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**“Te quería comentar un problemilla...” The Speech
Act of Apologies in Peninsular Spanish: A pilot study.**

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[Hipertexto](#)

I. Introduction

The present paper aims to take a preliminary look at the speech act (SA) of apologies in Spain Spanish. More specifically, it examines the linguistic choices made by Spanish speakers in the oral performance of a role-play situation, apologizing to a friend/acquaintance for having broken his laptop. In doing this, this paper illustrates specific strategies and modifications realized in the data collected, aiming at describing the SA studied within the Spanish society and the cultural values that may be reflected in speakers' linguistic choices.

I will first analyze what this particular SA consists of, and then will define the theoretical framework on which the analysis will be based. After, I will examine the data in detail. From the analysis of the data collected for the present study, general conclusions will be drawn, which shall remain preliminary due to the nature of the study.

II. The speech act of apologizing

Speech Act theory, developed by Searle's following Austin's work, is based on the idea that language is a form of behavior, and it is governed by rules (1969:22). Linguistic communication is seen as conventionalized, its minimal unit being the *speech act*, i.e. “an utterance that serves a

function in communication” (University of Minnesota: Center for Advance Research on Language Acquisition’s website). The idea that language is behavior is the key to understand how language functions in a social context. As Trosborg (1987:147) notes, “appropriate social behavior patterns, as they are perceived in Western societies, are built on the norms which constitute polite behavior”. It is well known that what is considered as polite behavior varies among different socio-cultural groups. Therefore, those norms which constitute polite behavior will be different in different societies. However, in all social groups, an **apology** is called for when social norms have been violated, whether the offence is real or potential (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983:20).

A suitable definition of an apology for this study, dealing with *post-event* apologies, is: a “compensatory action for an offence committed by S [the speaker] which has affected H [the hearer]” (Márquez Reiter, 2000:44). Goffman (1971) views apologies as *remedial interchanges* (i.e. remedial work which aims at re-establishing social harmony after a real or virtual offence has been performed), and makes a distinction between (1) apologies which redress a virtual offence, often realized by an *apologetic formula* (e.g. “Excuse me”/“Disculpe”), and (2) those which redress real damage on the addressee, which apart from an apologetic formula might also require an offer of material compensation (e.g. “I’m sorry. I promise I’ll fix it”/“Lo siento, no te preocupes que yo te lo arreglo”/ etc.). It is this latter type, substantive apologies, which this study deals with. According to Goffman (1971), a full apology must contain the following: an expression of embarrassment and chagrin; clarification that one knows what conduct had been expected and sympathizes with the application of negative sanction; verbal reflection, repudiation, and disavowal of the wrong way of behaving along with vilification of the self that so behaved; espousal of the right way and an avowal henceforth to pursue that course; performance of penance and the volunteering of restitution.

While it is doubtful that this is the how apologies are performed in English, it is probably not the case for all apologies in Spanish, and certainly not for Cuban Spanish (Ruzickova, 1998: 126), or Peninsular Spanish (present paper) apologies. Whereas classical speech act theory classified apologies “according to felicity conditions for [their] most prototypical (or so it seemed) realizations” (Suszczyńska, 1999: 1053), more recent pragmatic research on apologies (Fraser, 1981; Cohen and Olshtain, 1983; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-kulka et al., 1989) has provided natural data, which has allowed to define apologies as cultural-sensitive ‘speech act set’ (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983) “of semantic formulae or strategies found to regularly co-occur in apologetic responses, being relevant for a felicitous performance of this speech act” (Suszczyńska, 1999: 1053).

All these things considered, the act of apologizing requires an action or an utterance that is intended to ‘set things right’ between the apologizer and the recipient of the apology. By apologizing, the person

who committed the offence lets the offended person know that s/he is sorry for what s/he has done (Edmonson & House, 1981:45).

Different pragmatic researchers have examined apologies in different languages according to different variables: politeness strategies employed (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1978; García, 1989; Ruzickova, 1998; Márquez Reiter, 2000), cultural values reflected in the apology realization (e.g. Cordella, 1990; Suszczyńska, 1999), gender (e.g. Cordella, 1990), factors affecting the choice/use of a particular strategy (e.g. Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Fraser, 1981; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983, etc.), strategies used by native and non-native speakers (García, 1989; Trosborg 1987), and others. In the present study, the focus of analysis will be the use of strategies for the SA of apologizing in Peninsular or Spanish Spanish.

