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The Gender of the Addressee as a Factor in the Selection of Apology Strategies: The Case of Saudi and British

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Abstract

This paper was set out to investigate the main cultural differences between Saudi and British participants making apologies with a focus on the role of the gender of the addressee in the selection of apology strategies in gender-segregated vs. coed societies. Written questionnaires were used to collect data from 80 participants: 20 Saudi males, 20 Saudi females, 20 British males and 20 British females. Three apology situations were presented; in the first two situations the hearer (H) was a male, in the third, the H was a female. Data was analyzed based on Brown and Levinson's (B & L) politeness theory and according to the Cross Cultural Speech Act Research Project (CCSARP) apology strategy coding system. Generally, the results of this study indicated differences between the Saudi and the British apology strategy selections. Moreover, in particular, there were significant differences between the mean scores of apology situations where the gender of the addressee was a male.

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1. Introduction

Since the publication and republication of B and L's politeness theory in (1978, 1987), there has been a burgeoning body of scholarship concerning politeness research and speech act performances around the globe. A large number of speech acts has been investigated cross-culturally including requests and apologies (Marquez-Reiter, 2000), refusals (Nelson, Carson, Al-Batal, & El Bakary, 2002), compliments (Nelson, Al-Batal, & El-Bakary, 1993), greetings (Emery, 2000), complaints (Umar, 2006), thanking (Al-Talhi, 2014) among others. Nevertheless, as Ogiermann (2009, p. 24) contends, "most cross-cultural studies do not go beyond describing the differences in performing a particular speech act in the contrasted languages, and few attempt to interpret the data in terms of cultural values". The current study thus intends to explore the cultural aspect of the apology speech act behavior of males and females from the Saudi Arabian society, a comparatively less investigated society/culture than others. From a cross-cultural aspect, it compares between apologies as performed by Saudi and British participants focusing on the gender of the addressee as a manipulating factor in the selection of apology strategies. Generally, the findings of this paper can be used to raise awareness of the importance of the social factor of the gender of the addressee in offensive situations as a key factor in selecting certain apology strategies, specifically among gender-segregated communities. Hopefully, this paper will inspire other politeness linguists to conduct further research in this particular subject.

Generally, apologies fall under *expressives* where the speaker (S) represents herself as her own state of mind; they are also post-event (Leech, 1980) signaling that the damage has already taken place. Apologies are considered face-threatening acts by definition (Brown & Levinson, 1987) although some view them as a "face-saving device" (Meier, 1992, p. 31). I seem to be in agreement with the latter perception of apologies. It is not the apology but the offence made by the S that threatens the S's positive face; the resulting apology *saves* S's positive face and "restore one's own social status" (Edmondson & House, 1981, p. 153).

On a different note, Olshtain (1989) draws attention to the H's face in her definition of apologies stating that apologies are "a speech act which is intended to provide support for the hearer who was actually or potentially malaffected by a violation" (p. 156). Thus, apologies can also save the H's negative face that was threatened by the offence.

It seems that the only 'face' that the speech act of apology actually threatens is the S's negative face. It is certainly easier to opt out of an apology than face the humiliation of apologizing to someone. However, "in order to restore H's face damaged by the offence, S performs a speech act which is costly to his or her own face" (Ogiermann, 2009, p. 48). It is interesting to explore why the S goes out of her way and threatens her own face in order to apologize to the H. The possible explanation to this is that most often the impetus behind making apologies usually stems from reasons and needs that the S has. For instance, in apologizing, the S benefits by saving her own positive face. In some cultures, saving one's positive face (social image, reputation and inclusion in society) is more important than saving one's negative face (exclusion, non-distraction and independence). Also, in apologizing, the S restores a good relationship with the H that was potentially previously damaged by the offence. In some cases, the H holds social power (P) over the S as in situations where the H is the S's boss. In these instances, it is in the S's interest to keep a positive respectful relationship with the H. Alternatively, if the social distance between the interlocutors (D) was low and the H was someone the S regarded as close such as a family member or a dear friend, then the S would understandably apologize to H to ensure that she maintains a good positive relationship with the H in the future. Moreover, if the ranking of the imposition on the H was high and the offence was severe (R), then the S might feel obliged to apologize to the H as it is often the case that "apologies relieve the offender of some moral responsibility" (Fraser, 1981, p. 259).

