies consisted of a single strategy. Although proficiency was not a variable included in this study, there was apparently an effect of proficiency in the strategy uses.

The most frequent types of apology used by NS and NNS of English were explicit expression of apology (semantic formula), explanation or account, acknowledgement of responsibility, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance. These were most likely to be used in combination and often accompanied by intensifying and downgrading expressions in both NS and NNS apologies.

#### 4.2. Apology Strategies for Different Situations

Based on the observation that both NS and NNS participation relied on a combination of apology strategies in most of the instances, the next step of analyses was conducted to see what combinations of strategies were adopted for the scenarios presented. Table 3 shows the most frequent strategies used by NS and NNS for 8 situations presented in DCT. The percentage of each combined or single use of apology strategies was calculated based on the total number of apology act produced for each situation for each group.

Across situations, both NS and NNS participants mostly used the same combination of strategies. For example, for the apologies made to a professor after

missing a class, the NS and NNS respondents provided the offender the explicit apology + explanation combination most frequently (Table 3). Both groups most frequently used explicit apologies added with different strategies such as explanation, offer of repair, responsibility, and sometimes with intensifiers (e.g., *oh no*, *oh my gosh*) and downgraders (e.g., *no problem*, *don't worry*).

It was also notable that for the scenario in which the speaker (student) had to apologize to a professor for a missed class, 5 of the NNS respondents added an intensification to this combination of explicit apology + explanation, showing a higher level of sensitivity to the power/dominance factor in the context. For the same situation, NS respondents never used an intensifier. Unlike in this situation, explanation was not dominantly used for a missed appointment with a younger sibling. Rather, offer of repair was most preferred. This difference might indicate that both NS and NNS speakers are conscious of the power relationship as they choose an appropriate way to remedy the situation. Also, in this situation, NS respondents more frequently took on responsibility (9 instances) than their NNS counterparts (6 instances) for the offense committed to the younger sibling.

Table 3. Most Frequent Combinations of Apology Strategies for All Situations

Scenarios		Strategy Combination (frequency)	%
Missed class/professor	NS	Explicit apology + explanation (10)	50
	NNS	Explicit apology + explanation (11)	55
Running late/tutee	NS	Explicit apology + explanation (6)	30
		Explanation + offer of repair (6)	30
Bumping into stranger	NNS	Explicit apology + offer of repair (6)	30
	NS	Explicit apology + offer of repair (7)	35
Missed birthday/friend	NNS	Explicit apology + offer of repair (7)	35
	NS	Explicit apology + explanation (6)	30
Missed appointment/sibling	NNS	Explicit apology + explanation (6)	30
	NS	Offer of repair (7)	35
Missed appointment/friend	NNS	Offer of repair (5)	25
	NS	Explicit apology + responsibility (4)	21
Playing loud music/neighbor	NNS	Explicit apology + explanation (4)	25
		Explicit apology + offer of repair + intensifier (4)	25
	NS	Explicit apology + offer of repair (14)	74
Cutting in line/stranger	NNS	Explicit apology + offer of repair (7)	35
	NS	Explicit apology + explanation (4)	22
		Explicit apology (4)	25
	NNS	Explicit apology + explanation (4)	25
		Explicit apology + explanation+ downgrader (4)	25

### 4.2.1. Social Dimensions Affecting Apology Strategies

To see how the participants' apologies varied responding to the social dimension of distance, the uses of strategies were compared between the scenarios in which the offender bumped into a stranger, missed an appointment with a friend and missed appointment with a sibling. In the context dealing with a close friend, NSs relied heavily on the use of the combinations of explicit apology and explanation and responsibility with and without intensification (4 and 3 out of 19 apologies, respectively). On the other hand, NNSs showed a bit more reliance on the use of explicit apology and explanation also with and without intensification (4 and 4 out of 20, respectively). What they had in common is the use of explanation for their apologies. For bumping into a stranger, both NS and NNS participants used offer of repair as the main strategy often in combination with other ones such as explicit apology, intensifier and downgrader. Offer of repair was the main strategy used for dealing with situations with strangers, as it is shown in the responses in the scenario in which the offender had to apologize for loud music played to a neighbor. This popular use of offer of repair for both situations can also be explained in terms of the reparability of the offense. For both situations with a stranger involved, the offense was readily reparable.

As for the missed appointment with younger sibling, the single offer of repair was the most frequently used by both groups. There were fewer instances of explicit apologies used by NS respondents (only 4) whereas NNSs relied more on the use of explicit apologies (11), often again in combination with strategies such as explanation, responsibility, offer of repair, and intensifiers.

