Speech Act Theory: An Inter/Intra-cultural Study of Apology in Communication between Spouses

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Abstract

Motivated by the Speech Act theory, gender-specific use of language, and cross-cultural communication, this study intended to address quantitatively how cultural differences and gender patterns affect the way Persian and English native-speaking spouses apologize and utilize apology strategies in their conversational routines. To triangulate data, both a questionnaire (Chopman, 2012) and a focus-group semi-structured open-ended interview were used to collect data on sixty participants' linguistic behavior and their apology exchange. The Chi-square results for inter-cultural/gender comparisons indicated a higher rate of apologies among the English spouses and a variety in the rate and kind of apology strategies use. However, intra-cultural ones demonstrated twice more apology use by Persian females than males and no significant difference between the English spouses. The findings may have great appeal for both EFL learners and teachers to attend more to the nature of the apology speech act and its exchange among various groups and in different cultures and provide Persian EFL learners with information that may help them improve their pragmatic competence in English. The study also contributes to the pragmatics teaching curriculum and EFL research.

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Keywords

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Introduction

Communicative competence instruction has been one of the concerns of language teachers investigated by many researchers (Mansouri, Hadian, Tabatabaei, & Rezvani, 2019; 2018). Language has different social and cultural functions and, therefore, it is necessary to advance an accurate understanding of cultural similarities and differences in appropriate language use in different contexts. Researchers who study topics related to semantics or pragmatic functions of language usually find it difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between the two. Thijittang (2010) refers to pragmatic competence as the speakers' knowledge of language with regard to the use of politeness and appropriate rules which makes understanding and formulating speech acts possible. Speech acts are usually studied under the category of pragmatics which varies in verbalization and conceptualization across cultures or in different languages (Rodrigues Dias & Phoebe Kisubi Mbasalaki, 2021). In this relation, apology forms are among the speech acts ascribed to socio-pragmatic studies.

In the last decades, there has been a noticeable linguistic shift towards discourse analysis focusing on the importance of the social role of language and the textual nature of social life (Cameron, 1998). Pragmatics, as a new paradigm of research, is a field of linguistic analysis closely related to the verbal and non-verbal interactions among individual human beings. Katz (1977) suggests "Grammars are theories about the structure of sentence types. . . Pragmatic theories, in contrast, explicate the reasoning of speakers and hearers in working out the correlation in the context of the sentence token of a proposition. In this respect pragmatic theory is part of the performance" (p.19).

In recent years, there has been interest in research about the apology speech act used when social norms are broken and the apologizer takes responsibility for the offense to the offended. Sometimes the apologizer also suggests compensation in a bid to restore the equilibrium between him/herself and the offended person (Cetinavci, 2012). Through such a process, the offender gives the offended the power to forgive. Nureddeen (2008) maintains that an apology is used as a remedy for an offense. On their part, Bataineh and Bataineh (2006) contend that an apology is highly culture-specific and is used to reflect the offender's true feelings of sorrow and regret for his/her fault which can be expressed indirectly or directly, nonverbally or verbally. They also claim that the universal concept which is directly related to the apology speech act and exists in any language is politeness. Saving the interlocutors' faces (positive or negative) is key to maintaining successful communication.

It is acknowledged that some factors such as culture, power relations, social distance, and culture may influence the degree of politeness (Bwetenga & Diocleciano Nhatuve, 2021). People living in different cultures have different social norms and values. Apology norms also differ across different cultures. Apologies are effective strategies for repairing trust and resolving conflict; however, there exist cultural differences in the way apologies are offered, their frequencies, and the degree of their perspicuity in different cultures. When one is not adequately familiar with the target culture and its norms, s/he may use inappropriate language in a particular situation. Further, using one's own cultural lens in negotiations or in responding to a conflict in a different culture may lead to misunderstanding or, even worse, exacerbate the conflict. It is also suggested that one important function of the culture is its impact on the effectiveness of apologies (Sugimoto, 1997). The reason is that depending on the specific cultural context, the meaning (what an apology is) and the function (why the apology is used) of an apology may be different.

Literature on apologies and their consequences abounds (Ghanbari, Jamalinesari, Gowhary, & Azizifar, 2015; Tabatabaei, Gencer, Eldem, & Bakhtiarvand, 2018; Olga & Abedin, 2016). However, only a few researchers have done comparative studies the speech act of apology across dialects and languages. In addition, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, few studies have

addressed the patterns of apology between husbands and wives, especially within the framework of cultural differences. Consequently, the objective of the present work paper was to inter-culturally compare the rate of apologies across Persian and English native-speaking spouses. It also intended to give an account of the use of apology strategies between these two groups of language users. In addition, it was to numerically examine the relationship between married life span and the rate and strategies of apology utilized by the spouses. Last but not least, the study interrogated the intra-cultural gender-specific application of apology frequency and strategies employed by Persian and English native-speaking spouses. The findings of the current study were to add to a growing body of literature on each language, culture, and gender-specific use of apology as one of the speech acts.

