

# **Comparison of Preferred Apology Strategies Across Pakistani and American Discourse**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study presents an intercultural analysis of the speech act of apology in media discourse taken from the Pakistani and American cultures. Speech acts are what the writer or speaker does with words while uttering them with a specialized intention. Words hold a universal status in communication, yet they can manifest differently in different cultures and languages. This poses a great challenge for communication cross-culturally as it is indicative of a broader socio-cultural difference that underlies language in use, thus giving rise to inter-cultural misunderstandings. All speech acts need to be understood in a cultural setting in which the users utter and interpret them. Apologies are a frequently used form of speech acts that are part of the politeness strategy and serve to maintain polite rituals to acknowledge serious offences. This study uses Aijmer's framework and qualitatively analyses speech acts of apology taken from a Pakistani and an American sitcom namely, 'Mera Nam Hai Muhabbat' and 'Desperate Housewives', respectively. The use of explicit*

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*apologies dominates the American context whereas it follows a formulaic pattern from socially weak to stronger individual in the Pakistani context. Moreover, in the Pakistani context, speakers find it easier to borrow the explicit direct form from the English language that minimizes cost during the process rather than using the native words.*

### **Introduction**

Speech acts are said to be universal as they are common to all languages, but in most cases they manifest differently as they are defined and interpreted differently across cultures. Thus, they are bound to cultures in which they provide meanings according to the context. Therefore, in order to remove intercultural barriers in communicative practices some knowledge about other cultures and pragmatic differences need to be known.

Speech acts are acts that we perform during verbal interaction keeping in mind certain linguistic rules. The role of spoken discourse is to allow the intentions of the speaker be interpreted by the listener. Success is achieved, according to Searle<sup>1</sup> only when this intention is recognized by the listener. Thus, the intended meaning needs to be conveyed for a communicative event to be accomplished.

This study analyses the speech act of apologising from both Pakistani and American sitcoms and compares them to help determine how the choices of apologies in both sets of data showing cultural preferences. This study is unique in the sense that it is for the first time that the pattern of apologies as speech acts are not only studied in the Pakistani context, but also provides a comparison of data of apologies taken from Pakistani and American contexts to provide socio-cultural differences in preferred choices by participants

This paper analyses and compares the speech act of apologising drawn from two sitcoms. The aim of this paper is to determine how the choice of the preferred strategies for

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1 John Searle, *An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

apologizing in both sets of data is affected by cultural context. Also, it aims to find out what factors influence this choice along with the differences and similarities between them. Context, in pragmatics is a factor that has grave influence over the language used. And it is due to this difference in cultural context that the meaning making process is developed.

In order to analyse discourse, speech act theory is studied to gain insight into the way a speech act manifests. From the classification of speech acts into locutionary, illocutionary and precautionary forces, it is suggested that the illocutionary force of the utterance is what mainly underlies the structure of the sentence. Indirect speech acts are not considered as performatives and that the linguistic realization of an utterance alone cannot express the intention of the speaker. For this purpose, however, Mey<sup>2</sup> proposes that speech acts be studied along with contextual factors. This further provides the significance of viewing speech acts not in isolation, but comprehensively in order for them to make clear the intention of the speaker. Cultural settings in which an utterance is rooted, thus provide a better understanding of intentions as the social and cultural practices of people is what defines their actions that are then conveyed linguistically. Croft<sup>3</sup> asserts the importance of viewing the interaction of speaker and listener along with the performance of an utterance while analysing speech acts. This study not only investigates apology strategies, but also the social context in which the speech act of apology is being used, the cultural practices of the users, along with the contextual factors taken from the interaction of the addresser and addressee.