The three factors above (P, D, R) were captured in B and L's politeness theory (1978, 1987). Within Arabic politeness research, some linguists suggested adding more factors that particularly influence Arabic societies such as the inclination of the culture to which the

offender belongs; whether collectivist or individualist (Ahmed, 2017), the age of the interlocutors and the location of the exchange (Soliman, 2003), as well as the gender of the addressee (Al-Adaileh, 2007) which will also be investigated in this study. These factors can immensely influence the politeness strategies chosen by a certain society, and as Olaniyi (2017) suggested “members of a particular culture tend not to think of these rules as being culture-specific but often assume that these rules will be universally applicable” (p. 59). Therefore, in this study, a choice was made to investigate the extent the gender of the addressee can influence the making of apologies in a gender-segregated (Saudi) vs. non-segregated communities (British).

2. Theoretical Framework

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of politeness research studies investigating the Arabic language. These studies investigated different speech acts: apologies (Abu-Humei, 2013; Al-Adaileh, 2007; Al-Hami, 1993; Al-Sobh, 2013; Al-Zumor, 2010; Bataineh, 2004; Hussein & Hammouri, 1998; Jebahi, 2011; Nureddeen, 2008; Rizk, 1997; Soliman, 2003); requests (Al-Aqra', 2001; Alaoui, 2011; Al-Momani, 2009; Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010; Aubed, 2012; El-Shazly, 1993); compliments (Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Farghal & Haggan, 2006; Migdadi, 2003; Nelson et al., 1993; Qanbar, 2012); refusals (Abed, 2011; Al-Eryani, 2007; Al-Issa, 1998; Nelson et al., 2002); greetings (Al-Harbi & Al-Ajmi, 2008; Emery, 2000; Hasanain, 1994); favor asking (Al-Rifaei, 2012); advice giving (Al-Shboul, Maros, & Yasin, 2012); condolences (Yahya, 2010); invitation-making (Al-Khatib, 2006); and complaints (Umar, 2006).

In terms of classification, some studies are classified as interlingual (Al-Khatib, 2006; Al-Rifaei, 2012; Migdadi, 2003; Qanbar, 2012), some as cross-cultural (Al-Ali, 2012; Hussein & Hammouri, 1998), some as methodological (Nurani, 2009), and some as learner-based or interlanguage (Al-Hami, 1993; Rizk, 1997; Umar, 2006).

The studies above have given researchers insight into the possible conceptualization of politeness in the Arabic world and the

management of speech acts in various daily situations. Moreover, they revealed certain social and cultural tendencies that the Arabic respondents seemed to favor. For example, one of the main emerging themes was that generally Arab respondents tended to employ positive politeness strategies more than their counterparts from other cultures did. This result is in alignment with Hofstede (1991) who noted that all Arabic cultures are collectivist, which means that Arab members of the society greatly favor group harmony over individual autonomy. Ogiermann (2009) points out that collectivistic societies are intrinsically positive politeness oriented, while individualistic societies, such as England, are characterized as negative politeness or ‘deference’ (Scollon & Scollon, 1983, 2001) oriented societies.

According to Qari (2017), Saudi Arabia, as the rest of the Arabic world, is a highly positive politeness oriented society. Members from positive politeness societies are usually comfortable speaking to each other with a small spatial distance between them. Walker (2014) noted that these interlocutors are “comfortable with little personal space”, and he proposed Saudi Arabia as an example (p. 92). Members of the Saudi society tend to touch each other freely when they greet or see each other after a long time. For example, it is customary for Saudi men to greet one another by approaching and touching each other’s noses. In addition, kissing someone’s cheeks, hugging and holding hands while engaging in everyday social interactions can also be considered normal behavior amongst interlocutors of the same gender in the Saudi Arabic region.