Anecdotal evidence was found for pragmatic transfer and pragmatic error (in that it is grammatically correct but inappropriate) in apology realization by one NNS respondent. A Korean female respondent (advanced level of proficiency) used the following as in (5):

(5) For missed appointment with close friend

*I have nothing to say to you but sorry.*

*I have something coming up and wasn't able to tell you.*

A Korean apology such as *cenun hal mali epssupnita* literally translates as 'I have nothing to say' and is frequently the opposite of an apology as it might suggest a lack of willingness to apologize if it were used alone without the explicit apology of *sorry*. In American culture, this can be taken to mean that the person does not accept responsibility and refuses to say anything. However, in Korean, this is an expression meaning that words are insufficient to express the depth of regret. This can be seen as evidence of negative pragmatic transfer (interference) despite this particular learner's advanced level of proficiency.

The second research question asked if the strategy use varied depending on the situation. The type and frequency of each strategy did change depending on the situation presented on the written DCT. For example, NS and NNS respondents used the highest number of explanation for the situation in which the speaker had to apologize to the professor after missing a class. As for missed appointment with younger sibling, it was the offer of repair that was most frequently used both by NS and NNS groups and this was the case for the situation in which the speaker had to apologize to a strange woman whom he or she bumped into causing her bag to drop. The offer of repair was the most popular strategy to a neighbor who was complaining about loud music. Interestingly, offer of repair was rarely used in the situation where the speaker has cut in line, especially by NNS respondents. The combination of direct or explicit apology and explanation was the most frequent apology used by both groups in this scenario. These findings suggest that both NS and NNS respondents are sensitive to the contextual factors in the scenarios given on the written DCT, although they slightly differ in their choice of strategies. These factors include dominance (power, status), and distance.

Taken these results together, there was a high degree of similarity in the choice of apology strategies and use of intensifying and downgrading expressions by both groups. An interesting pattern was that both groups showed a high degree of sensitivity to social factors and were able to differentiate their strategy choices based on the sociocultural dimensions such as power, distance, and reparability or severity of the offense. In addition, an instance of pragmatic transfer was evidenced in an advanced learner of English.



## 5. Conclusion

There are a number of social factors which affect the speaker's decision to apologize in order to restore the hearer's face (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). The most significant of these factors is the degree of violation or the seriousness of the offense. In this study, NS and NNS apologies did seem to vary depending on the severity of offense, which was identified as one significant factor by previous researchers (e.g. Hatfield & Hahn, 2011; Wu & Wang, 2016). For instance, participants used the highest number of offer of repair in the situations in which the speaker bumped into a stranger, the speaker had to apologize for loud music, and the speaker missed appointment with younger sibling. Socio-cultural consideration appeared to be at work as the speaker decided to apologize. In American culture which value individualism and personal space, bothering a neighbor with loud music and bumping into a stranger might have been as invasion into personal space, thus requiring the offender to apologize more intensely. A future study should more closely address cultural, personal, and the contextual factors which determine the need to apologize and how one apologizes. Future research focusing on social parameters of distance, power, age and gender will contribute to a cross-cultural understanding of apology.

Finally, limitations of the current study need to be discussed. First of all, there is a question of the validity of the written DCT used for the study. One can question how accurately the written apologies elicited using the DCT represent apology realization in face-to-face interaction where there are more cognitive demands of discourse production (Edmondson & House, 1991). Comparison of learners' speech act realization in interactive discourse will definitely shed light on the understanding of NNSs' discourse production systems. Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2014) suggest that more interactive discourse completion tasks be used to assess learners' use of the pragmatic strategies. They also argue for the value of using a retrospective verbal report in combination with other elicitation methods like DCT as it can provide L2 researchers with a way to triangulate data. Another limitation of the current study is the lack of interrater reliability check. The coding was done solely by the researcher and was not verified by another rater, unfortunately. Future study on this topic should be done with a larger sample size with a solid measure of

inter-rater reliability check for more generalizable findings. Also, the lack of control for proficiency level of NNS participants is a major drawback of this study. Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) observed that proficiency is one of the significant influences in the production of conventional pragmatic expressions by L2 learners of English. Although the current study is only exploratory in nature, the future research should definitely address the issue of proficiency in a more tightly controlled setting.