This paper analyses apologies used in the language of the two dramas selected. These two linguistic datasets are: one hour from an American sitcom 'Desperate Housewives' and the other comprising comparable data from 'Mera Naam hai Muhabbat' a Pakistani sitcom. Episodes from both sitcoms

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2 Jacob L. Mey, *Pragmatics. An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

3 Croft, W, *Speech Act Classification, Language Typology and Cognition* (London: Routledge, 1994).

were randomly recorded by the researcher from Youtube. The data from the Urdu & American sitcom was transcribed, but not translated and were used for qualitative data analysis. For Desperate Housewives the abbreviation DH is used, whereas, the Urdu sitcom Mera Naam hai Muhabbat, is referred to as MNM in the study.

### Literature Review

Apologies are not only speech acts, but also a part of politeness strategy through which rumples in interaction are smoothed. Politeness is an integral part of social interaction. The need to keep politeness into consideration allows the speaker to show respect for the face of the listener.<sup>4</sup>Yang et al.<sup>5</sup> assert the significance of politeness stating that “a concern with politeness in discourse is more than simply an additional veneer added to make one’s words ‘nicer’” but instead, is simply seen as a means through which the relationship between the interactants is established. Apology is a speech act used frequently serving to fulfil various purposes ranging from maintaining polite rituals to acknowledgment of serious offence. This, however, may vary in different societies. According to Brown and Levinson<sup>6</sup>, apologies are negative politeness strategies as they focus upon the need to develop ‘respect, difference and distance’. An apology has its own dynamics during interaction. It occurs with preconditions that include the acknowledgment of the apologisee that an offence has taken place for which he/she has to take responsibility which as a result requires to be recompensed verbally.<sup>7</sup>It is a speech act that aims to provide

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4 D. A. Morand & R. J. Ocker, "Politeness Theory and Computer-Mediated Communication: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Analyzing Relational Messages," *Proceedings of the 36th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2003* (HICSS-36).

5 M. Yang, Y. Chen, M. Kim, et al., "Facilitating or Limiting? The Role of Politeness in How Students Participate in an Online Classroom Discussion," *Yearbook of the National Reading Conference* 55 (2006).

6 P. Brown, S. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universal in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987).

7 E. Goffman, *Relations in Public* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

support to a listener who has suffered a communicative violation.<sup>8</sup> However, for an apology to be effective it needs to be based upon honest emotions and regret felt by the apologiser. Takaku *et al.* believe that an apology should have the three R's: regret, responsibility, and remedy as its essential ingredients without which the apology would fail to achieve the desired effect.<sup>9</sup>

Holmes<sup>10</sup> asserts that an apology must have three given conditions: first, an act has occurred; second, A believes that the act has offended B; thirdly, A takes responsibility for the act. Thus, in this manner it addresses the hearer's face in order to provide a remedy for an offence the speaker takes responsibility for. This is done so that relationships must be restored and that communication should remain smooth. Like any other speech act, apologies also occur across cultures. However, the way they are used may vary across cultures. Most studies pertaining to cross-cultural speech acts have been conducted within the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) project so that the results may be applied to communicative language teaching. This project compared requests and apologies across languages to provide differences between native and non-native speakers in the realization patterns of speech acts.<sup>11</sup> No significant difference was observed in the selection of strategy and revealed were "surprising similarities in IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device) and expression of responsibility

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8 E. Olshtain and A. Cohen, "Speech Act Behaviour Across Languages," In *Transfer in Language Production* eds., H. Dechert and R. Manfred (Norwood: NJ, 1989) 53-67.

9 S. Takaku *et al.*, "A Cross Cultural Exam of the Effects of Apology and Perspective Taking on Forgiveness," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* (2001).