III. Methodology and Data

The Peninsular Spanish (PS) data collected for this study consists of 4 open role-play situations, recorded and transcribed following the conventions of Gail Jefferson's (1986) notation system. Five Spanish native speakers, three male (M) and two female (F) aged 25-45, were given a role-play situation where one of the M informants acted as a constant (C), being the H receiving an apology from the other four people (apologizers). All informants received the following instructions:

INSTRUCCIONES:

A continuación, vas a leer una situación en la que participan dos personas. Tú vas a hacer el papel de uno de ellos y la otra persona va a hacer el papel del otro. Ambos participantes saben quiénes son y dónde están. La interacción será grabada. Tienes que actuar con la mayor naturalidad posible e interactuar con la otra persona.

INSTRUCTIONS:

You will read a situation in which two people participate. You will play one of the roles and the other person will play the other. Both participants know who and where they are. The interaction will be recorded. You should act as naturally as possible and interact with the other person. (My translation)

Moreover, the constant person (receiving the apology: participant B) and the three apologizers (participant A) received the following corresponding situations, each of them just seeing their own situation:

ROLE-PLAY:

PARTICIPANTE A:

Tu compañero/a de clase (Participante B) te ha prestado su nuevo ordenador portátil para que hagas un trabajo. Mientras estabas utilizándolo, accidentalmente derramaste un café en el teclado, y ahora el ordenador no funciona. Te acercas a tu compañero/a y le hablas.

ROLE-PLAY:

PARTICIPANT A:

You borrowed your classmate's (Participant B) laptop to write a paper. While you were working on it, you accidentally spilled some coffee on the keyboard, and now the laptop doesn't work. You approach your classmate and talk to him/her. (My translation)

ROLE-PLAY:

PARTICIPANTE B (CONSTANTE):

Le has prestado tu ordenador portátil a tu compañero/a de clase (Participante A) para que hiciera un trabajo. Tu compañero/a se acerca a hablarte ahora. Respóndele.

ROLE-PLAY:

PARTICIPANT B (CONSTANT PERSON):

You lent your laptop to your classmate (Participant A) so s/he could write a paper. S/he approaches you now and talks to you. Respond to him/her. (My translation)

Role-plays were chosen for its potential to resemble real-life situations, and therefore the data obtained can be regarded as resembling real-life use. In addition, spoken role-plays were preferred over written to ensure participants did not know in advance what they were going to be asked to perform, thus not being able to plan their responses and producing more reliable data as well. Moreover, role-plays allow the researcher to focus on the language s/he is interested in examining and they are therefore time-saving in terms of collection. However, one of the limitations of this data collection method resides on its potential to force participants to follow a course of action they would not normally follow in real life (Placencia, 1994:68). Furthermore, as Márquez-Reiter (2000:77) notes, "it is difficult to tell how representative the interactions are of what the informants would say in 'spontaneous' unprovoked conversation".

Due to these limitations of the method, and additionally and more importantly the limited number of subjects, together with other issues to be discussed below within the data analysis, claims made here are provisional rather than final. The analysis undertaken here aims to be a first approach to help future more developed research.

IV. Theoretical framework

This paper will analyze Spanish apologies according to a categorization of strategies following¹ a model, built on Olshtain & Cohen (1983)² and on the coding manual from the Cross-Cultural Speech Act

1. Slight modifications have been made, considering the data obtained in the present study as well as other works on apologies (see studies on apologizing cited in this paper).

2. Who in turn build their categories on Fraser (1981).

Realization Project (cf. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). This classification of strategies is the following:

Strategies To Perform An Apology	
1.	IFID
a.	Expression of regret
b.	Offer of apology
c.	Request for forgiveness
2.	Acknowledgement of responsibility
a.	Explicit self-blame
b.	Lack of intent
c.	Justify hearer
d.	Expression of embarrassment
e.	Admission of facts
f.	Expression of self-deficiency
3.	Explanation or account
4.	Offer of Repair
5.	Promise of forbearance

Note that the abbreviation IFID stands for the explicit *illocutionary force indicating device*. This is a formulaic expression which has the function of signaling regret on S's part for the violation (that caused the apology), in order to conciliate H. In Spanish, examples of IFIDs are: "*lo siento*" "*perdón*", "*disculpe*", etc. The IFID and the other apology strategies are not exclusive. Thus, we can obtain an apology performed by one of the strategies, or a combination or sequence of them (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989: p.289).