Furthermore, members of the Saudi and Arabic societies tend to exaggerate extensively in order to show the H that they care about them (Qari, 2017). Such exaggerations can be found in their welcoming behavior which Alaoui (2011) contends is too excessive to the extent that it could be considered ‘rude’ in other cultures because the S is not keeping his/her distance. Arabic greetings, farewells, invites, and offers are also persistent and verbose (Mills, Kerkam, Mansor, & Grainger, 2015). Other social acts tend to be exaggerated as well such as giving lavish gifts in weddings and other celebrations. Ogiermann (2009) sees exaggeration as a behavioral aspect typical of positive politeness cultures. After all, one of the positive politeness

strategies, according to B and L, is to “exaggerate interest, approval, sympathy with H” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 102).

Another dominant feature of Arabic politeness linguistic behavior is the inclination towards using direct strategies in every day social endeavors. This phenomenon has been imputed to cultural and linguistic reasons. On a cultural level, in their investigation that compared between Saudi and American requests, Tawalbeh and Al-Oqaily (2012) concluded that directness among the Saudi sample was the expected behavior in situations where interlocutors were of equal power regardless of the weight of the request. They further stressed that, in the Saudi context, directness should not be considered impolite, but rather should be seen as ‘a way of expressing connectedness, closeness, camaraderie and affiliation’ (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012, p. 94).

On a linguistic level, Atawneh and Sridhar (1993) commented that the English language consists of a rich modal system that allows for higher mitigation by the use of hedged forms of indirect requests. By contrast, the Arabic language lacks the feature that contributes to a degree of pragmatic loss when using the same request forms in Arabic and English. Because modal verbs significantly affect the level of directness of speech act strategies, their scarcity in a language can cause the speakers to resort to other ways to show politeness. This seems to be the case in Arabic. For example, instead of (Could you please open the window?) an Arab might say (*open the window may Allah make you happy*). In these instances, the use of the ‘God-wishes’ or ‘Islamic prayers’ works as a mitigating agent which softens the direct imperative in Arabic. It seems fair to conclude then that the Islamic prayers used by Arabic speakers are utilized almost as a replacement of English modal verbs and other hedging devices.

Regarding apologies, during the last few decades, research performed by Arab scholars has been abundant (Abu-Humei, 2013; Al-Adaileh, 2007; Al-Ageel, 2016; Al-Ali, 2012; Al-Ghamdi, 2013; Al-Hami, 1993; Al-Laheebi & Yalla, 2014; Al-Megren, 2018; Al-Moghrabi, 2013; Al-Musallam, 2016; Al-Sobh, 2013; Al-Sulayyi, 2016; Al-Zumor, 2010; Bataineh, 2004; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006; Binasfour, 2014; El-Dakhs, 2018; Hussein & Hammouri,

1998; Jebahi, 2011; Nureddeen, 2008; Qari, 2017; Rizk, 1997; Soliman, 2003).

Collectively, the findings of the above studies indicated that whenever possible, most of the Arab subjects tried not to apologize to H especially when they possessed more power. In her investigation of Sudanese apologies, Nureddeen (2008) sustains that the Arab respondents opted not to apologize, avoided blaming themselves as much as they could and tended to resort to humor and turning the incident/offence into a joke. According to Bataineh and Bataineh’s apology research (2006) as well as Jebahi’s (2011) study, a noticeable percentage of Jordanian and Tunisian participants denied responsibility for the offence and shifted responsibility to other sources. Soliman (2003) reported that in his Arabic apology study, the S blamed the H (who was lower in status) for a deed which was at least partially his fault. Moreover, Rizk (1997) outlined that the 110 Arab respondents in his study collectively never apologized to children in an attempt to assert their parental authority. Al-Ali (2012) reports that between female Saudi and Australian participants, only Saudis used sarcasm in their apologies and sometimes even blamed H for the offence.

Although the above mentioned studies have enriched Arabic politeness research with a focus on apologies, the current paper intends to add more insight into the subject by bringing into attention a prominent social factor in manipulating apology strategies in gender-segregated societies; namely, the gender of the addressee in offensive situations. As far as the researcher’s limited knowledge goes, this factor has not been fully investigated before by any linguists in terms of research on Saudi apologies.

3. Methodology

The main instrument that was used to collect data in this research was a discourse completion test questionnaire (DCT). The DCT was created in an open-ended questionnaire form and it consisted of three situational descriptions eliciting apologies. In order to study the offensive situations based on the gender of the addressee, in the first two situations, the hearer was male, in the last, H was female. Moreover, to insure variety, the three situations depicted

different social factor combinations as follows: Situation 1 (+P, -D, +R), Situation 2 (-P, +D, +R), Situation 3 (-P, -D, +R).