10 J. Holmes, "Apologies in New Zealand English," *Language in Society* 19, no. 2 (1990): 161.

11 Shoshana Blum-Kulka and Elie Olshtain, "Requests and Apologies: A Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP)," *Applied Linguistics* 5, no. 3 (1984): 196-213.

preferences".<sup>12</sup> Apart from this project, many other such studies have been carried out that compare apology as a speech act in languages across the globe. For instance, according to a study between Turkish speakers and native English speakers, eight different situations were given to participants for apologising in which similarities and differences were noted in terms of frequency and preferred choices. The Turkish speakers apologised more frequently using IFID plus Repair while the English speakers only largely relied upon IFID's.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, Olshtain<sup>14</sup> compares apologies in four different languages and locates commonality in their usage across different situations. Lipson<sup>15</sup> compares apology strategies used in American English and Italian discourses using Owen's framework for analysis of remedial strategies<sup>16</sup> along with Olshtain and Cohen's semantic formulas.<sup>17</sup> An American television sitcom was selected and rewritten in Italian by students after which comparison was drawn between the two. Similarities and differences were found in the data. In the American context, effects of offenses were minimized by use of jokes and laughter, whereas requests for forgiveness were predominant in the Italian culture during the contrast. A greater degree of reprimand would be required in Italian contexts considering the severity of the offence.

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- 12 E. Olshtain, "Apologies Across Languages," In *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics, Requests and Apologies* ed., Blum-Kulka, J. House & G. Kasper (New Jersey: Albex Publishing Corporation, 1989), 171.
  - 13 Soudabeh Tabatabaei et. al., "A Comparative Analysis of Apology Strategy between Turkish EFL Learners and Native Speakers of English," *Applied Linguistics Research Journal* 2, no. 3 (2018): 48–57.
  - 14 Tabatabaei et. al., "A Comparative Analysis of Apology Strategy between Turkish EFL Learners and Native Speakers of English,".
  - 15 M. Lipson, "Apologizing in Italian and English," *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 32, no. 1 (1994): 19-39.
  - 16 M. Owen, *Apologies and Remedial Interchanges. A Study of Language Use in Social Interaction* (Berlin: Mouton, 1983).
  - 17 A. D. Cohen & E. Olshtain, "Developing a Measure of Socio-cultural Competence: The Case of Apology," *Language Learning* 31 (1981): 113-134.

Márquez,<sup>18</sup> while contrasting British and Uruguayan contexts finds out similarities and differences in the realization patterns of apologies, thus confirming what Blum-Kulka *et al.*<sup>19</sup> had claimed that some apology strategies of expressing responsibility have become a part of the routine and are used as such in many languages and culture. However, there are also a number of those that are used according to situational needs. Meier<sup>20</sup> analyses the findings of studies to understand the apology behaviour in English language for which she compared conclusions drawn in such studies instead of strategies. She compared distribution strategies, degree of mitigation, effect of severity of offence, effect of gender, and effect of interlocutor relationship. According to her study, the difference in the given factor depended on variables such as taxonomy of strategies, respondents and the method of data collection. It has been recognized that significance of language and culture in the use of apology and has emphasized the importance of taking into account values and beliefs as they provide perception of linguistic appropriateness.<sup>21</sup>

Apologies may manifest in different forms ranging from direct to indirect depending upon the culture in which it is used or the situation in which it occurs. According to Lakoff,<sup>22</sup> apologies manifest in many forms ranging from canonically explicit to ambiguously indirect. They have been classified differently by different theorists.

Cultural differences hugely influence apologies and must not only be studied but to be included in the taxonomy of the

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18 R. Márquez, *Linguistic Politeness in Britain and Uruguay* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000).

