

**COMPARISION OF KOREAN ESL LEARNERS' WITH NATIVE SPEAKERS' APOLOGIES:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS****Yıldız TURGUT***Dr. Mersin Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi yildiztr@gmail.com***ABSTRACT**

For language learners, pragmatic competence is important to communicate appropriately with native speakers. Acquiring pragmatic competence takes longer time for language learners. In that sense, this present study compares Korean ESL learners' apologies to native speakers of English. Data collected through Written Discourse Completion Tests applied to 22 Korean ESL learners and 54 American students. The data was coded based on the speech act sets for apologies. Then the data analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively focusing on age, gender, English language proficiency level and cultural variables. The findings indicate that for Korean language learners time spent in the US and English language learning are significant in terms of using apologies more in line with native behavior. Use of intensifiers changes according to gender-females tend to use more- and cultural background and language proficiency level-Americans tend to use more compared to Koreans. Implications for ELT have been discussed throughout the paper.

**Keywords:** speech acts, ELT, apologies, pragmatics

**ÖZET**

Bir dili öğrenenler için kişinin o dildeki kullanım edinci yetkinliği, o dili anadili olarak konuşan kişilerle uygun şekilde iletişim kurmasında önemlidir. Kullanım edinci yetkinliğinin edinilmesi dili öğrenenler açısından uzun zaman alan bir süreçtir. Bu sürece yönelik olarak bu çalışma Koreli İngilizce öğrenen öğrencilerin özür dileme durumları ve özür üretim stratejilerini Amerikalı öğrencileriyle karşılaştırmaktadır. Veriler 22 Koreli ve 54 Amerikalı öğrencilerin Yazılı Söylem Tamamlama Testi kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Veriler, Sözeylemlerden Özürlerin Sınıflandırılması temel alınarak, yaş, cinsiyet, İngilizce yeterlilik seviyesi ve kültürel değişkenler açısından nicel ve nitel olarak incelenmiştir. Bulgular, Koreli İngilizce öğrenen öğrencilerin özür formlarının İngilizceyi anadili olarak konuşanların kullandıkları formlara yakınlığı, Korelilerin Amerika'da ve İngilizce öğrenmek için geçirdikleri süre ile ilintili olduğunu göstermektedir. Özürlerde kullanılan pekiştiriciler cinsiyet, ki bayanlar erkeklere oranla daha çok, kültürel ve İngilizce yeterlilik seviyesi, ki Amerikalı öğrenciler Korelilere göre daha çok özür dileme eğiliminde, değişkenleri açısından farklılık göstermektedir. Bulguların İngiliz dili eğitimi açısından çıkarımları makale boyunca açıklanmaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** sözeylemler, İngiliz Dili eğitimi, özürler, kullanım edinci

## INTRODUCTION

Apologies are important to communicate appropriately with native speakers in learning L2 pragmatics and culture of the target language. Additionally, apologies might be complicated for language learners due to several reasons. For example, the effects of transfer from native language to L2 on the sociocultural choices made and sociolinguistic forms used in performing speech acts (Cohen, 1996) might impact the communication as has already been examined in several empirical studies. However, there are limited studies focusing on speech acts of specific population of language learners, such as Korean ESL learners whose population is increasing each year at English language schools for adults in the US. Also, related to the specific population how culture related elements, e.g. gender, social distance, age and interlocutor identity, play roles needs to be investigated in language learning and teaching field. Therefore, this present study compares the apology speech act forms between adult Korean speakers who were attending English courses in the U.S. and adult native speakers of English who were taking Linguistics course. A significant focus of the study is on what the similarities and differences between the two groups' apologies are according to different variables such as gender, social distance, age, interlocutor identity and English language proficiency level for the Korean participants. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do Korean and American students apologize in English?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the two groups' apologies according to gender, social distance, age, and interlocutor identity?
3. How does English language proficiency level impact the forms of apologies for Korean participants?

Answering to these questions will shed light to the field of English language teaching especially for students coming from different cultural backgrounds.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Apologies include at least two participants, an apologizer and a recipient of the apology, referring to past events or future offense with three basic preconditions. An apology occurs when social norms have been violated, whether the offense is real or potential (Olshtain-Cohen, 1983 p. 20). For that reason, the act of apologizing requires an action or an utterance in order to maintain harmony between the speakers. Norrick (1978) defined the social functions of apologies as follows: "admitting responsibility for a state which affected someone in an adverse way (thereby implicating contrition), asking to be forgiven, showing good manners, assuaging the addressee's wrath, getting off the hook" (p.280).

As apologies require the speaker to admit responsibility for some behavior (or failure to carry out behavior) that has proved costly to the hearer (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984), apologies are face-threatening acts, but at the same time it is possible for the offender to save face by justifying or explaining the reasons behind his/her failure (Goffman, 1972). Under these preconditions, there is also a possibility that the person who has caused the infraction may not perceive him/herself guilty; he/she may not feel the need to apologize, or he/she may choose to deny his/her responsibility. Many factors might be influential in his/her behavior such as his/her own perception of degree of the severity of the offence is often decisive, but he/she may also take into consideration the recipients' point of view, his/her perception of degree of offence, the extend of the expected reprimand, and

so forth. Other influential factors might be age, familiarity, and social status of the two participants (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). Additionally, for L2 learners, the learner's level of linguistic proficiency, L1, their perception of the universality or language specificity of how to apologize (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1985; Olshtain, 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989) might be influential as well. In this present study these factors covered under two categories: sociolinguistic and sociocultural.

### ***Sociolinguistic Factors***

Sociolinguistic forms refer to the actual language forms used to realize the speech act (e.g., sorry vs. excuse me, really sorry vs. very sorry). The speakers' sociolinguistic ability consists of their control over the selection of these forms including their control over the register of these forms, from most intimate to most formal (Cohen, 1996b).