Two versions of the DCT were created: Arabic for the Saudis and English for the British. Each discourse sequence was followed by a blank space in which the participants were asked to fill. There was no rejoinder. The participants were requested to respond exactly the way they would have in real life contexts.

For example:

Your father requested you to wake him up for an important appointment and depended on you as he was extremely tired and could not wake up on his own. You forgot and he missed his appointment, what will you say to him? طلب منك والدك انك توقظه/توقظيه لموعد مهم و اعتمد عليك لكونه تعبانا جدا و لا يستطيع الصحيان لوحده. انت نسيت و هو راح عليه الموعد ايش راح تقول/تقول له؟

In addition to the main DCT, a second questionnaire was administered to gather demographic information about the participants' gender, nationality, age-range and level of education.

The participants in this study were 320 in number: 80 male Saudi Arabian nationals (SMs), 80 female Saudi Arabians (SFs), 80 male native British English speakers (BMs) and 80 female native British English speakers (BFs). The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 22. The British participants were recruited from Roehampton University (RU), London, England. They mainly studied in the Media, Culture and Language department, while both groups of Saudi participants were recruited from King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. They had specialties in law, media and English literary studies.

Table 1
A Classification for Apology Strategies by the CCSARP Project

Name of Strategy	Definition	Example from English
IFID	This is the most direct and explicit form of apology which consists of performatives verb, such as apologies, forgive, pardon, excuse, and be sorry	I am sorry I do apologize My apologies Please forgive me
Explanation or account	In this strategy the offender explains the reason/cause of the offense in order to alleviate the imposition on H	There was too much traffic
Taking on responsibility	The apologizer recognizes his/her responsibility for the offense by either accepting the blame, expressing self-deficiency, expressing lack of intent, feeling embarrassed, and acknowledging the hearer as deserving an apology	It is my fault I am embarrassed You are right in blaming me
Concern for the hearer	In this strategy the speaker expresses sympathy for the hearer by asking about his/her physical and emotional states	Are you hurt? Are you Ok? I hope you didn't wait long
Offer of repair	This strategy is usually employed when the offence needs some kind of further repair such as when there is physical damage resulting from the offense	I will pay you back for the damage in your car
Promise of forbearance	The use of this strategy implies that the speaker intends not to do the offense	I promise I won't do it again

Note: In cases where the participants employed strategies other than the ones listed above, these were quantitatively classified as 'Other', as will be shown in the tables in the Results section

4. Results

4.1. Analysis of Apology (Situation 1)

In this situation, participants responded to the following question:

Your father requested you to wake him up for an important appointment and depended on you, as he was extremely tired and could not wake up on his own. You forgot and he missed his appointment, what will you say to him? (+P, -D, +R)

Table 2
Apology (Situation 1)

Situation 1	IFID	Account	Responsibility	Offer of repair	Promise of forbearance	Other	Opt out
Saudi male	35%	65%	10%	0	0	35%	45%
Saudi female	73%	58%	13%	5%	3%	60%	0
British male	80%	30%	5%	5%	5%	65%	5%
British female	95%	50%	10%	5%	5%	55%	0

According to Table 2, SMs projected low frequency use of ‘illocutionary force indicating devices’ (IFIDs) in this situation and comparatively high frequency use of the strategy ‘opt out’. The rest of the groups, however, displayed high frequency use of IFIDs. Moreover, BMs followed their IFIDs with expressions of accepting responsibility for the offence. SMs, on the other hand, were one of the least groups to accept responsibility and admit their faults.

It might seem puzzling that the apologetic behavior of SMs is quite indirect in a situation that delegates high power to the H over the S. It could be the case that the SMs’ resort to the employment of apology strategies was less direct than IFIDs, and accepting responsibility may have emanated from their possible fear of their fathers’ resulting punishments. Some responses from SMs were in accord with these assumptions. For example, a SM stated that he would opt out of apologizing and not communicate at all with his father because he predicted that his father would scold him and be upset with him for a very long time. Another SM mentioned that he would have to lie to his dad otherwise he would be punished by him. Other SMs were also ready to lie to their fathers in this case (*I will pretend I was sleeping because my dad is hot-headed, I will lie and make up anything and after I would keep silent and basically take it*).