19 Blum-Kulka and Elite Olshtain, "Requests and Apologies,".

20 A. J. Meier, "Apologies: What Do We Know?" *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* (1998): 215-231.

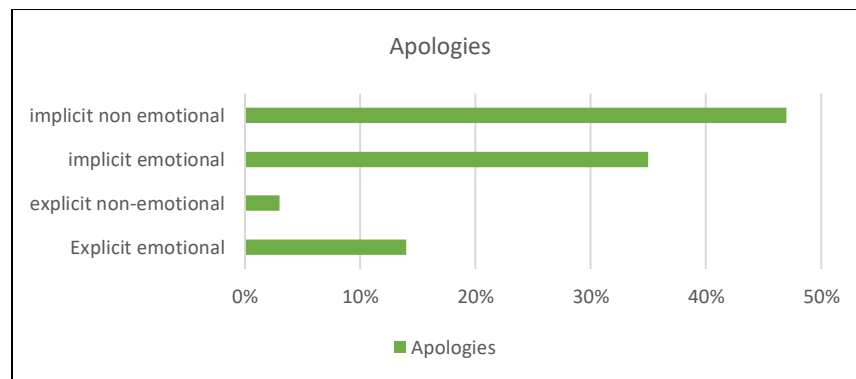
21 Meier, "Apologies: What Do We Know?".

22 R. Lakoff, "Nine Ways of Looking at Apologies: The Necessity for Interdisciplinary Theory and Method in Discourse Analysis," In *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* ed., Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heide E. Hamilton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

speech act of apologies. This may give rise to categories that may be surprising yet interesting. A research conducted on Japanese and American English speakers gave forth a set of 12 modes of apologising that have not been included in any other taxonomy. These include: “not saying or doing anything,” “explaining the situation,” “apologising ambiguously,” “apologising nonverbally,” “casually saying ‘sorry’,” “acting helpless,” “saying directly ‘I am very sorry’,” “writing a letter,” “apologising several times in several ways,” “offering to do something for the other person,” “leaving or resigning,” “committing suicide.”<sup>23</sup>

### Analysis and Discussion

For the analysis of data in this study, the apology strategies of Aijmer<sup>24</sup> are used as a framework comprising a total of thirteen apology strategies based on personal preferences. He sub-classifies these into explicit, implicit, emotional and non-emotional. The classification framework used for analysing the apology strategies used in Pakistani and American context is given in the appendix. On the basis of implicit and explicit classification, figure 1 shows the percentage of apologies.



**Figure 1:** Percentage of implicit and explicit apologies.

23 D. C. Barnlund, & M. Yoshioka, "Apologies: Japanese and American Styles," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (1990): 193-206, <http://dx.doi.org>

24 K. Aijmer, *Conversational Routines in English* (London: Longman, 1996), 85.



### Explicit Emotional Apology

It can be seen from the Table 1, that from the explicit emotional category the expression of regret *I'm sorry* or *sorry* is the main strategy of apology used in Desperate Housewives to convey remedial apology. It is a culturally bound and speaker centric form of apology.

**Table 1: EXPLICIT EMOTIONAL APOLOGY DATA**

	MNM Data	DH Data
Explicitly apologising	Sorry wo mai batana hi bhool gai thi tumhai	
Expressing regret		Hey! I am sorry I'm late

A total of 13 percent of the apologies from DH shows that an explicit and emotional style of offering apology stands in stark contrast to the Urdu sitcom *Mera Naam hai Muhabbat*. In MNM, only one such instance of regret has been recorded so far. And in that one instance, an interesting thing is that the English word 'sorry' has been borrowed to convey regret. The Urdu lexicon 'ma'afi' is not utilized, thus, revealing a huge insight of the Pakistani culture where apologising is not considered a natural conversational strategy. During conversation, this type of apology is not favoured in the Pakistani context, and as a result, MNM is mirroring this general cultural preference.

This style of apologising is considered hearer-oriented as it puts the burden of forgiving on the recipient. However, it implies a high cost of face for those who utter it and resultantly a positive face of the hearer. It is usually used to restore or maintain relationships. Apologies present a complex social system for the purpose of maintaining relationships and establishing membership in a community. Tavuchis describes it as a social exchange, a means to restore social order without altering the offensive act, which means that there is no material exchange even though the situation changes and so does the relationship. Thus, they are crucial for the

maintenance of relationships.<sup>25</sup> For example, in the following phrase, the explicit and direct apology is backed by an explanation provided immediately by the speaker in order to improve her relationship. The speaker here is engaged in conversation with her friend and after being asked why some important information was not passed on, the speaker had to provide justification. Keeping in mind the Pakistani culture where people rely more upon emotions rather than logic, more need is felt to support a direct apology with evidence.