The role of transfer of speech acts from L1 to L2 is controversial. It is generally believed that learners have less or no difficulty if apologies in their L1 and L2 are very similar, but they have difficulty if L1 differs from L2 apologies (Kasper, 1997b; Tateyama, 2001). However, even if native language (L1) and L2 would both employ the same semantic formula for a given situation, the frequency with which that strategy is employed may differ. For example, Linnell, et al (1992) used the verbal discourse completion situation designed by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) in assessing oral apologies between twenty native and twenty nonnative speakers of English. In that study, although there were no significant differences between the two groups in six of the eight situations which included situations such as forgetting a meeting with a boss, forgetting a meeting with a friend, and bumping into an elderly lady in a department store, some differences were found between native and nonnative speakers in terms of acknowledgement of responsibility, and intensification of the expression of apology. These features were used less by nonnative speakers in two of the situations. Moreover, the nonnative speakers used an explicit apology and an intensified in an unintentional insult situation significantly less than the native speakers. Also, the participants undersupplied acknowledgement of responsibility for forgetting a meeting with a boss. Additionally, in some cases L1 transfer is possible but does not actually occur, maybe because the learners lack the necessary L2 linguistic proficiency to do so. Cohen and Olshtain (1985) provide examples of it. In a study of Hebrew learners' L2 English, they found situations where the learners did not seem to be familiar with the semantic formulas needed for the apology. For example, they were less likely to offer repair when they had backed into someone's car, and less likely to acknowledge responsibility when they have bumped into and shaken up an old lady than when they performed the same apologies in their L1. Lack of linguistic proficiency was in this case reflected in the use of general formulas and saying too little. More specifically, related to lack the necessary L2 linguistic proficiency (Rose, 2000), Olshtain and Cohen (1989) distinguish three types of deviations from gaps in linguistic competence: Overt errors, Covert errors, and Fault realization of semantic formula. Overt errors occur when the learner is evidently trying to apologize but produces a linguistic error due to the lack of linguistic competence in L2, as in the example: "Situation: bumping into a woman in the way. 'I'm very sorry but what can I do? It can't be stopped'. Where the speaker uses 'stopped' instead of 'avoided'" (Olshtain & Cohen, 1989 p.62). Secondly, covert errors occur when the learner's apology is linguistically correct but is inappropriate. For example, "a Hebrew learner of L2 English apologized for failing to keep a meeting with a friend with 'I'm really very sorry. I just forgot. I fell a sleep. Understand'" (Olshtain & Cohen, 1989 p.63).

Lastly, fault realization of semantic formula occurs when the learner has chosen an appropriate formula but phrases it incorrectly, as when one learner wanted to offer repair for forgetting meeting with someone by using this formula: 'I think I can make another meeting with you'. (Olshtain & Cohen, 1989 p.64)

Besides the controversial role of transfer from L1 to L2 in speech acts especially on apologies, another sociolinguistic factor that needs to be investigated is gender. Holmes' (1989) study on corpus of 183 naturally occurring remedial exchanges and the linguistic formulas used in these exchanges in New Zealand showed a number of differences based on gender. For example, women used apologies more than men overall. Also, women apologized to other women more than to men whereas men apologized to women more than to other men. Furthermore, while men's apologies often alluded to the offender, women's apologies focused more on the offended person. Also, Edmundson (1992) examined the perception of semantic formulas in apologies. Edmundson's (1992) study found that women relied on lexical cues to judge the acceptability of an apology whereas men who were one third of the sample relied on lexical, paralinguistic (nonverbal), and prosodic cues equally.

### ***Sociocultural Factors***

Sociocultural choices refer to the speakers' ability to determine whether it is acceptable to perform the speech act at all in a given situation and, if so, to select one or more semantic formulas that would be appropriate in the realization of the given speech act. Depending on the language situation involved, the speaker may need to consider the culture involved, age and sex of the speakers, their social class and occupation, and their roles and status in the interaction (Cohen, 1996).

Brown and Levinson's (1978) positive and negative politeness taxonomy helps to characterize different cultures as well as subcultures within societies. For example, positive politeness cultures may show a tendency toward placing high value on directness, matter-of-factness, friendly back-slapping, and the like. However, negative politeness cultures may value the maintenance of social distance and face-saving. When comparing apologies across cultures we might find that in cultures with a positive-politeness orientation, speakers tend to apologize less than in those with a negative-politeness orientation. As a result, in such cultures fewer of the situations under investigation may actually call for an apology. For example, if one is late to a meeting in a positive-oriented culture, she might say something like, "You know me. I'm never on time," and thus would be considered as an apologizing. In a negative oriented culture, one might say something like, "I'm sorry I caused you so much inconvenience," because one would expect less accommodation from the hearer and would respect more the hearer's need for an apology (Olshtain & Cohen, 1989 p. 60). As a result, speakers coming from more positive-face-oriented cultures may sound rude in more negative-face-oriented ones if they choose the indirect explanation rather than the expressed apology.