1. Literature Review

Grice (1975) stated that "in any conversation, only certain kinds of 'moves' are possible at any particular time because of constraints that operate to govern exchanges" (p.45). According to Grice, such constraints will limit the speaker in what to say and the listener in what s/he can understand. Linguists mostly define speech acts in terms of the speaker's intended meaning (pragmatics) and its effect on the audience (illocutionary act). In this relation, learning the pragmatic rules of other languages can enable learners to produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate.

According to Henley (1977), the relationship and interactional patterns between males and females are not just kinds of expressing feelings of friendliness or solidarity, but in fact, such an interaction is greatly affected by the dominance of males over females. This is in line with the claim that sex differences in speech are attributable to different roles played by males and females and that some special features in women's speech are reflections of their inferior status in society (Crisby & Nyquist, 1977). This has led to the study of the way people use language to express and create gendered discourses (Dewi, Yuliatin, & Sari, 2022). Sanderland (2004) suggested that studying gendered discourses helps us to learn about the different ways males and females see the world and construct their identities while using written or spoken discourse in different contexts and situations.

Apologies are considered as being powerful (Tannen, 1999) and moral phenomena (Smith, 2008) that are an example gendered discourse. Many people refer to biological and cultural factors not only as separable but also as mutually contaminating. In this relation, linguistic behavior can be seen as the result of culturally created gender as distinguished from biologically determined sex. Gender differences in apology behavior have significant implications for interpersonal interactions. It is believed that the acceptability of an apology is determined by the extent to which the wrongdoing is perceived as being wrong by the offended, the consequences of the wrongdoing, and the extent to which the wrongdoer takes responsibility for the wrongdoing (Slocum, Allan, & Marriam, 2011). Although it is believed that there are significant differences in the way men and women apologize, such a claim is not based on satisfying empirical systematic research.

There are different apology strategies as remedial moves including 'admitting that an offense has occurred, 'showing respect and attention, 'expressing an attitude towards offense', and 'repairing the damage and providing compensation' (Owen,1983). There are also different definitions for an apology and also a variety of classifications by different linguists for apology strategies. Bataineh and Bataineh (2006) elucidated that an apology is a kind of persuasion utilizing certain strategies or a combination of strategies. They further argue that such strategies include the explicit statement of the apology (*I apologize*), requesting the acceptance of apology (*Please accept my apology*), expressing regret for the offense (*I am truly/ terribly sorry*), requesting forgiveness for the offense (*Please forgive me*), acknowledging responsibility for the

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offense (*It was my fault*), promising forbearance (*It will never happen again*), and offering compensation (*Let me make it up*).

Chopman and Thomas (2008) stated that people do not use the same language to apologize and believed that when one does not use the right language to apologize, even a sincere apology may be received as being insincere. They proposed five different apology languages including expressing regret, accepting responsibility, offering compensation, showing remorse, and requesting forgiveness. The findings of a recent study showed different apology strategies were used by Iraqi EFL learners and they knew how to use apology forms to meet the requirements of particular situations (Ulga & Abedin, 2016).

Table 1. *Apology languages (proposed by Chopman & Thomas, 2008)*

Expressing Regret	Expressing that the person feels sorry or bad for his/her wrong behavior, saying "I am sorry I did it", or "I feel really bad that my behavior has made you upset."
Accepting Responsibility	Confirming that something wrong has been done and accepting one's fault saying "I was wrong", or "It was my fault".
Offering Compensation	Asking what to do to restitute, saying "What could I do to make things right?", or "How could I pay for the loss?"
Showing Remorse	Expressing the desire to change one's behavior and become a better person saying, "I'll do my best not to repeat it", or "I won't let it happen again".
Requesting Forgiveness	This is especially to show one's humility, saying "I sincerely ask you to forgive me. Will you please ignore that?"

In a study conducted by Nor and Paramasivam (2013), it was found that expression of apology, explanations or reasons for the offense and offers, and repairs were the three most frequently used strategies. Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani (2010) found even when there is no need to apologize, Persian EFL learners apologize and overuse apology strategies. They also asserted that before using apology strategies, Persian EFL learners transferred socio-pragmatic strategies of intensifiers from Persian to English. A study by Gonzales, Pederson, Manning, & Wetter (1990) showed that affective statements were used both by males and females; however, females used such forms more frequently than males. The variety of such affective statements also differed for different genders so females were reported to produce more variety of affective statements while frequently using intensifiers in their utterances. Statements such as 'I feel very bad', 'I'm so embarrassed, and 'I am terribly sorry' are typical expressions used by females.

The striking field of research, language and gender, dates back to Lakoff (1975), and even earlier when Jespersen (1922) in his book 'The Woman' referred to the sexist view of language use among men and women. In more recent literature, the notion of gender has been discussed as in Grey's (1992) "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" or in Tannen's (1990) "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation". In these books, the actors examined how gender affected communication flow and strategies used between men and women and indicated divergent men and women's use of language across interactions. They also asserted that common life experiences and emotional bonding were more valued by females. Sometimes men refuse to apologize because they are not willing to admit that they have done something wrong (Engel, 2001) or they are not willing to accept the defeat. On the other hand, women are more concerned with showing modesty and politeness to others compared to men, so they apologize more willingly (Tannen, 1999).