*Sorry wo mai batana hi bhool gai thi tumhai*  
(Sorry, actually I forgot to tell you)

In this strategy, the speaker does not necessarily convey the intention that the he/she feels responsible for any wrongdoing. So, in order to keep the blame from falling on the speaker, it is accompanied by other strategies. This can be seen in the Urdu data.

It is observed that 'sorry' is the most minimal apology that one can offer which is termed as a the "bare" format of apologising. It is distinguished from other more expanded formats which may include more than a single word such as 'I'm sorry' in the data taken from MNM. According to Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson<sup>26</sup> this format is employed in contexts of self-repair. In this case, a bare 'sorry' can open the repair space. However, it can also be used by another proper repair such as in the phrase "*wo mai batana hi bhool gai thi tumhai*" [Urdu: Actually I forgot to tell you].

### **Explicit Non-Emotional Apology**

The explicit non-emotional apology strategy is the one that is most infrequently employed in both the Urdu and American sitcoms at around 3 percent. Only one token of 'acknowledging a debt of apology' and 'demanding

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25 N. Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (CA: Stanford UP, 1991).

26 Emanuel A Schegloff, Gail Jefferson, Harvey Sacks, "The Preference for Self-Correction in the Organization of Repair in Conversation," *Language* (1977): 361-382.

forgiveness' can be found in the Urdu data while none from the American English data. However, just a single example of 'Explicitly requesting the hearer's forgiveness' is found in the data taken from DH.

**Table 2: EXPLICIT NON-EMOTIONAL APOLOGY DATA**

	MNM Data	DH Data
Offering one's apology		
Acknowledging a debt of apology		Honey can you take this in
Demanding forgiveness		Excuse me?
Explicitly requesting the hearer's forgiveness	Ab tau maaf kar do	

### Implicit Emotional Apology

For giving an explanation or account (Implicit emotional strategy), in the case of DH an explanation is needed to support the use of regret strategy, which is the preferred strategy as is constituted in about 11 percent of the accounts. Although the same percentage of instances can be found in the Urdu sitcom, they are used as the primary strategy of exhibiting regret instead of buttressing the actual utterances. Goffman<sup>27</sup> classify apology at one level, as a separate category within a broader framework of remedial work which can be performed through the three devices: accounts, requests and apologies. He asserts that an account is commonly used for providing excuses and explanation that attempts to shift responsibility to a third party. This is evident in the category of 'giving an explanation or account' provided in the Table 3.

The above examples taken from both MNM and DH provide an account and explanation that in some manner shift blame of the offence from the speaker and attributes it to other entities. In the first example taken from MNM the delay has been blamed upon the work that the addresser was involved in, whereas in the second example taken from DH,

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27 Goffman, *Relations in Public*.

responsibility for an offensive comment is not taken by the speaker through the phrase “I’m not being flip”. The speaker, according to Goffman<sup>28</sup>, uses this strategy for claiming ignorance to the offensive act.

**Table 3: IMPLICIT EMOTIONAL APOLOGY DATA**

	MNM Data	DH Data
Giving an explanation or account	Acha mujhay kaafi dair ho gai Wo wo bhai kaam tha mujhay Wo bhai mai	We didn't actually forget I'm not being flip - I'm just pointing out a reality
Expressing emotion	Oho jaanay kahaan rakh di mainay Han haan karamat bhai- mujhay yaad hai Haan ye tau hai Aisa na kar abhi yaar Wo main Nida... Oho mainay usay bataya hi nahi	Oh Rex you look so tired Oh Tom What what happened Oh Gabrielle... No not now Yeah! It's been a little rough!