Other point related to sociocultural issue is a perception of the universality or language specificity of how to apologize. Although all languages share the same basic strategies for apologizing, negative transfer is evident in a number of respects. For example, the learner's L1 may have an effect on the intensity with which apologies are performed. Cohen and Olshtain (1981), for example, note that Hebrew speakers of English were less likely to

accept responsibility for an offence or to make offers of repair than native English speakers. Also, they did not intensify their expression of regret as much. Cohen and Olshtain (1983) refer to Wu (1981) who found that Chinese learners of English intensified regret much more than native English speakers. These differences corresponded to the differences of learners' L1s. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) comment "while Hebrew L2 speakers may appear somewhat rude to the native English speakers when expressing regret, Chinese L2 speakers may appear overly polite, even obsequious" (p.30). The Chinese learners also tend to offer explanations, where native English speakers did not. Similar findings are also found for apology forms in the Japanese learners of English (Narita & Young, 1994). Olshtain (1983) found that the overall frequency of semantic formulas was higher in native English speakers than in native Hebrew speakers, with native Russian speakers intermediate: English > Russian > Hebrew. She (1983) states that "transfer from Russian or English into Hebrew as the target L2 might therefore be expected as an increase in the overall frequency of use of semantic formulas" (p. 245). However, this was not exactly what she found. Whereas the English learners decreased the frequency of their use of semantic formulas to a level approximation to that of native Hebrew speakers, the Russian learners maintained the same level as in their native Russian. Olshtain (1983) suggests that this reflects the different perceptions of the English and Russian learners. Whereas the former perceived Hebrew speakers as apologizing less than native English speakers, the latter viewed apologizing as a universal phenomenon, 'claiming that people needed to apologize according to their feelings of responsibility, regardless of the language which they happen to speak...' (p.246). Thus, transfer was governed by whether the learners saw apologies as language-specific or universal in nature. However, as Kasper (1992) notes, the Russian learners in fact supplied apology strategies in three out of five situations more frequently in L2 Hebrew than in their native Russian, despite their perceptions of universality. This suggests that learners' attitudes can be overridden by other factors.

The extent to which transfer takes place can be influenced by the learners' perception of the universality of how to apologize. Transfer might be less likely if learners recognize the language-specificity of apologies. Transfer is also more likely in situations where learners feel the need to act in accordance with the sociocultural norms of the native culture. The extent to which learners acquire the sociocultural rules of the L2 is situation-dependent. Olshtain (1983) argues that transfer effects can be accurately identified if attention is given to the specific situations that lead to an apology. She suggests that transfer might be more likely in situations where the learners' culturally-determined perceptions of the importance of status and distance and of the severity of the offence are different from those of native speakers of the target language. For example, in the case of a situation involving backing into someone's car and causing damage, English speakers of L2 Hebrew apologize in much the same way as they do in their L1, whereas in the situation where they have insulted someone at a meeting, they do not transfer their L1 strategies but rather behave in a similar way to native Hebrew speakers.

Related to the production of apology forms, there might be also some differences in cultures. For example, the learner has just finished a large meal at the home of Japanese hosts in Tokyo. What does the guest say in Japanese upon getting up from the table? Does the event call for a hearty thank you, an apology, or some combination of the two? Ferrara (1994) reports on the results of both naturalistic and elicited data collection that found Americans tending to use thanks in situations where for native Japanese speakers a quasi-apology form was the preferred token, such as after a meal in a private home. In a situation where a professor was given a small gift, Americans chose to give thanks whereas the Japanese apologized for being unworthy (Cohen, 1996).

Other difference is related to either the semantic formula is hearer supportive or self-supportive ones. According to Frescura (1993), the hearer supportive formulas were used when complainers choose to support the face of the complainer by admitting their own guilt, by recognizing the complainer's rights, or by offering compensation. The self-supportive formulas were used when complainers choose to support their own face by denying guilt, by appealing to the complainer's leniency, or by providing an explanation for the offence. Performance was measured according to the total output of formulas, the types of formulas used, and the intensity of the formulas produced. Frescura (1993) found that native speaker's of Italian in Italy preferred the self-supportive formulas overall, whereas native speakers of English preferred the hearer- supportive ones. Learners of Italian did not indicate any preference, whereas native Italian speakers in Canada appeared to maintain some native Italian formulas.

The present study of L2 apologies bears out many of the findings of the research on L2 requests. Both the learners' general level of linguistic proficiency and the socio-cultural norms of their L1 influence how they apologize in an L2.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants*

This present study investigates the apology speech act forms between American students who were taking an Introduction to Linguistics course at a large American university in the US and Korean speakers who were learning English at the English Language Institute (ELI) of the American university. Thirteen Korean ESL students (10 female, 3 male) attending low intermediate, and intermediate level proficiency classes at ELI volunteered to participate to this study and they were placed in a group. They had been learning English for approximately eight years, and they had been in the U.S. from five months to three years.

The comparison group was formed by fifty-nine (48 female, 11 male) American undergraduate students aged around twenty and twenty-five, who were taking Introduction to Linguistics course at a university in the U.S. and English is their native language.

### *Data Collection Methods*

At the beginning of the study, all participants filled in two questionnaires. The first one was related to their education, family and language backgrounds. The other questionnaire was Written Discourse Completion Test prepared to understand the ways of apologizing of both groups. The situations in the questionnaire with the reliability of 90% were taken from Cohen and Olshtain (1993) and these sixteen questions were modified according to stranger/friend, male/female, old/young, and American/Korean variables. Each question in the questionnaire; therefore, represents the combination of 4 variants, such as stranger-male-old-American (SMOA), or friend-female-young-Korean (FFYK). A detailed explanation related to figures, which was used during the analysis of the data is available in the Appendix. The participants replied in English through writing in the given blanks.

**Data Analysis Methods**

Both quantitative (Principle Components Analysis, Stepwise linear regression, and ANOVA) and qualitative analysis were applied to the data. For the quantitative part, the analysis of the participants' apology responses to the given situations in the questionnaire followed the original framework developed by Olshtain and Cohen's (1983). Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) categorization of apologies which were represented through five separate semantic formulas either may be used alone or be used in combination shown in Table 1, in this present study the participants' responses were categorized numerically and entered into SPSS for quantitative analysis.

Table 1. The speech act sets for apologies (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983).