Although many studies have been done to shed light on the effect of gender on apologies (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Ghanbari, et al., 2015; Harb, 2015), there is not yet agreement among them. Different scholars have investigated some factors related to the concept of apology including offense as a contextual factor (Gonzales, et.al, 1990), some apologizers' characteristics

like status (Tata, 2000), cultural characteristics (Bataineh and Bataineh, 2008), and the role of gender (Smith 2008).

Gender might have different effects on the complexity of the apology components, that is, the elements that comprise an apology have also been investigated (Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Förster, & Montada, 2004). Slocum (2006) also studied 'admitting responsibility for the offense' in the form of affirmation, action components such as offering compensation, and statements of emotions.

Another important related field of research is how an apology is constructed (Smith, 2008) especially because it plays a significant role in repairing relationships (Bono, McCullough, & Root, 2008) and improving psychological (Zechmeister, Garcia, Romero, & Vas, 2004) and physical (Anderson, Linden, & Habra, 2006) well-being after oppositions or conflict (Eaton, Struthers, Shomrony, & Santelli, 2007). Despite Gonzales et al. (1990), Tannen (1990), and Smith (2008) who indicated frequency differences in apologies offered by men and women, Schumann (2011) noted that "despite widespread acceptance of the stereotype that women apologize more than men do, there is little compelling evidence of a gender difference in apology behavior" (p.2). Furthermore, Aydin (2013) suggested the significant impact of power relations on the rate and types of apologies and drastic differences in apologies across cultures and Alzeebaree and Yavuz (2017) revealed significant differences in apology strategies implementation between males and females.

The results of a study by Tabatabaei et al., (2018) indicated that native and non-native participants used almost similar frequency of strategies in apology speech acts. Based on the research findings, generally speaking, compared to men, women used indirect speech more often; however, regarding apologies, men used indirect apology forms while women used more direct language to apologize (Lakoff, 1975).

This study focusing on apology speech act for its healing nature aimed at investigating conversational patterns between the spouses to provide contrasting evidence on apology speech acts utilized by Persian versus English husbands and wives to systematically study the potential role of gender in English and Persian spouses' use of apologies. It examined the frequency of apologies in the two cultures and between spouses and investigated the apology strategies used by Persian and English native-speaking spouses to examine the effect of cultural differences as well as gender patterns on the way spouses apologize in their conversational routines. The following questions were addressed in the study.

1. Is there statistically any significant difference between the rate of apologies between Persian and English native-speaking spouses?
2. To what extent is the use of apology strategies between Persian and English native-speaking spouses the same or different?
3. How is the length of a marriage related to the rate of apologies or apology strategies employed by the spouses?
4. How does gender interfere with the frequency of apologies and the type of apology strategies employed by Persian and English native-speaking spouses?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study was descriptive and content-analytic which aimed at gathering quantifiable information on the participants' linguistic behaviors. The collected data were used for statistical inference through the analysis of data.

2.2 Research Participants

Thirty Persian spouses living in Iran (in Esfahan and Tehran) and thirty English spouses living in England (in Norwich and Birmingham) were the participants of the study. They were of different ages and had the experience of married life for a period of 5 to 50 years. The nonprobability sampling technique, using whoever was available, was used for its convenience. Before beginning to collect data, the participants were given information regarding the objectives of the study. To ensure the consent of the participants, the researchers assured the participants that their responses and opinions would be kept highly confidential and would only be used for the current research and purely academic purposes.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

To collect the participants' real responses and reliable data so that participants do not manipulate their responses and the strategies they used, the researchers did not inform the participants that they were measured for their apology frequency and strategies. Data were collected simultaneously in Iran and England for eight months through haphazard accidental sampling. For the sake of methodological triangulation, ethnographic research methods, the questionnaire of 'Apology Language Personal Profile' (Chopman, 2012) (Appendix A) along with focus-group semi-structured open-ended interviews were used. To increase the reliability of the instrument employed and to make sure that the questionnaire was both productive and receptive, this study applied a combination of multiple-choice items and DCTs (Discourse Completion Task). That is, the questionnaire consisted of fifteen situations comprising two different types of responses, some predetermined statements in multiple-choice form as well as a free response option which allowed the participants to express their own opinion freely for clarification or giving additional information. The participants were also asked to write about the other possible kinds of offenses for which they usually apologize and how. Some spouses were also interviewed to shed light on the accuracy of the collected information and to give them chances to elaborate on their responses or add some more details if required. Their oral statements and comments were recorded, and then, transcribed and carefully analyzed after the interview session and some Persian apology expressions have been quoted exactly as they were to prevent losing the illocutionary forces of the utterances.