In addition to the choice of strategies, the S can also modify these strategies using intensifiers and/or downgraders (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 21). The analysis of these features should be interesting in terms of politeness, since it would not play the same impact on the H to say "*Perdón*" than "*mira, de verdad que lo siento muchísimo*". For the present study, the analysis of these features will follow Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) categorization of intensifiers and downgraders, to which another category (*commitment upgrader*) has been added³. The categorization of upgraders/downgraders on the model followed in the present study is the following:

3. Following Trosborg's (1987) categorization of modality markers that upgrade the impact of an apology (built on House & Kasper, 1981, p.166-70).

1. Upgraders	2. Downgraders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensifiers (intensifying adverbials or suffixation) - Emotional expressions/exclamations - Expressions marked for register - Double intensifier or repetition of intensifying adverbial - Politeness marker (<i>Por favor</i>) - Concern for the hearer - Commitment upgrader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2a.Mitigating the offence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Politeness marker (<i>Por favor</i>) - Understater - Hedge - Subjectivizer - Downtoner - Cajoler - Appealer 2b.Distracting from the offence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Query precondition - Act innocently/pretend not to notice the offence - Future/task-oriented remark - Humor - Appeaser

Furthermore, the study will attempt to draw some preliminary conclusions in terms of politeness. There is little agreement among researchers about what exactly constitutes politeness (Fraser, 1990). The insights which this study will try to bring into the PS data will follow Wierzbicka's (1985) and Watts's (2003) perspectives of politeness. Both authors would coincide in that "politeness as a metapragmatic concept cannot be understood without first defining its different folk notions" (Suszczyńska, 1999, p. 1053). In other words, cultural aspects and values are closely tied to politeness.

V. Data analysis

A. Main strategies

The informants of this study used a variety of strategies. They utilized more than one strategy during the complete act of the apology, repeating some of the strategies several times. No apology was formulated by the use of just one strategy. The following will look at the strategies used on the data obtained.

1. IFID

The explicit *illocutionary force indicating device* appeared in the majority of the role-plays, in different realizations. However, it did not occur in one of the role-plays, where the apologizer chose other strategies to perform his apology without making use of the IFID. The IFID realizes directly by the use of a verb indicating apology (*disculpar, sentir, perdonar*, etc.). This main strategy can be realized through several sub-formulas in Spanish. What follows is a more detailed analysis of the realizations occurring in the

data collected for this study, where these different sub-strategies are illustrated.

a. Expression of regret. In the data, the only occurring formula that belongs to this sub-category was “*lo siento*”.

F2: y:: nada ya cuando esté todo: correcto:: te lo devuelvo, de verdad
lo siento? de verdad? muchísimo?

b. Request for forgiveness. This sub-strategy appeared in more than one realization possibilities. An instance follows.

M2: *perdóname*, yo:: intentaré arreglarlo lo más pronto posible

2. Acknowledgement of responsibility

When the apologizer takes on responsibility, s/he tries to placate the H for the offence which created the need to apologize (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989: p.291). On acknowledging responsibility, the apologizer can do so with varying degrees of self-blame (Trosborg 1987:150), and recognize his/her responsibility through a number of sub-strategies. This main strategy was repeatedly used in all role-plays.

a. Explicit self-blame. The apologizer explicitly acknowledges that s/he has been at fault. This sub-strategy did not occur on my data. However, an example would be: “*Es culpa mía*”.

b. Lack of intent. The S explicitly states that he or she had not intended to hurt the H through his or her offence. The apologizer “explicitly expresses that the offence was non-intentional and in so doing mitigates the offence” (Márquez-Reiter, 2000, p.154).

F2: ... pero es que *fue sin querer*, es que le di con la mano...

c. Justify hearer. The apologizer communicates to the H that s/he fully understands the latter’s reactions to the offence inflicted upon him/her. This sub-strategy appeared in two of the role-plays, although it was realized implicitly. The apologizer repeated the offended person exclamation, re-affirming his reaction and justifying it.