	Strategy	Example
1	An expression of an apology	
a	Expression of regret	I'm sorry.
b	An offer of apology	Excuse me.
c	A request for forgiveness	Excuse me.
2	An explanation or account of the situation	The bus was late.
3	An acknowledgement of responsibility	
a	Accepting the blame	It's my fault.
b	Expressing self-deficiency	I wasn't thinking.
c	Recognizing the other person as deserving apology	You are right.
d	Expressing lack of intent	I didn't mean to.
4	An offer of repair	I'll pay for the broken vase.
5	A promise of forbearance	It won't happen again.

Through quantitative analysis three independent variables (gender, age and cultural background) and sixteen dependent variables (the questionnaire) were compared.

For qualitative data analysis, various possible modifications both for intensifying the sincerity, such as "I'm really sorry" and for mitigating the apology, such as "Yeah, but you were in my way!" (Cohen et al, 1986 p.66) were examined according to Trosborg's (1995) categorization of intensifiers as downgraders and upgraders (see detailed eight categorization of downgraders and upgraders with examples in Trosborg, 1995). Downgraders are internal modifiers that minimize the guilt and serve to mitigate the circumstances under which an offence was committed and which, consequently, lessen the blame that can be attached to the complaine. Upgraders are markers that maximize the apology serve the purpose of remediation, either by means of intensification of an apology, excuse etc, or simply as verbal devises to restore harmony.

**FINDINGS**

During the quantitative data analysis process firstly, Principle Component Analysis applied to the data. Principle Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation (excluding missing values pairwise) analysis found seven components with Eigenvalues greater than 1, as Table 2 shows.

Table 2. Total Variance Explained

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.912	11.950	11.950	1.711	10.697	10.697
2	1.721	10.759	22.709	1.551	9.693	20.389
3	1.651	10.316	33.025	1.532	9.577	29.966
4	1.474	9.215	42.239	1.500	9.377	39.343
5	1.329	8.304	50.543	1.468	9.177	48.520
6	1.226	7.659	58.202	1.338	8.359	56.879
7	1.116	6.972	65.175	1.327	8.296	65.175

Extraction Method: Principle Component Analysis.

In Table 2 loadings for each question within each component are given in parenthesis beside the respective question. These seven components explained 65.2% of the variance in the data.

Table 3 explains the social factors impacting seven components. According to the way that participants' responses pattern under Principle Component Analysis, the most important social factor for questions 9,10 and 16 was that the person is a friend. That is, having a personal relationship with the interlocutor is significant. For questions 11 and 12 the most important factors were being young, male and friend. In that, age, gender and having personal relationship are significant. The most important social factor for questions 3, 8, 4 and 7 was that the person is stranger and young. For questions 1 and 15 the important factor was that the person is American. That is, an interlocutee's cultural background is significant. The important social factor for the questions 2 and 14 was that the person is old and Korean, and for the questions 5, 6, and 13 the important social factor was the person is old and female.

Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix

Component	Questionnaire Question #		Explanation
1	9	0.777	Friend
	10	0.561	



	16	0.735	
2	11	0.762	Young & Male & Friend
	12	0.825	
3	3	0.787	Young & Stranger
	8	0.699	
4	4	0.812	Young & Stranger
	7	0.699	
5	1	0.689	American
	15	0.760	
6	2	0.678	Old & Korean
	14	0.748	
7	5	0.639	Old & Female
	6	0.649	
	13	0.510	

Secondly, stepwise linear regression is applied to the data. It was performed on each one of the principle components to test for significant effects of three independent variables among the respondents: gender, age and cultural background (American vs. Korean) as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. The Stepwise linear regression

Component	Question question #	Explanation
5	1	Cultural background & age
	15	
6	2	Gender
	14	

Significant effects were revealed for the questions forming Components 5 and 6. For component 5, cultural background ( $F= 5.120$   $t= -2.263$  Sig .033) and age ( $F=7.798$   $t=-2.978$  Sig .007) were significant determiners for the way in which people responded. For component 6, sex was a significant factor ( $F= 4.793$   $t=2.189$  Sig .038).

Why do cultural background and age significant in component 5? For the participants coming from different cultural backgrounds the regulations might be different. For example, the participants asked to response to the given situation in question 1, which is “You don’t stop in time at the red light and bump into the car in front of you. You and other driver get out and see that there is no damage to the other car. The other driver is still noticeably upset.” American participants’ responses were presented below:

American 1: “I am so sorry. I should have been paying better attention. Are you hurt?”

American 2: “I am so sorry! I did not mean to bump into you. We can exchange necessary information although there weren’t and damages.”

On the other hand Korean participants responded as

Korean 1: "I'm sorry, I'll tell police officer and I'll give money for you"

Korean 2: "I'm sorry. I will call policeman and I will pay proper money for you".

Korean 3: "I'm sorry about my mistake, but your car and you OK, so we make peace."

The other question which highlights the cultural background and age differences is question 15. In that question participants were asked to respond to the following situation: "You promised to return a textbook to your female American classmate within a day or two, after Xeroxing a chapter. You held onto it for almost two weeks. Your classmate: I'm really upset about the book because I needed it to prepare for last week's class." In that situation Americans tend to more apologize to strangers while Koreans more apologize to their friends.

The Stepwise linear regression also shows that in component 6 including the questions 2 and 4, sex is significant for the participants. Apologizing to an old (male/female) person might make differences in both cultures in terms of gender:

Question 2: You have placed your shopping bag on the luggage rack of a crowded bus. When the bus brakes, the bag falls down and hits an old Korean man, who is sitting on one of the back rows.

Question 14: You promised you'd buy your old American female neighbor a newspaper while in town, but you forgot.

Your neighbor: 'Did you get the paper?'