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2.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The participants' responses to the situations presented in the questionnaire were carefully analyzed by the researchers. To dig deeper into the emotional states of the participants, they also analyzed the content of the participants' answers to the open-ended questions to yield more realistic qualitative results. First, the frequency and percentages of the apology strategies which were utilized by the husbands and wives were tabulated. Then, Chi-Square was utilized to examine the significance of the existing differences between Persian spouses and English spouses (inter-cultural analysis) and also within Persian and English spouses (Intra-cultural analysis). Next, such an examination was done for different apology strategies as well.

3.   Results

Answering the first research question, which implied cross or inter-cultural comparison of apologies rate between Persian and English native-speaking spouses, required frequency and chi-square calculation indicated in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. *Percentage of Apology by Sex*

	Native		Non-Native		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Female	398	50.6	338	66.8	736	57.0
Male	388	49.4	168	33.2	556	43.0
Total	786	100.0	506	100.0	1292	100.0

According to Table 3, the frequency of apologies (inter-cultural analysis) was significantly higher among the English spouses.

Table 3. *Frequencies and Test Statistics between English and Persian Spouses Based on Chi-Square Test*

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Native	786	646.0	140.0
Non-Native	506	646.0	-140.0
Total	1292		
Chi-Square	60.681		
df	1		
Asymp. Sig.	.000*		

*$p < .05$

To answer the second research question, addressing differences in apologies between Persian- speaking spouses, necessitated the statistical analysis of chi-square in Table 4.

Table 4. *Frequencies and Test Statistics among Persian Spouses*

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Female	338	253.0	85.0
Male	168	253.0	-85.0
Total	506		
Chi-Square	57.115		
df	1		
Asymp. Sig.	.000*		

* $p < .05$

According to Table 4, a *P*-Value lower than 0.05 indicates that the frequency of apology was not the same among the male and female Persian spouses and females apologized significantly more than males.

The statistical analyses to investigate the use of apology strategies intra-culturally between English speaking spouses, the third research question, are represented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Frequencies and Test Statistics among English Spouses*

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Female	398	393.0	5.0
Male	388	393.0	-5.0
Total	786		
Chi-Square	.127		
df	1		
Asymp. Sig.	.721		

* $p < .05$

A *P*-Value higher than 0.05 indicates no significant difference between male and female English spouses in the rate of apologies (Table 5).

The result of the comparison of the kind and rate of five main apology strategies between English-speaking spouses, the focus of the fourth research question, is indicated in Table 6.

Table 6. *Frequencies and Test Statistics of Apology Strategies among English and Persian Spouses*

	Expressing regret		Accepting responsibility		Offering compensation		Showing remorse		Requesting forgiveness	
	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N
Native	256	222.0	188	152.0	134	100.0	92	81.0	116	91.0
Non-Native	188	222.0	116	152.0	66	100.0	70	81.0	66	91.0
Total	444		304		200		162		182	
Chi-Square	10.414		17.053		23.120		2.988		13.736	
df	1		1		1		1		1	
Sig.	.001*		.000*		.000*		.084		.000*	

* p < .05

According to the result of the Chi-square analysis in Table 6, the frequencies of strategies of expressing regret, accepting responsibility, offering compensation, and requesting forgiveness were significantly higher for English spouses. However, it showed no significant difference between English and Persian spouses in showing remorse.

Table 7 represents the results of a comparison of the use of apology strategies among Persian spouses.

Table 7. *Frequencies and Test Statistics of Apology Strategies among Persian Spouses*

	Expressing regret		Accepting responsibility		Offering compensation		Showing remorse		Requesting forgiveness	
	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N
Female	118	94.0	90	58.0	34	33.0	50	35.0	46	33.0
Male	70	94.0	26	58.0	32	33.0	20	35.0	20	33.0
Total	188		116		66		70		66	
Chi-Square	12.255		35.310		.061		12.857		10.242	
Df	1		1		1		1		1	
Sig.	.000*		.000*		.806		.000*		.001*	

* p < .05

According to Table 7, Persian females used the apology strategies of expressing regret, accepting responsibility, showing remorse, and requesting forgiveness more than males. However, the apology strategy of offering compensation was not used significantly different in communications between Persian spouses.

The results of the comparison of English spouses in making use of apology strategies are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. *Frequencies and Test Statistics of Apology Strategies among English Spouses*

	Expressing regret		Accepting responsibility		Offering compensation		Showing remorse		Requesting forgiveness	
	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N
Female	140	128.0	114	94.0	42	67.0	50	46.0	52	58.0
Male	116	128.0	74	94.0	92	67.0	42	46.0	64	58.0
Total	256		188		134		92		116	
Chi-Square	2.250		8.511		18.657		.696		1.241	
Df	1		1		1		1		1	
Sig.	.134		.004*		.000*		.404		.265	

* p < .05

According to Table 8, although there are no differences between the English spouses in making use of apology strategies of expressing regret, showing remorse, and requesting forgiveness, English females used more accepting responsibility strategy and the male ones applied more offering compensation strategy.