What is more, a number of SMs showed deference to their fathers by offering to kiss their hands and their heads instead of a verbal apology. Kissing the hands or the head is a

common polite social act usually offered by Saudi young generation towards their parents and elders. In his study of Iraqi apologies, Ahmed (2017) said that according to the cultural norms of the Iraqi culture, “kissing the father’s head or hand could be the best way to save the offended person’s face” (p. 146). Interestingly, in this situation, none of the SFs employed this strategy. In contrast, SFs’ general attitude was to elicit sympathy from the dad and apply softer tones in their approaches to apology. Some of the strategies they employed included (crying, reminding dad that she is his dearest daughter, asking dad not to be angry, telling dad that he has been ‘destined’ to miss this appointment and distract dad by making him laugh and forget the incident). This may indicate that in their approach to apologizing to their fathers, SMs might prefer to employ negative politeness apology strategies while SFs may consider employing positive politeness strategies instead.

Turning to the British respondents’ employment of ‘Other’ strategies, we found that their apology strategy choices were noticeably different from those selected by the Saudis. For example, along with an IFID, over half of the British participants solely blamed their fathers in this situation (*sorry but you should consider buying an alarm clock, sorry but please next time use an alarm clock in addition to relying on me in waking you up, I apologize but next time you should set the alarm yourself*). These distinctive behaviors displayed by the Saudis and the British towards their fathers in the same context can shed light on some of the systematic differences between Eastern and Western societies concerning internal familial relationships

within the household. As Biddle (2012) says “[in individualistic cultures], human beings are not ... attached or dependent on one another; each must use his own mind and direct his own body; no one else can do either for him” (p.1). By contrast, “in collectivist cultures, families tend to be characterized by respect for parental authority and strong interdependent ties” (Bejanyan, Marshall, & Ferenczi, 2015, p. 1).

Table 3
Apology (Situation 2)

Situation 2	IFID	Account	Responsibility	Offer of repair	Promise of forbearance	Other	Opt out
Saudi male	73%	25%	33%	40%	0	38%	0
Saudi female	45%	3%	5%	10%	0	18%	80%
British male	95%	5%	20%	5%	5%	45%	0
British female	90%	5%	26%	10%	0	26%	0

It is crucial to note here that even though Saudi women have recently been given the right to drive cars, the ruling is quite recent and most Saudi women still depend on foreign drivers in driving them around until they learn how to drive themselves and are given individual driver’s licenses. Therefore, to make situation 2 realistic to the participants, it was important to state that in the case of Saudi females, a personal driver was involved.

According to Table 3, all the groups showed highest mean scores for their employment of IFIDs. In regards to accounts, SMs had the highest average score and Saudi females had the lowest. Saudi males typically provided reasons such as (*There was too much traffic*) and (*I didn't see you*). On the other hand, SFs resorted to ‘Other’ strategies, mainly blaming the driver for his heedlessness and negligence.

In the case of the British, both males and females showed highest preference for the use of IFIDs along with the ‘Other’ strategy (give the hearer insurance details).

Generally, if we take a closer look at the groups’ choices of apology strategies, we shall see that the Saudi female group was the only group who chose to opt out of apologizing to H and not enter in any kind of social interaction with him. This could be the result of a strict Saudi system regarding the extent of social communication allowed between men and women in public. The nature of interaction between the sexes in Saudi Arabia is restricted. SMs and SFs do not usually

4.2. Analysis of Apology (Situation 2)

In this situation, participants responded to the following question:

You as a driver (or your personal driver if you are a Saudi female) in a car park back into someone’s car and it was your fault. What will you say to the male driver of the other car? (-P, +D, +R)

mix in social events and are very careful not be completely alone with each other, even for a short time. As Al-Saraj (2015) explains,

Islam dictates that women should not have physical contact with men except for male relatives – our fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, and uncles. It would not be acceptable for an unfamiliar man – even a police officer- to arrest a woman, or even to stop a woman on the highway. Her male guardian must be present for any interaction with a man from outside the family... If a woman is not married, her father [or brother] is her guardian. (p. 35).