In American culture old males are more recognized than female ones.

Lastly, as a quantitative analysis, ANOVA was applied to the data. Two points considered as important; time in the USA for the Korean participants and Years of studying English. Table 5 shows that the amount of time Korean participants spent in the US impacts what set of apology form they used in the test.

Table 5. ANOVA Time spend in the USA for Korean participants.

Question #	Situation in the question	ANOVA Sig.
8	At a library, you accidentally bump into one of your Korean female friends who is holding a stack of books. Your friend is startled, but unhurt. A few of the books fall on the floor.	.000
10	You borrowed your elder Korean male professor's book, which you promised to return that day, but forgot to bring it.	.017

Why does time in the U.S. make difference in questions 8 and 10? The question 8 asked the participants' response to the situation of being at a library and accidentally bumping into one of the participants' Korean female friends who was holding a stack of books. The friend was startled, but unhurt. A few of the books fell on the floor. Korean participants who had been in the US less than five months used regret and explanation combination of apology set, such as "I'm sorry! I didn't know that you are in front of me", whereas the participants who had been more than five months in the US used regret and repair combination, such as "I'm sorry. Let me help you." The tenth question in the test was: "You borrowed your elder Korean male professor's book, which you promised to return that day, but forgot to bring it." The Korean participants who had been in

the US less than eight months used three different sets: regret and repair, regret-explanation “I’m sorry, forgive me. I forgot our promise”, and explanation-repair whereas the participants who had been in the US more than eight months used only regret-repair-explanation set of apology i.e. “Sorry I forgot to bring your book. I promise that I will return it to you tomorrow.” Both questions, 8 and 10, indicate that Korean students might not know how to react when they just came to the U.S. After spending some time through observations, they might figure out how to behave.

The years of studying English for Korean participants found significant as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. ANOVA Years of studying English for Korean participants.

Question #	Situation in the question	ANOVA Sig.
7	Walking along the street, you meet an American mother holding a cute little 9-month old baby.  You: ‘What a cutie! How old is he?’  The mother: ‘ It’s a <i>she</i> , not a <i>he</i> !’	.045

When the participants’ English language learning backgrounds and their responses to the test were examined in terms of using apology strategy forms (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983), the qualitative data indicate that Korean participants who studied English less than ten years used regret and blame combination, such as “I’m sorry, it was my mistake” whereas participants who studied English from ten to fifteen years used only regret form such as “I’m sorry”. The later apology form was also one of the sets used by American participants for the same situations. Maybe the more they study English, the more they realize the discourse features and cultural differences between these two cultures: American participants used in most cases “regret” and sometimes “regret and explanation”.

For qualitative data analysis, various possible modifications both for intensifying the sincerity, such as “I’m really sorry” and for mitigating the apology, such as “Yeah, but you were in my way!” (Cohen et al, 1986 p.66) were examined according to Trosborg’s (1995) categorization of intensifiers as downgraders and upgraders. Figure 1 shows the frequency of using intensifiers by both Korean and American participants.

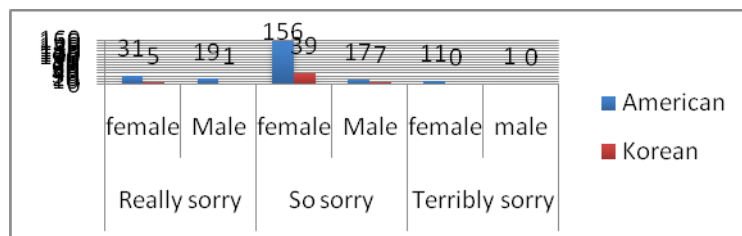


Figure 1. Frequency of using intensifiers

Also, Table 7 provides examples of intensifiers used by the participants.

Table 7. Examples of using intensifiers by both Korean and American participants.

Female American	Yikes! I am so, so sorry. Let me buy you another cup and get this burn checked out.  I'm really really really really I mean REALLY sorry! Please forgive me. I'll make it up for you ( <i>your computer</i> )
Male American	Are you alright? I am sorry. Let me help you.
Female Korean	Are you OK Ma'am? I am so sorry. I really apologize you.
Male Korean	Are you OK? I'm sorry. Let's go to the hospital.

In terms of down-toners and upgraders, we see that subjectivizers such as “I thought for sure that it was the right stop” as in the question 3 in which the participants had given bus directions and met with that person the next day and that person accused the participant for giving wrong directions. The most common strategy is using intensifiers. The male group in the control group is mostly used “really sorry”, and then “so sorry”. However, female group in the control group used a variety of intensifiers such as extremely sorry, incredibly sorry, truly sorry, and repetition type such as “I am so so sorry” or saying “sorry” at least 2 times in her response to the situation. In the Korean group again the female group are using the various ways such as “so sorry”, “really sorry”, “very sorry” and repetitions than Korean male who used only “so sorry”. When Korean female group’s type of intensifiers and the female control group’s intensifier types are compared, it can be seen that the second one uses more intensifiers in terms of both type variety and the number.

Table 8: Frequency of responses according to intensifiers for both groups.

	really sorry		so sorry		terribly sorry		very sorry		incredibly sorry		repetitions		truly sorry		extremely sorry	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
American group	31	19	158	17	11	1	6	1	2	0	9	1	4	0	2	0
Korean group	5	1	39	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0

Also, participants used complimenting for the question 7 in which the participant mixed a gender of a baby. After they stated they are sorry adding their reason such as “you know how hard it is to tell genders when they are so young and look like so cute”, they compliment to baby about “how cute he is” etc, and asks, “how old is he?” Also in the question 16 in which the participant does not know that his/ her friend has got divorced and asks about his/her wife/husband, the participants after stating that they are sorry, they ask about “how are kids?”, or commend about “ I didn’t like him anyways, you deserve so much better”, etc. I think this is another different strategy that participants used to downgrade their mistake and to make that person forget the event through directing the conversation in a different way.