M2: ... con la mala suerte de que haciendo el trabajo he derramao sin querer un poco de café - en el portátil y se ha parao

C: y se ha pa↑rao!

M2: y se ha parao

d. Expression of embarrassment. In the data obtained, embarrassment was not expressed linguistically, but rather by prosodic features such as intonation, wining tone and laughter (the latter being a type of laughter showing embarrassment and discomfort). In the following example, the apologizer is acknowledging responsibility by expressing self-deficiency,

and its strategy is interrupted in the middle by a laughter showing embarrassment.

M2: no, ya lo sé, ya sé que no debería ((laughter)) no, no debería

e. Admission of facts. The S openly accepts his/her involvement in the offensive act. This strategy should not be confused with explanation or account, as when the explanation of the facts appears on the first person, it is an acknowledgment of responsibility (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989: p.293).

M2: con la mala suerte de que haciendo el trabajo *he derramao* sin querer *un poco de café - en el portátil*

f. Expression of self-deficiency. The apologizer expresses (awareness of) his/her own deficiency, that has caused the offence.

C: hombre, tío! pero joder, a quién se le ocurre ponerse a tomar café con el portátil al lao

M2: [no, ya lo sé, ya sé que no debería ((laughter)) no, no debería

C: [claro?]

3. Explanation or account

An apologizer may mitigate his/her guilt “by giving an explanation or account of the situation” (Trosborg, 1987, p.151). This strategy was used by all informants on the data of the present study.

C: =pero, pero bueno, pero, dónde lo llevaste?

F2: a ningún lao, *a mi casa, es que °siempre tomo café cuando trabajo°*

4. Offer of Repair

The apologizer may offer to ‘repair’ the damage which has resulted from his/her infraction. Repair may be offered in its literal sense or as an offer to compensate for the harm, the latter being relevant in situations in which actual repair is not possible or not wanted (Trosborg, 1987, p.152). This strategy appears several times in each role-play, probably due to the role-play situation itself, where the offence is set as one considered serious on the socio-cultural group being studied.

F1: pero carlos pero no me seas - si yo te lo voy a llevar a arreglar carlos de verdad - ya he hablao con mi ↑padre y ma dicho que me paga el a↓rreglo=

C: =ya! pero es un tras↑torno, (ahora) a ver date cuenta ahora qué hago yo? sin el ordenador?=
=

5. Promise of forbearance

The S’s sense of guilt may lead him/her to feel the need to promise that the act will never occur again. In the data for the present study, this

promise appeared once, and to some extent implicitly. However, it can be identified as such when examining the context of the whole interaction with the constant person (C). When the recipient of the apology tells the apologizer that next time he will think whether or not lending the apologizer the laptop, the apologizer makes a sarcastic comment in which the sarcasm is directed to himself, and by doing that he is implying that he will not do it (what caused the offence of spilling coffee on the laptop: drinking coffee next to the laptop) again.

M2: a ver si para la semana que viene, pa dentro de tres o cuatro días te digo dónde lo llevo y ya:::

C: vale, vale-eso sí, ya me pensaré la próxima vez si te lo voy a dejar o no ((laughter))

M2:

ya, ya me pensaré si tomar café yo, no? ((laughter))

[
sí,

The following table presents a quantitative view of the number of strategies used by male and female apologizers:

Table#1. Apology strategies used by males (M) and females (F).

	M	F	Total	% of the Total # of strategies
IFID	3	4	7	15.2%
RESPONSIBILITY	10	6	16	34.8%
Explicit self-blame	0	0	0	0%
Lack of intent	2	2	4	8.8%
Justify H	2	0	2	4.3%
Embarrassment	1	1	2	4.3%
Admission of facts	4	3	7	15.2%
Self-deficiency	1	0	1	2.2%
EXPLANATION	2	6	8	17.4%
OFFER REPAIR	8	6	14	30.4%
FORBEARANCE	1	0	1	2.2%
Total # of strategies	24	22	46	100%

B. Upgraders and downgraders

The apologizers used a variety of upgraders and downgraders in several of their strategies. In sum, upgraders intensify the impact of apology and downgraders play down the impact of the offence. Thus, not only IFIDs were intensified, but also for instance *offers of repair* were upgraded by commitment upgraders, and so on. For space constraints, only a general view at the use of upgraders and downgraders will be presented in the present paper.