*Wo wo bhai kaam tha mujhay*

(actually, actually brother (elder), I had some work to do)

I'm not being flip - I'm just pointing out a reality

The strategy for expressing emotions is almost equally employed in both the Urdu and American English data which is 6 percent and 7 percent respectively, thus revealing that spontaneous expressions of emotions is a shared strategy in both cultures. Apologies are in most cases motivated by emotions the transgressor feels in relation to the situation.<sup>29</sup>The offender's feeling towards the offended determines the effectiveness of the apology. It is through the emotions conveyed by the offender that important information concerning the state of the person displaying them is

28 Goffman, *Relations in Public*.

29 S. Hareli & Z. Eisikovits, "The Role of Communicating Social Emotions Accompanying Apologies in Forgiveness," *Motivation and Emotion* 30, no. 3 (2006): 189-197.

obtained.<sup>30</sup> The emotions that trigger an apology determines the outcome of an apology.

*Oho jaanay kahaan rakh di mainay*  
(Oho, I wonder where I put it)  
Oh Rex you look so tired

The both above examples display emotions by the offenders that according to Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton,<sup>31</sup> normally arise from considerations of the way one's actions hurt the other party and threatened their relationship. Moreover, personal implications of the offence also give rise to such emotions that is, how the world will perceive the offender. These feelings become the major factor behind an apology.<sup>32</sup> From the multiple social emotions that one feels after an offence, guilt and shame are the most common that trigger a remedial action.

### **Implicit Non-Emotional Apology**

In the American English data 10 percent of apologies comprise a self-reproach strategy that aims to boost the hearer's positive face, whereas, in the Urdu data (4%) it is much less in comparison (as shown in the Table 4), thus revealing the different needs across culture to boost the hearer's positive face.

According to a cross cultural study of preferred apology strategy conducted by Kondo & Taniguchi,<sup>33</sup> the self-denigrating strategy is seen as a negative one in Japanese culture as the respondents thought the "speaker is trying to appear cute." This negative reaction is due to the fact that the

30 B. Parkinson, A. H. Fischer & A. S. R. Manstead, *Emotions in Social Relations: Cultural, Group and Interpersonal Processes* (New York: Psychology Press, 2005).

31 R. F. Baumeister, A. M. Stillwell, & T. F. Heatherton, "Guilt: An Interpersonal Approach," *Psychological Bulletin* (1994): 243-247.

32 Michael E. McCullough, Everett L. Worthington, Jr. & Kenneth C. Rachal, "Interpersonal Forgiving in Close Relationships," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73, no. 2(1997): 321-336.

33 F. Kondo, & H. Taniguchi, A Comparative Study of Perceptions of Apology Strategies between Japanese and Americans," *Modern Sociology* (2007): 131-154.

offender is talking about himself rather than about the incident.

**Table 4: IMPLICIT NON-EMOTIONAL APOLOGY DATA**

	MNM Data	DH Data
Self-denigration or self-reproach	Kia bataon Razia tum tau jaanti hi ho Pata nahi mai nay kabhi nahi socha Wo mai kuch oor hi samjha tha Ab kia bataoon behen	Oh ok I just got angry I don't know I don't know how I'm going to I'm just so angry
Minimizing responsibility	Nahi nahi chupa nahi raha Bhai aap nay hi tau kahatha Mai nay aisa tau nahi bola Bas bhai aatay aatay dair ho gai	Yeah but I can't guarantee anything I just need a chill out for the next few days Ahh I don't know what to say I wouldn't have said anything Uh, I'd invite you both in, but I didn't have time last week
Acknowledging responsibility for the offending act	Mujhay tau pata hi nahi tha Laikin mera matlab ye hargiz nahi tha	I kicked my soccer ball into your backyard I saw you both flirting

Some American respondents also thought it “irrelevant” or that “it seeks for sympathy” whereas some thought that the offender is taking responsibility for his/her action by acknowledging a mistake. In the Pakistani context, the infrequent use of this strategy reveals that self-criticism is not favoured and from the data it is evident that the criticism is of a very mild variety and largely indirect. In some cases, apologising is seen as a humiliating act which reduces speaker’s symbolic power<sup>34</sup> Therefore, loss of social authority

34 R. B. Bilder, “The Role of Apology in International Law,” In *The Age of Apology: Facing up the Past* eds., Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Niklaus Steiner (Pennsylvania UP: Pennsylvania, 2007), 13-30.

coupled with self-denigration poses great threat in a culture like Pakistan.