Related to gender identification, it can be seen that male figure is more identified by the female-control group 24 usages in the question 1 and 2 (mostly) than the male- control group who used 7 times in 16 situations. This figure is 4 for Korean female group and 1 for Korean male group. “Ma’m” is used 10 times during the 16

situation by female control group, the number is 5 for male control group. While Korean female group is using “Ma’m” 3 times only, the male Korean group never used it. For the question 10 in which the participant had forgotten to bring back the his/ her professor book, female control group used 3 times “professor”, the male group only used once. In Korean group the female group only used 2 times, but the male group never used it. While apologizing from their friends female control group considered it 8 times such as “honey” “dear”, etc and Korean female group used only once, but male groups in both control and Korean group never used any identification word for it. While apologizing from younger ones both female and male group in control group used one identification word such as “ young man” and “buddy”, but there is no identification in the Korean group. Different from others one male in Korean group used “Mr.” title in an apologizing form.

## DISCUSSION

### *Culture*

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis indicate the cultural difference in apology situations. For example, one Korean female in a situation of bumping into an older lady and slipping the coffee, states she is sorry and then says, “I’ll give to some money for your clothes”. Or in another situation in which bumping into a car a female Korean speaker says, “I’m sorry. I’ll tell police officer and I’ll give money for you” while a male Korean speaker for the same situation says, “ I’m sorry about my mistake, but your car and you are OK, so we make peace.” However, for both of the situations (coffee and car) none of the Americans offered to pay money or renewing the cloth. These are the only some examples to reflect cultural differences, L1 transferences with low language proficiency similar to the findings of previous studies (Cohen, 1996; Ferrara, 1994; Kasper, 1997b; Wu, 1981).

Moreover, related to the first analysis about the direction of the apologies, it is seen that there is not only gender difference, but also there is cultural differences different from the previous studies in the field (Narita & Young, 1994; Rose, 2000; Tateyama, 2001). For example, Korean culture different from the American culture apologizing from a female is more than apologizing from a man and Koreans are apologizing from their female friends more than they apologize from a stranger female opposite to the American culture. While American females are apologizing more from Americans than Korean ones, Korean females are apologizing more from Korean ones than they do from American ones. American females are more apologizing from their male friends than they are apologizing from their female friends; the direction is the opposite for the female Koreans (FM<Ff). Related to age and culture issue it can be seen that female Americans’ direction of apologizing is different from the female Korean ones. For example, while for the American female group apologizing from young Koreans are more than apologizing from young Americans, the opposite direction is true for the Korean female group (FMYA>FMYK).

Therefore, while learning a language learning about that culture is also an important issue for the language learners. Therefore, speech acts are one of the ways to introduce to the culture to the learners besides linguistic features.

### *Language proficiency*

Language proficiency is important in order to express thoughts and feelings especially in apology situations because the recipient of the apology might not understand well what meant to say. Therefore, general language proficiency is important (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Olshtain, 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989). For example, in the situation of missing the gender of a baby “It’s a *she*, not a *he*”, some of the Korean speakers are still keeping to say “he” while apologizing instead of “he”. It is one example about the importance of language proficiency in apology situations.

The most important one is the using strategies. While the control group was using various strategies, the Korean group only used some of them. The control group’s responses included more details and explanations, modifications of the apology situations such as (giving wrong direction): “Sorry about that I thought for sure that was the right stop. But you did enjoy the movie right?” For the same situation one Korean student answer: “I am so sorry”. This example also indicates that the speakers-in this case Korean language learners- less control over the selection of proper apology forms and the register of these forms similar to the findings of previous studies (Cohen, 1996; Cohen & Olshtain, 1985; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989). Furthermore, unlike Frescura’s (1993) findings that found native speakers of English preferred hearer-supportive formulas, in this present study American participants were using both ‘self-supportive’ and ‘hearer-supportive’ whereas Korean participants used mostly ‘hearer-supportive’ ones. That is Korean participants chose to support the face of the complainer by admitting their own guilt, by recognizing the complainer’s rights, or by offering compensation whereas Americans in some cases chose to support their own face by denying guilt, by appealing to the complainer’s leniency, or by providing an explanation for the offence. The difference between American and Korean participants’ different formula use might be due to the cultural differences as Asian culture might be with more ‘negative-politeness’ orientation than American culture (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Narita & Young, 1994; Rose, 2000; Wu, 1981). However, as the findings indicate that the time spent in the US and years of studying English for Korean participants are significant in terms of using apologies more in line with native behavior.

As a result, the findings indicate that the time spent in the US for Korean language learners is significant in terms of using apologies more in line with native behavior. Through giving importance to both linguistic feature and modifying strategies language learners might become more effective participants of that society.

### *Gender*

Apologizing directions are changing related to the gender issue. For example, in the control group while the females are apologizing from Americans more than Koreans, it is in the opposite direction for males in the same group. Also, while the female group is more apologizing from male friends than their female friends, it is again in the opposite direction for male group (FM<Ff). Also, while both female groups are in the control group and in Korean group are more apologizing from a friend- male- young than a stranger- male young (SMY<FMY), it is in a opposite direction for males in the participant (SMY>FMY) meaning that males are apologizing more from stranger young males than they do from their young male friends.