1. Upgraders

By using upgraders, the S intensifies the impact of the apology on the H. The following is an analysis of the different types of upgraders that occurred in the data collected for this study.

a. Intensifiers (intensifying adverbials or suffixes). The apologizer may intensify his/her apology by means of an adverbial or suffixation.

F2: de verdad lo ↓siento? de verdad? *muchísimo*? pero es que fue sin querer, es que le di con la mano no me di cuenta y=

b. Emotional expressions/exclamations. This type of expressions can accompany the apology to upgrade its impact.

F1: carlos, que no que es la primera vez, eh que ve↓rás - estaba en la ↑cama? y me llevé un ca↑fé? y mientras estaba ahí, con el café, la cama, >no se qué,< paf! se me ca↓yó carlos *por dios por dios* perdóna↑me carlos!=

c. Double intensifier or repetition of intensifying adverbial. Repetition of the intensifier can occur to upgrade its impact even more.

F2: de verdad lo ↓siento? de verdad?

d. Commitment upgrader. The apologizer may use different sentence modifiers expressing a special commitment towards the proposition. This can be done in a number of ways in Spanish, and appeared through several different realizations in the data. For instance, the use of the subject pronoun, which is most times redundant in Spanish, was realized when offering repair in a number of cases, the apologizer showing his/her commitment towards the strategy being used.

M2: pero: a::m, yo-no-no-no te preocupes que yo te-te-lo arreglo te lo preparo

2. Downgraders

2a. Mitigating the offence

a. Understater. In Spanish, the apologizer can use phrases or suffixation to underrepresent the state of affairs denoted in the proposition. This downgrader was highly used to mitigate the offence in the data.

M2: te quería comentar una ↓cosa, un problemilla que:: me ha sur↓gido, te acuerdas que me dejaste hace unos días el portá::til=

b. Hedge. The apologizer may wish to avoid a precise propositional specification in order to avoid the potential provocation of such precision.

M1: y en ↑fin ↓sem - se me cayó el café en el te↑cla:do? luego es (que)
no sé qué hice por ahí=

c. Downtoner. Sentential or propositional modifiers may be used by the S in order to modulate the impact the offence may have on the H.

F1: *solamente* es un par de ↑días!=

d. Cajoler. Some conventionalized speech items of little semantic value are commonly interspersed to increase, establish or restore harmony between the interlocutors, which may be endangered through the apology.

F2: ya, pero, pero mira es *que* lo que pasa-o sea ahora no fun↓ciona pero-pero he pensado que lo puedo llevar a arreglar y::: *nada* ya cuando esté todo: correcto:: te lo devuelvo, de verdad lo ↓siento? de verdad? muchísimo? pero es *que* fue sin querer, es *que* le di con la mano no me di cuenta y=

e. Appealer. The apologizer may wish to appeal to the H's benevolent understanding. "Appealers function to elicit a H signal, occur in a syntactically final position, and may signal turn-availability. Tags are common realization" (Bulm-Kulka et al., 1989, p.285).

F1: =pero carlos no te enfades, *no?*

2b. Distracting from the offence

a. Future/task-oriented remark. The S may try to make light of his/her offence by diverting the H's attention from the past (the offence) to the future (what needs to be done).

M2: y::: *habrá que mirar - tengo que mirar ↑precios y tengo que mirar además porque es una comp-es una:: qué marca era? era:: toshiba?*

C: mackintosh!

b. Humor. The apologizer may use humor as a strategy to pacify the H.

C: mackintosh!

M2: o: mackintosh!

[[

C: mackintosh, mackintosh

M2: *es de las complicadas, no? ((laughter))=*

C: =de los caros! ((laughter))

[]

M2: *vaya! de los caros, joder ((laughter)) pue::s ((laughter))*

Table 2 shows the quantification of the use of upgraders and downgraders by M and F apologizers.

Table#2. Upgraders and downgraders used by males (M) and females (F).