A calculation of frequency and chi-square analysis were also used to investigate the difference in the use of apology strategies between the male English and Persian spouses (Table 9).

Table 9. *Frequencies and Test Statistics of the Apology Strategies Employed by Male English and Persian Spouses*

	Expressing regret		Accepting responsibility		Offering compensation		Showing remorse		Requesting forgiveness	
	N Observed	N Expected	N Observed	N Expected	N Observed	N Expected	N Observed	N Expected	N Observed	N Expected
Native	140	129.0	114	102.0	42	38.0	50	50.0	52	49.0
Non-Native	118	129.0	90	102.0	34	38.0	50	50.0	46	49.0
Total	258		204		76		100		98	
Chi-Square	1.876		2.824		.842		.000		.367	
Df	1		1		1		1		1	
Sig.	.171		.093		.359		1.000		.544	

* p < .05

According to Table 9, regarding the five apology strategies, there were no differences between the male English and Persian speakers. However, Table 10 indicates significantly higher use of all of the apology strategies by female English speakers than the Persian ones.

Table 10. *Frequencies and Test Statistics of the Apology Strategies Employed by Female English and Persian Spouses*

	Expressing regret		Accepting responsibility		Offering compensation		Showing remorse		Requesting forgiveness	
	N Observed	N Expected	N Observed	N Expected	N Observed	N Expected	N Observed	N Expected	N Observed	N Expected
Native	116	93.0	74	50.0	92	62.0	42	31.0	64	42.0
Non-Native	70	93.0	26	50.0	32	62.0	20	31.0	20	42.0
Total	186		100		124		62		84	
Chi-Square	11.376		23.040		29.032		7.806		23.048	
Df	1		1		1		1		1	
Sig.	.001*		.000*		.000*		.005*		.000*	

* p ≤ .05

The analysis of the relationship between the married life span and the rate and type of apology strategies used by the spouses was done through the Pearson formula and the results are indicated in Table 11 and Table 12 respectively. According to the former, the rate of apology has no relationship with the duration of the marriage.

Table 11. *Correlation between the Married-Life Span and the Rate of Apology Employed by the Spouses*

Frequency

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Year	.056	.222	484

According to Table 12, the Pearson formula indicated no significant relationship between the married life span and the rate of apology strategies except for 'offering for compensation strategy' for which a negative relationship was found across the two cultures.

Table 12. *Correlation between Duration of Marriage and the Rate of Apology Strategies Used*

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Expressing regret	.034	.717	114
Accepting responsibility	.130	.194	102
Offering compensation	-.220*	.033	94
Showing remorse	.024	.823	92
Requesting forgiveness	.061	.589	82

English-speaking spouses also explained that "for being impatient, for speaking brusquely or harshly, for criticizing my husband's family, usually I would just say sorry and explain why I did it. There would be a reason" (Participant 3). They also told, "we would always consult on important matters so such problematic situations would not arise (for situation No.4)" (participant 2). Other ones expressed that "If my husband carried on doing something really annoying, I'd leave him" (participant 11), "It would depend on why he'd broken his promise. It might have been unavoidable" (for situation No.8) (participant 10), "If there is a significant conflict, we don't just leave it, we talk it through until we've resolved it (situation No.14) (participant 3), and "It is silly to be upset for such things. Shirts cannot be that important. For sure, no one does it on purpose, and so we just laugh" (situation No.12) (participant 7). Persian spouses also added some extra notes such as "My spouse usually explains the situations or makes excuses in order not to accept the responsibility, saying: it is not important; I didn't mean that, you are too much sensitive" (participant 6), " My spouse doesn't care at all, never apologizes" (participant 9), "What my spouse says in such situations is "I just didn't care; I didn't mean to make you feel upset, it is not that important" (participant 4), "My spouse says you always take things too seriously" (participant 8), and "I am always blamed for being too much sensitive and expecting a lot. He never apologizes" (participant 6).

4.   Discussion

This study set out with the aim of assessing cultural and gender effects on apologizing and apology strategies use. The current study found a higher frequency of apologies between English spouses.

Another finding, not in line with Tabatabaei et al., (2018), was that English spouses were proven to use expressing regret, accepting responsibility, offering compensation, and requesting forgiveness more than Perian spouses; however, such a difference did not exist for showing remorse.

The results of this study showed no relationship between married life span and either the rate of apologies or the type of apology strategies used by Persian and English spouses. However, a weak negative relationship was found between the rate of offering compensation and the married life span.