In both the American English and Urdu data 8 percent of the instances of apologies show a similar trend in this direction. In comparison to other components of apology, caution is required to deal with the issue of responsibility for committing the act since there are many ways it may be done in. Kampf<sup>35</sup> asserts that there are five ways to lessen the responsibility of the transgressor even in the cases in which he includes an IFID in his utterance. They are:

1. Apologise to undermine the claim that he has offended someone;
2. Apologise for the outcome and not the act;
3. Apologise for style not for the essence;
4. Apologise for some component and not the entire act;
5. Apologise using means to downgrade his responsibility.

*Nahi nahi chupa nahi raha*  
(no no I'm not hiding it)  
*Mai nay aisa tau nahi bola*  
(I never said it was so)

In the examples above, the transgressor employs methods (1) and (3) for minimizing responsibility whereas the example below minimizes responsibility by blaming the offender instead.

*Bhai aap nay hi tau kaha tha*  
(Brother (elder) you were the one who said it)

The example given below from the data taken from DH, employs method (2) where an indirect apology for the outcome is being provided.

Yeah but I can't guarantee anything

The strategy of offering redress is only found in 4 percent of the MNM data. Normally it is used in the case of serious

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35 Zohar Kampf, "Public (non-) Apologies: The Discourse of Minimizing Responsibility," *Journal of Pragmatics* (2009): 2257-2270.

offences, but the fact is that the sitcoms selected do not employ very serious situations, and thus it can be said that they are relatively serious situations. According to Cohen and Olshtain,<sup>36</sup> this strategy involves a means of restoring damage made by the speaker. This restoration in most cases may be given in a literal sense or as a compensation to the victim when repair is impossible.

Similarly, only five instances are found of promising forbearance in MNM. These are serious and involve a high cost to the face for the apologiser, while it is not at all found in DH. In all situations, however, the offences are not serious, but they contribute towards a high cost of face for the apologiser.

### **Comparison of Apology Strategies Used in Pakistani and American Cultures**

Since there are multiple kinds of apologies and different situations warrant different responses, it is the degree of offence that determines the apology strategy. Moreover, the nature, severity, relation of interlocutors, familiarity of interlocutors and gender difference bear influence on the choice of apology.<sup>37</sup> It is observed in this study that different apology strategies are preferred in both sets of data.

### **Preferred Strategies**

In the American English data, expression of regret is the most favoured strategy from the explicit emotional category. This strategy used in the American context does not have the same value in the Urdu context. In the American context, the use of verbs that directly demand forgiveness are preferred whereas, the use of direct and explicit apology in the Urdu context is rare and taken as formal. Another strategy, namely, the acknowledgment of wrongdoing is used frequently in both

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36 Cohen & Olshtain, "Developing a Measure of Socio-cultural Competence," 113-134.

37 Bruce Fraser, "On Apologizing," In *Conversational Routine: Explorations in Standardised Communications Situations and Pre-Patterned Speech* ed., F. Coulmas (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 259-271.



contexts, but in the case of English it is used as a supplement while in the Urdu context as a direct form of apology, thus displaying a difference in manner of issuing regret. Use of supplements in apologies taken from DH emphasize sincerity of the speaker and the feeling of regret.

### **Cultural Preferences**

It has been observed, moreover, that both sets of data show emergence of important cultural differences which include the settings in which they are uttered, social distance of participants and the power relation between interlocutors including gender difference.