	M	F	Total
Upgraders (100%)	8 (38.1%)	13 (61.9%)	21
Downgraders (100%)	21 (48.8%)	22 (51.2%)	43

VI. Discussion of results

In order to appropriately discuss the result we first need to take into account what factors influence the S's decision to choose an apology strategy over another. As Olshtain & Cohen (1983) describe, these factors can be *social*: social distance (i.e. familiarity), social power (i.e. relative status), gender and age of participants. Moreover, there are *contextual* factors also involved: "situational features such as the severity of the offence and the obligation of the S to apologize" (Márquez-Reiter, 2000: 54). Both types of factor are culture-specific, i.e. their influence in different cultures or societies will follow different patterns.

My data of PS fall within a very specific context, where the offence is determined by the researcher (in order to set a violation that culturally, within the socio-cultural group under examination, is considered to require a substantial apology). In addition, the social distance is also set approximately at the middle of Wolfson's et al. (1989) *social distance (SD) continuum*: both informants are classmates, i.e. friends or acquaintances, thus neither real intimates nor strangers. Being the offence and the SD determined by the role-play, the subjects do not have totally open choice of apology strategies, due to their inherent cultural system. Moreover, the relative power (P) between the interlocutors is a variable also set within the role-play situation determined by the researcher. The roles taken by the informants are in a situation of -P, where none of them has a superior P than the other, and they are therefore in a horizontal situation. In addition, the recipient of the apology is always a male. Apologies directed to a female may had offered different data.

1. Use of strategies

Given these clarifications, the examination of the PS on this study tells that there is a definite preference for the strategy of *acknowledgement of responsibility* among Spanish friends/acquaintances in general. As Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) remark, "when a speaker chooses to use an IFID in order to realize the speech act of apology, he or she implicitly takes on responsibility for the violation, especially in the speaker's perspective is

expressed, e.g. "I'm sorry" or "I apologize" or "Forgive me". However, in sincere apologies speakers often add an explicit expression of responsibility..." (p.168). This finding seems to bear some similarity with Olshtain's (1989) results for Hebrew and Canadian French. Her findings according to the actual choice of strategies in each language confirmed that the preferred strategy for two out of the three languages under study was the *acknowledgement of responsibility*.

After *taking on responsibility*, the apologizers on my PS data showed preference for the *offer of repair*, such strategy appearing in all role-plays several times. The high incidence of these two strategies could reside in the situational parameters of the role-play itself (i.e. the severity of the offence) that made the use of the strategies appropriate (for the socio-cultural group being studied). In contrast with the above mentioned coincidence with Olshtain's (1989) results, *offer of repair* did not emerge with such a high incidence on her results. The two strategies preferred on her findings were *taking on responsibility* and the IFID, whereas the two preferred strategies in my PS data were *taking on responsibility* and *offer of repair*. Yet again, contextual factors on this study's role-play situation might have been the cause for such results. In the Spanish society, an apology for such severe offence seems to be considered to need an offer for repair, even offered more than once and intensified during the speech event of apologizing.

This findings discussed above also appear to contrast with Cordella's (1990) findings for Chilean Spanish. This is probably related to the social and contextual factors involved in her role-plays. Whereas Cordella's role-play situations represented a context with +P and +SD (boss-employee), and the offence was of a different severity (missing a meeting), this study's data refers to a -SD -P +severity of the offence.

After these two strategies discussed, *explanation or account* followed in preference, before the IFID (*promise of forbearance* being the last one, with a low degree of incidence). Once more, we can easily attribute this preference for strategies to both the social and contextual factors involved, and their influence within the Spanish society. The low frequency of occurrence of *promise of forbearance* could be explained in relevance terms, i.e. it is probable that the realization such strategy may be perceived as relevant when the offence is for instance 'being late to a meeting', which is likely or at least possible to happen again some time. However, when the offence is breaking a classmate's laptop, such promise of non-recurrence would be very likely to be perceived as not appropriate within the socio-cultural group studied, and even irrelevant and therefore containing no apologizing value, because it is expected that such severe offence never happens and even more, it never happens more than once.