Based on the above discussion, it is unsurprising that the majority of SFs in this situation followed a few general trends in their apology attitudes to the offended male as follows:

1. They tended to employ formal linguistic expressions (*we seek your pardon; forgiveness*).
2. They tended to use the pronoun ‘we’ to refer to themselves and apologized using the plural form of the IFID (*we are sorry, we are at your service*).
3. They sought assistance from a third party by either giving the H their father or their brothers’ phone number, or letting the driver deal with the situation.
4. They scolded their drivers in front of the H hinting that it was not the S’s fault that the accident had happened, but it was rather the driver’s fault because he is either new, cannot

drive, or does not know the roads very well (*what's the problem (driver's name)? May Allah guide you to the right way. This is someone's car. Be careful next time*).

5. They expressed high levels of anxiety in their responses (*I will cry, I won't be able to say a word from the shock*).

6. Some SFs opted out of responding altogether and preferred to stay completely silent.

The above findings are in conformity with other studies that also included Saudi female samples. For example, Al-Qahtani's (2009) study about British and Saudi offering indicated that "the gender of the addressee showed a significant impact on the use of politeness strategies in realizing offers in the Saudi female group but not in the British ... opting out was more

frequent among the Saudi female speakers when the addressee was a male" (p. 256). What is interesting is that this type of behavior does not seem to be 'impolite' by Saudi members. On the contrary, it is often commendable that a girl refuses to interact with a male stranger in public as she is in this case being protective of her positive face by sticking to the habits and customs of her religion and cultural background.

4.3. Analysis of Apology (Situation 3)

In this situation, participants responded to the following question:

You offended a fellow worker (female) during a discussion at work. After the meeting, she mentioned the offence and you admitted you were wrong. What will you tell her? (-P, -D, +R)

Table 4
Apology (Situation 3)

Situation 3	IFID	Account	Responsibility	Offer of repair	Promise of forbearance	Other	Opt out
Saudi male	90%	3%	50%	3%	5%	47%	0
Saudi female	80%	8%	58%	3%	8%	63%	3%
British male	95%	0	74%	0	0	15%	0
British female	83%	0	60%	5%	5%	15%	0

In this situation, the S can be either male or female according to the participant's gender, the H however is a female. Thus, potential different behavioral characteristics of males and females can be identified in male-female versus female-female social interactions. It can be observed that all the groups employed high levels of direct apologies using IFIDs. Moreover, all the groups employed the strategy 'accepting responsibility' in their apologies. British males had the highest average mean score for using this strategy (74%) expressed with highly formulaic and ritualized utterances such as (*it's my fault*) and (*it was my mistake*). In addition, the British respondents resorted to 'Other' categories such as: (blaming hearer, minimizing responsibility, eliciting the H's understanding and denying responsibility).

On the other hand, Saudi males and females offered to further apologize to the H in front of their other work colleagues. They justified this by stating that since the offence took place in front of others, the apology had to be public as well. Moreover, a few Saudi male speakers

viewed this situation as an opportunity to liaise closely with the H in a manner that can be considered unacceptable by members of the Saudi society, such as (kissing the H's head, inviting H to dinner and paying for it, giving H the speaker's phone number, and apologizing to the H only if she were physically attractive). Although these out-of-norm strategies were employed by some Saudi males, the majority employed strategies which were approved and consistent with the Saudi society culturally and ethically in the context of male-female social interactions.

By contrast, in female-female interactions, SFs tended to utilize strategies directed at saving the positive face of both the H and the S. SFs tended to assert positive relationship with the H by reminding her of the close bond she has with the speaker (*you know you are like my sister, you know how dear you are to me and how I don't like to make you mad*). They also stated that they would ??? (*hug the hearer until she forgives me and laugh off the offence with her*).