This study also found that form among male and female Persian spouses, females apologized significantly more than males, further supporting the idea of Gonzales et al. (1990), Tannen (1990), and Smith (2008). However, there was no significant difference between male and female English spouses in this relationship. The frequency of expressing regret, accepting responsibility, showing remorse, and requesting forgiveness was higher for Persian females which is in line with Nor and Paramasivam (2013). However, in offering compensation, there was no significant difference for Persian spouses. The frequency of use for expressing regret, requesting forgiveness, and showing remorse was not significantly different between English spouses. However, the frequency of use for accepting responsibility was significantly higher for English females while the frequency of use for offering compensation was significantly higher for

English males. The frequencies of use for apology strategies were not significantly different between male English and Persian spouses, while the frequencies were significantly higher for female English spouses which is in line with Bataineh & Bataineh (2006), Slocum (2006), and also with Alzeebaree and Yavuz (2017) who indicated that differences in the use of apology strategies were found to occur not only between Kurdish EFL undergraduate students and native speakers of English but also between the male and female Kurdish EFL undergraduate students, in other words, within the same culture, and different apology strategies within the same culture have been stated to cause problems for foreign or second language uers.

Based on the statements provided by them, among Persian couples, husbands were usually reluctant to apologize and tended to express their apology indirectly which is in line with Lakoff (1975) and Engel (2001). Some English husbands preferred not to say sorry in a face-to-face encounter and had their own indirect ways of saying that they felt sorry. They referred to buying flowers and leaving a message on the answering machine (as classic strategies) as some examples, while, such responses were rarely seen among the Persian males. Persian females tended to apologize for offenses and sometimes even when it was not their fault, not consistent with Schumann (2011) who found that women and men apologized for a parallel proportion of the offenses they reported. She suggested that a gender difference in apology frequency was initiated by different judgments of severity rather than by a difference in willingness to apologize.

The explanations added by the spouses in the questionnaires revealed that English females usually tended to apologize even for light offenses. However, husbands, while trying to maintain their status, preferred to use explanations or accounts of situations. The interesting point was that there was a cultural difference even in the participants' perception of the situations offered in the questionnaire. English spouses confirmed the plausibility of the situations, yet some of the situations, such as situation number ten, seemed to be strange to them! They claimed these were not what they exactly would say on such occasions. "Anniversaries for instance are not big deals, maybe for the elderly people or upper-class rich people! At most, what we normally say in such situations is *sorry*! And no further explanation. We care more about our birthdays." They added that in some of the stated situations they would never apologize and they offered some other situations as being more important to them.

English spouses also stated that "We usually just say I'm really sorry - as many times as it takes until the other person is OK with it!" they added, "We apologize for not staying calm with each other or with the kids, or for not sharing out the duties with the kids. We sometimes get cross or grumpy with each other, and then apologize. We usually hug, make each other dinner or talk about the events of the day."

It is said that women talk more than men. What is important to note is that more talk means the probability of committing more faults that requires more apologies. Another factor influencing the patterns of talk is power relations between spouses which do not follow the same pattern in different cultures. During the past decades, Iran has witnessed significant growth in the number of educated women who undertake prominent social roles and responsibilities; nevertheless, the power relation is still mostly male-dominated in Iran. In addition, some other factors such as age, social class, education, and years of married life may affect power relations between spouses.

Indeed, women usually offer more apologies than men do, but it is noteworthy that women also commit more offenses than men do! The rationale behind the claim that men apologize less frequently than women might be the belief that men have a relatively higher threshold for what is assumed to be offensive behavior. It is also believed that men are not willing to apologize because they consider it as showing their weakness. Most of the spouses in the present study had children, and naturally, they were more motivated to resolve their conflicts by simply saying that they felt sorry for the sake of their children's peace. Moreover, after years of married life spouses

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learn by experience that conflict management via apologizing will save them a lot of undesirable consequences.

Conclusion

As a socio-pragmatic study, the present research was designed to compare the rate and type of apology strategies inter-culturally between Persian and English native-speaking spouses and their relationship with life span. It also aimed to assess the extent to which gender-specific use of the rate and type of apology strategies are made intra-culturally. This study found that generally English spouses apologized more than the Persian ones. In addition, they expressed regret, accepted responsibility, offered compensation, and requested forgiveness more than the Persian one. It was also shown that Persian females expressed regret, accepted responsibility, showed remorse, and requested forgiveness more than males. However, English female spouses rated higher in accepting responsibility and males surpassed in offering compensation. This study also indicated no relationship between life span and rate of apologies and type of its strategies used. It can be concluded that male Persian spouses are not willing to take responsibility for their wrong actions and find it onerous to apologize especially to their wives. However, to maintain a healthy marital relationship, it is of vital importance to develop the skill of apologizing. Contrary to the public belief that apologies reflect a weak character, it requires great strength. God has created repentance because he wisely knew humans would make a lot of mistakes throughout their life and they will need to have a chance to apologize and try to make things right. One of the most respected forms of interaction in civilized life encounters is the ability to offer apologies and know how to get them right. A simple apology can heal a damaged relationship and restore an intimate bounding. If spouses learn to do it right, an apology can simply lead to a happier life. Spouses should especially take into account that if they lose control of their arguments they may lead to irrecoverable breakdowns in their relationships. One can manage the relationship problems; however, when such problems are ignored or left unaddressed, the health and permanence of the relationship will be at risk.