### **Setting of the Utterance of Apologies**

Setting of the utterance is important as it provides a physical context where an apology is issued. This context can bear influence on the choice of strategy made by the apologisee and thus ascertain the weight of it too. In the Urdu context most apologies take place in domestic domains while a very few take place in public. In the English data private apologies are the preferred apologies. This reveals that the concept of socializing is more enhanced in the Pakistani culture rather than the American. One reason behind this may be the difference in the setting and context of both the sitcoms. The Urdu sitcom revolves largely around private lives of people, where familiarity and closeness is found, it also contained some instances where the context was extended towards the external sphere, whereas in the American sitcom, entire episodes covered nothing but family and friends' affairs where everyone seemed to be acquainted with each other.

### **Social Distance of Interlocutors**

The three above mentioned factors influence the need of the speaker for restoring a relationship. In the Urdu data, there is a significant acknowledgment of the social distance of participants. The wider the distance the lesser the number of apologies made. The seriousness of offence too is largely related to this. In MNM, most apologies are issued in the domestic setting while a few in public sphere. In the

DH data, the private domain is the preferred sphere for the issuance of an apology. This reveals that the concept of socializing is more enhanced in the Pakistani culture rather than the American culture.

Apology is not only the use of a relevant verb, but also strategies that can help mend social relations which includes offering repair, minimizing the offence and in some cases minimizing responsibility as well. Leech<sup>38</sup> terms it as a convivial speech act that helps an individual to achieve a harmonious relationship. Apologies are powerful as they have the capability of decreasing blame attributed to the offender in case of an offence while increasing positive intentions for future of a relationship. According to research, an apology has the power to reduce chances of lawsuits.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Power Relations of Interlocutors**

In the context of power relationship, it is noted that most apologies are directed towards the elders and issued by the younger individuals or relatives such as younger siblings or children, while in the American context, the reverse trend is seen as most apologising is done by the elders in case of offensive behaviours.

#### **Gender Difference of Interlocutors**

It is noted that many variables impact apology strategies, these include social differences and social status. According to one study, Holmes<sup>40</sup> concludes that there are differences between apologies by both male and female. He asserts that females tend to Apologise more and same is the case with females in the Pakistani context. There is no instance of a male apologising to a female whereas most direct apologies by women are made to males. Further, it is

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38 Geoffrey Leech, *The Principle of Pragmatics* (New York. Longman, 1983), 142-145.

39 Jennifer K. Robbennolt, "Apologies and Settlement Levers," *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* (2006): 333.

40 Janet Holmes, *Women, Men and Politeness* (London: Longman, 1995), 254.

noted that these males are mostly brothers and husbands in MNM. In the American context however, many examples of males apologising to females are recorded.

### **Conclusion**

The study shows the difference in choice of apology strategies made by the characters from Urdu and English sitcoms representing Pakistani and American culture. The study is by no means conclusive as cultural practices and choices are complex phenomena and may show variation in different circumstances. However, the analysis of the sitcoms reveals difference in the preferred strategies of apologies adopted in the Pakistani and American context.

It is observed that the most favoured strategy in the American English data is expression of regret followed by giving explanation or an account and self-denigration or self-reproach strategy. The Urdu data, however, reveal that the most favoured is expressing emotion, followed by giving explanation or an account. This shows that providing explanation of accounts is preferred in both cultures whereas, Pakistanis being an emotional people use emotional appeal for the purpose of apologising and evoke sympathy in order to mend severed relations.

Social hierarchy also impacts apologies as is evident from the Pakistani sitcom that shows females apologise more and a majority of them are found apologising to males. Moreover, only younger individuals apologise to their elders and no token of an older individual is seen apologising to a younger. The American culture, however, is different in a manner that males are also found apologising to both younger individuals and even children.

It is concluded that intercultural communication is not only making choices in selection of a language to interact in but also the knowledge of how different languages work in on a socio-cultural level. This study is a window into the importance of providing insight into the cultural differences

between Urdu and English language in the American context in order to understand the differences in the way context influences linguistic choices pertaining to speech acts of apologising.