Despite these methodological limitations, the current findings have theoretical and pedagogical implications. First, the results speak to the universality of speech acts in that all the NS and NNS speakers employed some forms of apology in response to situations where the hearer was offended. The variability in the selection of apology strategies by NS and NNS respondents might suggest that the realization of apology varies from culture to culture, responding differently to social and contextual factors. In addition, pragmatic errors displayed by NNS respondents might suggest a difficulty posed for second language learners of English in acquiring successful pragmatic knowledge. This also has important pedagogical implications in that it justifies calls that pragmatics should be taught explicitly to raise learners' awareness and give them choices for interaction in target language. There has been an extensive body of research which claims that explicit instruction benefits pragmatic development (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Kasper, 1997, 2001). The findings of this study also suggest that ESL or EFL teachers should be aware that miscommunication can occur even among advanced level learners. ESL learners need to be taught not only explicit forms of apology but also possible social implications of their use. Moreover, ESL teachers need to be sensitive to cross-cultural differences in realization patterns of speech acts.

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## Appendix A: Discourse Completion Task

**Instructions:** *Please put yourself in the following situations and assume that in each instance the speaker will, in fact, say something. Write down what you think would be said (in English), in the space provided. Make sure that you read the whole situation carefully before you respond. Can we make all questions having two part sequences like the first one I created?*

1. You are a junior majoring in biology at CSU in the fall semester of 2015. You have been a good student maintaining a GPA of 4.0. Last week, you got sick and had to miss your biochemistry lab without letting your professor, Dr. Davis, know in advance. On her way to the class on Tuesday, she runs into Professor Davis and he says:

Professor Davis: Hi, Julia. We missed you in the lab last week.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

2. After you miss Dr. Davis' class, you are supposed to borrow notes from a classmate to cover the information. The girl who normally sits next to you in lab and she says:

You: \_\_\_\_\_

3. You decide you need to make some money, so you start tutoring for biochemistry since you have a 4.0 in your science classes. Through an organization with your university they match you up with someone that needs to be tutored. You and the student that needs tutoring exchange numbers and set up a time to meet. The first meeting, you are ten minutes late because there was traffic. The student calls you to ask where you are and you:

The student: Hi, Julia ! Where are you? I am here waiting for you to arrive for a tutoring session.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

4. There is a big party on campus this weekend to welcome all of the international students to your school. All your friends are planning on going, but you have two research papers to write this weekend and can't go. One of your friends wants to know if you are going and she says: (DISTRACTOR- REFUSAL)

Friend: "Hey! Were you planning on going to the party this weekend?"

You: \_\_\_\_\_

5. You are about to miss your bus to your next class when you bump into an older woman causing her to drop the heavy bags she is carrying:

Older woman: Oh no! I dropped all my bags!

You: \_\_\_\_\_

6. It was your close friends' 21st birthday yesterday and you couldn't go to her party yesterday because you were studying all night for your exam. You also forgot to tell her that you weren't going. When you see her on campus the next day she says:

Friend: Hey! I missed you at the party last night.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

7. You promised your ten year old brother you would take him out to get ice cream tonight after dinner. However, you have a paper due tomorrow and you still need to write ten more pages! When you tell your brother you cannot take him for ice cream, he says:

Brother: But you promised!

You: \_\_\_\_\_

8. It is the first week of classes and you ordered your books online. It will take another week before the books arrive at your apartment. Your professor has already assigned reading passages from the book and there will be a quiz on the reading in two days. You notice the person next to you already has the book and since you don't want to fail the first quiz of the semester you:

You: \_\_\_\_\_

9. You haven't seen your friend in a couple weeks because you've been out of town, so you two decide to meet up at a coffee shop to catch up. Your friend waits for an hour, and you never come so she leaves. She calls you the next day and says:

Friend: "You know, I waited for you at the coffee shop for an hour yesterday, where were you?"

You: \_\_\_\_\_

10. You are living in a dorm with thin walls. You like to play loud music while you study but your neighbor can hear your music. They knock on your door. When you open it they:

Neighbor: Hey, your music is really loud and I'm trying to sleep.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

11. It is lunch time and you only have half an hour between classes to eat. You skipped breakfast, so you are very hungry. You go to the university cafeteria and get food, only to walk in and see a huge line. You decide to cut to the front of the line to save time. The person behind you sees this and says:

Stranger: You can't cut in line!

You: \_\_\_\_\_

12. You and your best friend are going out to the club to dance after a long week of midterms. You both get dressed up for the occasion. When your friend sees you she says:

Friend: Oh what a cute dress you're wearing!

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Kyongseon Jeon  
Department of English  
Columbus State University  
4225 University Avenue  
Columbus, GA 31909  
USA  
Phone: +1 (706) 565-1207  
Email: jeon\_kyongseon@columbusstate.edu

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