In order to maintain a good relationship, it is important to have appropriate linguistic behavior in different situations. Developing interactional competencies is key to successful communication. No one likes to admit that they have committed a mistake or a faux pas. Not all people are strong enough to admit their faults and failures. Some others are so concerned about winning or being in a state of power that they are reluctant to admit their faults. Long-lasting conflicts can simply result in destroying one's personal or social relationship and even affect his/her family life, while a simple apology can reconcile such grudges. Although this is a powerful and valuable social skill, little attention and thought have been devoted to instructing the students on how to apologize. Some teachers themselves have not learned the skill yet. One needs to learn to apologize as a means to put an end to a dispute or misunderstanding. Such studies familiarize both the language learners and teachers with the nature of conversational interactions, the existing similarities and differences among the cultures, and among various groups in society, especially in the case of exchanging apologies.

The existing differences in the way people talk can also be attributed to different variables such as differences in social status, ethnic background, educational level, gender, and age. It is recommended that further research be undertaken to focus on the impact of such variables on the frequency and the type of apologies used in different settings. Furthermore, they might explore these issues through more interactive data collection techniques, such video- and audio-recording, and/or retrospective self-evaluative techniques, such as diary. Another limitation of the study was the sample size which would be compensated for by designs of larger sample sizes and with more sophisticated statistical tools such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM),

multiple regression, or even Meta-Analytic Structural Equation Modeling. Lastly, future lines of research are suggested to be based on the variability of the language users focusing on different aspects of pragmatics such as implicature or different speech acts (e.g., refusal, disagreement, etc.).

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Appendices

Sex: male   female
Years of married life:
Education:
Adopted from "APOLOGY LANGUAGES PERSONAL PROFILE" by Dr. Gary Chopman, from
http://www.5lovelanguages.com/profile/apology/

What does your spouse do in the following situations? Does s/he apologize? If yes, what exactly does s/he do or say? There is a blank choice, you can add if you think of a different response.

1- Your spouse failed to acknowledge your wedding anniversary.

a) "I can't believe I forgot. You and our marriage are so important to me. I am so sorry."

b) "There is no excuse for me forgetting. What was I thinking?"

c) "What can I do to prove my love for you?"

d) "You can bet I won't forget next year! I'm going to circle the date on my calendar!"

e) "I know you are hurt, but can you ever forgive me?"
f) ……………………………………………………………………………………………

2- Your spouse lashed out in anger against you when you had done no apparent wrong.
a) "I wish I had not hurt you by yelling at you. I feel so bad for how I treated you."
b) "I was angry, but I had no right to speak to you that way. You did not deserve that."
c) "What can I do or say to make things right between us?"
d) "I'm afraid that I'll do this again, and I don't want to. Help me think of ways to avoid blowing up like this in the future."
e) "I am truly sorry for yelling at you. I hope that you can find it in your heart to forgive me."
f) ……………………………………………………………………………………………

3- Your spouse knew how you felt about a matter and knowingly went against your wishes.
a) "I knew how you felt but went against your wishes anyway. I wish I had not done that."
b) "If I had only thought about what I was doing, I would have realized it was wrong."
c) "What can I do to regain your respect?"
d) "I won't take your feelings for granted in the future."
e) "Will you please give me another chance?"
f) ……………………………………………………………………………………………

4- Your spouse failed to consult with you on an important matter of mutual interest.
a) "I know now that I hurt you very badly. I am truly sorry for what I did."
b) "I really blew it this time. I was wrong to not include you in this decision. You have a right to be upset with me."
c) "Is there anything I can do to make up for what I did?"
d) "In the future, I plan to consult with you no matter what. I won't bypass you in making decisions again."
e) "You have every right to hold this against me, but will you please forgive me?"
f) ……………………………………………………………………………………………

5- Your spouse unintentionally poked fun at you and embarrassed you in front of others at a party.
a) "I deeply regret embarrassing you like I did. I wish I could go back in time and say something more appropriate."
b) "That was so thoughtless of me. I thought I was being funny, but obviously, hurting you like I have is not funny."
c) "Is there any way I can repair our relationship? Would you like for me to apologize to you in front of the others?"
d) "It's easy to take others' feelings for granted, but I want to be more considerate of you and others in the future. Will you help hold me accountable?"
e) "I didn't intend to hurt you, and now all I can do is ask for your forgiveness and try not to repeat my same mistake again."
f) ……………………………………………………………………………………………

6- You were trying to tell your spouse something important, and he/she acted uninterested.
a) "I feel really bad that I didn't listen to what you were saying. I know how it feels to have something important to say, and I regret that I didn't listen to you."
b) "Listening is such an important part of a strong relationship, but once again, I blew it. You needed me to hear you, and I basically just ignored your need."
c) "Can we back up and try again? You talk, and I'll listen. You'll have my undivided attention."
d) "I messed up this time, but in the future, I promise to give you my full attention when you say you have something important to tell me."
e) "I'm sorry I wasn't listening. You don't have to forgive me, but I hope you will."
f) ……………………………………………………………………………………………