It is worthy to mention that some Saudi female respondents stated that they would only apologize to the H if the interlocutors were close friends because they would want to maintain a good relationship with their friends. If the interlocutors were otherwise not very close, the S would opt out. Offering an apology dependent on social distance could reveal that the S's true intention in making the apology is to restore the damaged relationship with the H in the present time and sustain the strong bond between the interlocutors in the future. In the case of SFs, it is probable that they tend to use the speech act of apologizing to support both interlocutors' positive face, also as a marker of solidarity and an expression of camaraderie between the interlocutors especially when the social variable 'distance' is low. This gives support to the affirmation by Mills et al. (2015) that "Arabic-speaking people ... tend to address the participant's positive face-wants and to be less concerned about negative face-wants" (p. 54). It also corresponds with Al-Qahtani's (2009), study about Saudi and British showing that in the Saudi context,

the addressee's power-status did not show a significant effect on the type of politeness strategies ... social distance, on the other hand, was found influential [in that] in the Saudi group, there was a strong negative correlation between positive politeness and social distance. (p. 5)

In other words, as the distance between the interlocutors lowered down, SFs tended to employ a higher number of positive politeness strategies.

5. Discussion

In this paper, an attempt was made to examine the speech act of apology as produced by British and Saudi members. It also aimed to investigate the role of the gender of the addressee on the selection of apology strategies by Saudi and British respondents. The findings showed some differences in the use of politeness strategies between both cultural groups. For example, in terms of 'Other' apology strategies, the British subjects did not fear blaming their fathers for solely depending on the S to wake him up for his important meeting. Contrastingly, the Saudis, especially male, were largely more submissive,

evasive and reluctant to admit their faults perhaps out of fear of dad's forthcoming punishment. The SMs also showed their remorse in a non-verbal way by kissing the father's hands and head. Ahmed asserted that amongst the Arab societies, "non-verbal performance parallels verbal apologies in [some particular] family situations" (2017, p. 147). The discrepancy between the Saudi and British respondents' attitudes toward apologizing to the father may be imputed to cultural reasons where the father figure possesses more power and higher status in collectivist cultures than in individualistic ones. This conclusion agrees with the notion that "in collectivist cultures, families tend to be characterized by respect for parental authority and strong interdependent ties" (Bejanyan et al., 2015, p. 1).

Turning to differences between Saudi males and female, SMs seemed to prefer employing negative politeness strategies to express their apologies while SFs tended to use positive politeness apology strategies. This conclusion asserts Qari's (2017, p. 217) confirmation that in general 'Saudi males... showed more respect towards their fathers than Saudi females using deferential expressions and respectful address terms'.

In Situation 2, SMs mostly employed CCSARP apology strategies whereas 80% of SFs refused to apologize to the H and widely preferred to, not even, interact with the male driving the other car. When they apologized, they tended to use 'plural distancing' apology expressions and asked a third party to be present or phoned. The refusal to apologize and the preference for 'silence' can sometimes be strictly imputed to cultural reasons. Shafiee, Khorasani, and Rashidi (2013) illustrate that "silence cannot always be taken to mean power or powerlessness, domination or subjugation. Cultural and subcultural differences can also play a role in this aspect" (p. 121). This result is essential as it indicates that in gender-segregated societies, the gender of the addressee may be a SOLE factor in determining specific politeness behavior by one gender towards the other. This phenomenon however hardly has any effect in societies where genders easily intermingle and had no effect in the British respondents' apology strategy selections in my study. What is interesting is that the refusal to apologize or interact with the offended person in

this situation is not only acceptable but also actually preferred and encouraged by both the S and the H, according to the Saudi cultural background. In her book 'Understanding Arabs', Nydell (2012) points out that "in Saudi Arabia ... social separation is not practiced merely because it is required by custom; it is often preferred by both men and women because they feel more comfortable [with this arrangement]" (p. 34).

In Situation 3, SFs appeared to be more influenced by the social variable (D) than (R). To illustrate, although in Situation 3 the ranking of imposition is high, a few SFs stated that if H was not a close and dear friend (-D), they would not bother to apologize to her or even deal with the situation. Contrastingly, apology depending on social distance was not particularly mentioned by any of the British participants. In addition, the SFs appeared to have had greater wants in creating and maintaining close relationships in female-female interactions than their male counterparts. This conclusion agrees with Al-Marrani and Sazalie (2010) who concluded that the native speakers of Yemeni Arabic in female-female interactions employed more direct request strategies than in female-male cases where they preferred indirectness. They explained that "being direct in these situations expresses camaraderie and is consistent with cultural norms" (2010, p. 491).

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