Related to the intensifiers, it is obvious that females are using variety of intensifiers than males do such as “incredibly, truly, extremely” and repetitions such as saying “sorry” both at the beginning, in the middle or and

or repeating the intensifier words such as “so so sorry”. However, males only use “really” or “so sorry”. Also the males are using few intensifiers in terms of number of usage than the females do similar to the previous studies (Edmundson, 1992; Holmes, 1989). Furthermore, related to the language proficiency level, like Linnell et al (1992), as nonnative speakers, Korean participants used less intensification of the expression of apology compared to the control group.

Related to gender it is observed that in both groups females were more aware of the identification issues such as calling someone as ‘sir’ or ‘ma’m’. However, it is certain that male identification was used more than female one in both societies. As a result, in the linguistic formulation of the apology forms there is a gender difference in both cultures.

## IMPLICATIONS

The cultural differences might be introduced to language learners; for example, more apologizing to strangers, which is opposite to the Korean culture. Moreover, through explicit instruction, the Korean speakers might learn to effectively combine other strategies besides using strategy 1A, Strategy 2 and 4. Their linguistic proficiency in general terms and while apologizing might be improved. For example, they might told that offering money for cloth and car might be inappropriate and the possible appropriate suggestions might be stated such as giving numbers or car insurance issues, and so forth.

This present study has also two implications related to Olshtain and Cohen’s (1983) typology: Firstly, rather than using one strategy at a time in a given situation, the participants were using combination of strategies. The other one is that linguistically less proficient students use few strategies.

Similar to Holmes’ (1989) study which found a number of differences based on gender, this present study found that women used apologies more than men overall, women apologized to other women more than to men, and men apologized to women more than to other men. Moreover, like Olshtain and Cohen’s (1989) study this study found that speakers coming from more positive-face-oriented cultures may sound rude in more negative-face-oriented ones if they choose the indirect explanation rather than the expressed apology. Additionally, the data of Koran participants with low proficiency of English indicates covert error structures, which are errors when the learner’s apology is linguistically correct but is inappropriate (Olshtain & Cohen, 1989). Therefore, learners should consider the culture involved, age and sex of the speakers, their social class and occupation, and their roles and status in the interaction (Cohen, 1996).

In terms of teaching, teacher education, course materials and curriculum might include cultural difference topics in apologies. Several reports (Baleghizadeh, 2007; Tateyama, 2001) indicate that explicit teaching on how the degree of indebtedness in thanking situations, the severity of offense in the apology contexts, and such factors as age social status, and in-group/out-group distinction intricately influence the choice of routine formulas benefited to the participants. As an implication of this present study, some aspects of pragmatics of apology strategies should taught explicitly to EFL learners even though they started to learn them after spending five months in the US.

***Limitations and Future Research***

The number of participants is the main limitation in this present study: the number of Korean male participants was only three and the number of Korean females was only ten, and there were only eleven males in the control group.

In the Written Discourse Completion Test there was only one question for each type. For example, in order to measure stranger-male –old –American (SMOA), there is only one question. Therefore, the number of them might be increased.

As a general limitation of the methodology of this study is that for speech acts, role-playing, recording the role-plays and then, interviewing with the participants might be more valid approach instead of giving the Written Discourse Completion Test because the participants might not reflect exactly what they would say and how they would say in that situation or they might not say what they have written on the questionnaire in the real situation vice-versa while filling out the questionnaire. Additionally, participants' development can be observed through a longitudinal study. Future research might overcome these limitations and might investigate how effectively we can teach apologies considering cross-cultural sociolinguistic differences.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite some limitations, this present study shows some clues about Korean language learners. As language teachers, we might introduce and teach the strategies for apologizing to ELLs because even it seems that every culture has apology as a speech act, the way of apologizing and the direction of apologies might be change; therefore, it is necessary for our learners to learn the apology forms or as a general speech acts forms are important not only in terms of becoming a proficient speaker of that language, but also in terms of adopting to that society life and culture. Also, it maybe difficult for language teachers to cover all the subjects related to this area in a limited time frame, but he/she might give some general idea and learners themselves learn and they become aware of its usage in everyday life.

**Appendix****Questionnaire**

Abbreviations:

(S= stranger F= friend M= male f= female O= old Y= young A= American K= Korean)

1. SMOA You don't stop in time at a red light and bump into the car in front of you. You and the other driver, who is an old American man, get out and see that there is no damage to the other car. The other driver is still noticeably upset.
2. SMOK You have placed your shopping bag on the luggage rack of a crowded bus. When the bus brakes, the bag falls down and hits an old Korean man, who is sitting on one of the back rows.
3. SMYA The young American boy to whom you had given bus directions to the day before sees you on the street.

The boy: 'You know, you told me to get off one stop too soon for the movie yesterday. But it was O.K. We still got there before the movie started.'

4. SMYK At a crowded pool, you see two empty chairs and quickly start to carry them away.

A young Korean boy calls out: 'Hey ! Those are our chairs. Didn't you see our clothes on the ground next to them?'

5. Sf OA In a cafeteria, you accidentally bump into an older American lady about 60 who is holding a cup of hot coffee. The coffee spills all over the lady, burning her arm and soaking her clothing.



The old lady (shouting, startled): ‘Oooh! Ouch!’

6. SfOK The old Korean lady with her grandchild to whom you had given subway directions to the day before sees you on the metro stop.

The old lady: ‘You know, you gave me the wrong metro number for the movie theater yesterday! By the time we got there, we had already missed half of the movie.’

7. SfYA Walking along the street, you meet an American mother holding a cute little 9-month old baby. You: ‘What a cutie! How old is he?’

The mother: ‘It’s a *she*, not a *he*!’

8. SfYK At a library, you accidentally bump into one of your Korean female friends who is holding a stack of books. Your friend is startled, but unhurt. A few of the books fall on the floor.

9. FMOA You are a boss, and you have offended one of your old American male workers during a discussion at work. After the meeting, the fellow worker mentions this fact.