7- Although you had expressed your annoyance with a particular habit many times before, your spouse continued exhibiting the behavior to spite you.
a) "I've taken this too far. I'm very sorry for not being more considerate of your wishes. I wouldn't like it if you did that to me."
b) "OK, I admit it; I am annoying you on purpose, and that's neither funny nor fair. I need to act more mature than that."

c) "Saying 'I'm sorry' won't take back the fact that I've knowingly tried to annoy you. What more can I do to win back your favor?"
d) "I have gotten into the habit of disregarding your wishes, and I don't want to go on doing that. From now on, I'm going to make extra effort to honor your wishes."
e) "I've tried your patience, and now I'm asking you to forgive me. Will you allow me a fresh start in honoring your requests?"
f) …………………………………………………………………………………………

8- Your spouse broke a promise.
a) "I am so sorry. I promised you I'd come through, and I let you down."
b) "I've really messed up this time."
c) "I don't know what I can do at this point, but is there any way I can compensate?"
d) "It's too late to do anything about it now, but I want so badly to avoid this type of error again. Let's talk about what I can do in the future to make good on my promises."
e) "I don't expect you to forgive me, but I would greatly appreciate it if you would forgive me."
f) …………………………………………………………………………………………

9- Your spouse broke one of your prized possessions.
a) "I know this was one of your prized possessions, and I feel terrible about what has happened."
b) "I should have been watching more carefully. It was my fault for not paying more attention or this would not have happened."
c) "Can I purchase it somewhere for you? Is there some way I can replace this?"
d) "I promise that I will be more protective of your possessions in the future."
e) "You have a right to be upset, but I hope that you can forgive me."
f) …………………………………………………………………………………………

10- At lunch, your spouse dropped food on you and ruined your shirt.
a) "I am so sorry about that. I feel bad that I've ruined your shirt and inconvenienced you like this."
b) "I am normally pretty careful, but I wasn't careful enough this time. I accept full responsibility for this mess."
c) "I would like to take it to the dry cleaning. What about buying a new one?"
d) "This has taught me a hard lesson. You can bet that I'll be more careful in the future."
e) "Can you please forgive me for my carelessness?"
f) …………………………………………………………………………………………

11- You were in a crisis and needed help, but your spouse ignored your need.
a) "I should have been there for you. I'm so sorry I let you down."
b) "I let you down when you needed me the most. I made a terrible mistake."
c) "Saying 'I'm sorry' doesn't feel like it is enough. What more can I say or do to mend it?"
d) "I realize now that I could have been more help to you, and I promise that I'll do everything I can do to help you if ever you are in trouble again."
e) "I am sincerely sorry and ask you to forgive me."
f) …………………………………………………………………………………………
12- Your spouse made an insensitive remark about you.
a) "That was so thoughtless of me. I wish I had been more considerate of your feelings."
b) "I know what I said was wrong and that I hurt your feelings."
c) "Would you allow me to retract what I said? I would like a chance to restore your reputation."
d) "While I will likely say wrong things again in the future, what I've learned from this experience will help me avoid hurting you with insensitive comments."
e) "I blew it! Can you forgive me?"
f) …………………………………………………………………………………………....

13- You were proud of your accomplishment, but your spouse acted as if it was trivial.
a) "You needed me to share your excitement, and I let you down. I hate that I didn't respond more appropriately."
b) "I spoiled your celebration by not being happy for you. I could make excuses, but really, I have no good excuse for ignoring your achievement."
c) "Is it too late for us to celebrate your accomplishment? I really want to make this up to you."
d) "I promise I'll notice and celebrate your accomplishments in the future. I've learned a hard lesson."
e) "I know I failed you before, but will you please forgive me again?"
f) …………………………………………………………………………………………..

14- Your spouse learned that he had previously been wrong about a significant point of conflict between the two of you.
a) "I am upset with myself over how I handled our disagreement. My behavior threatened our relationship and that scares me. I regret the way I acted."
b) "I admit that I was wrong. If I had only known then what I know now, I could have saved us a lot of heartache."
c) "What can I do to mend our relationship? I feel like I need to do or say something to restore your respect for me."
d) "If we disagree over an issue in the future, I plan on gathering all the facts before I make any judgments. That may save us from unnecessary arguing."
e) "I apologize. Will you please forgive me?"
f) ……………………………………………………………………………………………

15- Despite his/her promise to keep your secret, your spouse broke your trust in him/her by telling others.
a) "If only I had thought about how much damage I was doing by telling your secret. I feel so bad for not having taken my promise more seriously."
b) "I told you I would keep your secret, and I broke my promise and damaged your trust in me. I made a terrible mistake."
c) "Help me know what I should do to restore your trust in me."
d) "It may take you some time to rebuild your trust in me, but I'll be working hard from now on to prove that I am trustworthy."
e) "You don't have to answer immediately, but will you consider forgiving me for making this mistake?"
f) ……………………………………………………………………………………………

What are the other possible kinds of offences for which you usually apologize and how do you express your apology?