10. FMOK You borrowed your elder Korean male professor’s book, which you promised to return that day, but forgot to bring it.

11. FMYA You promised to meet your American male friend at a computer store to help him choose the right laptop. You forgot the meeting. The next day, you see your friend.

Your Friend: ‘Remember, we were supposed to meet at the computer store. I waited for you at the store for an hour. I didn’t want to buy the laptop without you.’

12. FMYK You arranged to meet your Korean male friend in order to study together for an exam. You arrive half an hour late for the meeting.

Friend (annoyed): I’ve been waiting at least half an hour for you!

Your neighbor: Yeah.

13. FfOA You promised while in town, you would buy a loaf of bread for your neighbor, who is a Korean grandmother, but you forgot.

Your old neighbor: ‘Did you get the bread?’

14. FfOK You promised you’d buy your old American female neighbor a newspaper while in town, but you forgot.

Your neighbor: ‘Did you get the paper?’

15. FfYA You promised to return a textbook to your female American classmate within a day or two, after Xeroxing a chapter. You held onto it for almost two weeks.

Your classmate: I’m really upset about the book because I needed it to prepare for last week’s class.

16. FfYK At a party, you meet your Korean female friend you haven’t seen for some time. You ask about her husband and children.

The friend: ‘You may not know this, but we just got divorced.’

## REFERENCES

- Baleghizadeh, S. (2007). “Speech Acts in English Language Teaching” *Iranian Journal of Language Studies*, 1-2, (143-154).
- Blum-Kulka, S.& Olshtain,E.(1984). “Request and Apologies. A Cross-cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP)” *Applied Linguistics* 5,(196-212).
- Cohen, A.D. & Olshtain, E. (1981). “Developing a Measure of Sociocultural Competence: The Case of Apology” *Language Learning*, 31, (113-134).
- Cohen, A.D.& Olshtain, E. (1985). Comparing apologies across languages, (175-184), (Ed. K.R. Jankowsky), *Scientific and Humanistic Dimensions of Language*, Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Cohen, A.D., Olshtain, E., & Rosenstein, D.S. (1986). “Advanced EFL Apologies: What Remains to be Learned?” *Interlanguage Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 62, (51-74).
- Cohen, A.D. & Olshtain, E. (1993). “The Production of Speech-acts by ESL Learners” *TESOL Quarterly*, 27, (33-56).

- Cohen, A.D.(1996). "Developing Ability to Perform Speech-acts" *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18, (253-267).
- Cohen, A.D. (1996b). Speech-acts in Second Language Learning Contexts, (383-420), (Editors: S. MacKay & N.H. Hornberger), *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Edmundson, R. J. (1992), *Evidence for Native Speaker Notions of Apologizing and Accepting Apologies in American English*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.
- Ferrara, K. (1994), *Pragmatic Transfer in American's Use of Japanese Thanking Routines*, Unpublished manuscript, Department of English, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.
- Frescura, M. A. (1993). *A Sociolinguistic Comparison of "Reactions to complaints": Italian L1 vs. English L1, Italian L2, and Italian as a Community Language*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Graduate Department of Education, University of Toronto, Toronto.
- Goffman, E. (1972). *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction*. London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press.
- Holmes, J. (1989). "Women's and Men's Apologies: Reflectors of Cultural Values" *Applied Linguistics*, 10-2, (194-213).
- Kasper, G. (1992). "Pragmatic Transfer" *Second Language Research*, 8-3, (203-231).
- Kasper, G. (1997b). The Role of Pragmatics in Language Teacher Education, (113-136), (Editors: K. Bardovi-Harlig & B. S. Hartford), *Beyond Methods: Components of Language Teacher Education*, New York: McGraw Hill.
- Linnell, J., Porter, F.L., Stone, H., Chen, W.(1992). "Can You Apologize Me? An Investigation of Speech Act Performance Among Non-native Speakers of English" *Penn Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 8-2, (33-53).
- Narita, S. & Young, R. (1994). "Apologies in English by Japanese learners" *JALT Journal*, 16-1, (75-89).
- Norricks, N. R. (1978). "Expressive illocutionary acts" *Journal of Pragmatics*, 2, (277-291).
- Olshtain, E. (1983). Sociocultural Competence and Language Transfer: The Case of Apology, (232-249), (Editors: S. Gass & L. Selinker), *Language Transfer in Language Learning*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Olshtain, E. & Cohen, A.D.(1983). Apology: A Speech-act Set, (18-35), (Editors: N. Wolfson & E. Judd), *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Olshtain, E. & Blum-Kulka, S. (1985). "Cross-cultural Pragmatics and the Testing of Communicative Competence" *Language Testing*, 2,(16-30).
- Olshtain, E.(1989). Apologies Across Languages, (155-174), (Editors: S. Blum-Kulka, Juliane House & Gabriele Kasper), *Cross-cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing.
- Olshtain, E. & Cohen, A.D. (1989). Speech Act Behavior Across Languages, (53-68), (Editors: H. W. Dechert & Manfred Raupach), *Transfer in Language Production*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing.
- Rose, K. R. (2000). "An Exploratory Cross-sectional Study of Interlanguage Pragmatic Development" *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 22-1, (27-67).

Tateyama, Y. (2001). Explicit and Implicit Teaching of Pragmatic Routines, (200-222), (Editors: K. R. Rose & G. Kasper), *Pragmatics in Language Teaching*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.  
Trosborg, A. (1995). *Interlanguage Pragmatics: Request, Complaints and Apologies*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Wu, Z. (1981), *Speech act-apology*, Report, Los Angeles: ESL Section, Department of English, UCLA.

**Acknowledgement:**

I would like to thank Associate Professor Andrew Lynch for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.