On the other hand, such a low incidence of the IFID may reflect the perception of highly formulaic formulas within this socio-cultural group. Although it seems that such an important offence as breaking a

classmate's laptop is worthy of several repetitions and expansions of accounts, explanations, offers of repair, etc., there seems to be no need within the Spanish culture for such repetition of the explicit IFID. Sincerity seems to be of greater importance than the expression of highly conventionalized formulas such as explicit IFIDs. It comes into sight that highly conventionalized formulas are perceived as somewhat insincere within the Spanish society. Therefore, in a situation where the SD is not so large, as in this study's role-play situation, other strategies are preferred. This finding seems to coincide with Trosborg's (1987) results for Danish and English. Her low number of direct apologies (IFIDs) was explained by the severity of the offence. She suggested that her data showed that "beyond a certain degree of severity, a routinized formula used on its own is not an adequate [apology] ... Other strategies are needed, such as explanations and offers of repair" (p.164).

In addition, not all possibilities among the IFID sub-strategies were realized in my data. The sub-strategy *offer of apology* did not occur. The non occurrence of some strategies on the data does not imply that those strategies would not occur on natural discourse on the Spanish society, but rather the limited number of informants may have caused possible or common realizations not to be shown on the recordings. An example of this sub-strategy would be: "*Me disculpo por causarte este destrozo...*" / "*mis disculpas por haberlo roto...*" / etc.

These preferences discussed above, however, are a matter of cultural values and perceptions, and therefore the present study just applies within the society being studied. As Márquez-Reiter (2000:57) notes, people tend to use apologies "as tools for judging societies as more or less 'polite' than others". This is an issue that can often lead to *pragmatic failure*, i.e. misinterpretations, among members of different societies/cultures.

Furthermore, the discussion of gender and its effect on the use of strategies may not be of high relevance in the present study due to the small number of informants. Although males actually seemed to be using a slightly larger number of strategies, the difference does not seem to be significant. A data set consisting of a larger number of subjects would be needed to support any findings in terms of male/female differences, before claiming any conclusions regarding cultural patterns within this SA in Spain.

3. Use of upgraders/downgraders

Both upgraders and downgraders were highly used by all participants, as seen on the data analysis. Downgraders were used to play down the impact of the offence with a similar degree of incidence by both male and female apologizers. However, an interesting difference between M/F was found on the use of upgraders. Although both gender groups used these, the majority of upgraders were used by female apologizers. There seems to be a higher occurrence of intensification of the apology among females

than among males within this socio-cultural group. Nevertheless, once again the small number of informants should be considered. Therefore, this finding should be supported with further research consisting of a larger number of informants.

VII. Preliminary Conclusions

From this preliminary look at Spanish apologies, a definite conclusion might be drawn. The complex use of strategies, upgraders and downgraders on the data illustrates the complexity of this SA within the speech community being studied. Furthermore, there seems to be no fixed structured sketch for apologies in Peninsular Spanish. This finding seems to coincide with Ruzickova's results of Cuban apologies. Therefore, the before mentioned Goffman's sketch of what a full apology must contain does not apply to Spanish society.

The use of several strategies on all role-plays seems to lead us to the conclusion that Wolfson's hypothesis about various SAs seems to be applicable to PS apologies. This hypothesis deals with the *SD continuum* and states that communicative interchanges between speakers who are strangers are brief, and so they are between real intimates. However, friends and other acquaintances (i.e. interlocutors standing in the middle of the *SD continuum*) are most likely to get involved in long negotiations with multiple repetitions, extensive elaborations, and a wide variety of semantic formulas (Wolfson et al., 1989:185).

In politeness terms, the high occurrence of some strategies (*acknowledgement of responsibility, offer of repair and explanation/account*) before the IFID could be explained within Watt's (2003) politeness theory, if we look at cultural perceptions of the violation's seriousness. In this sense, we could interpret that within the Spanish society, sticking to the norms of *politic behavior* would be of greater importance than the explicit expression of *politeness*. Watts sees politic behavior as socioculturally determined behavior aimed at establishing/maintaining personal relationships between the individuals of a social group in equilibrium. Politeness within this theory would constitute a subset of politic behavior, which is explicitly marked and conventionalized. Consequently, a greater value would be given to follow politic behavior over the marked conventionalized expression of politeness within the Spanish society. In fact, the expression of conventionalized formulas would be some times or in determined situations considered not appropriate, as for instance repeating the IFID excessively in an apology instead of using the other indirect strategies illustrated.

All things considered, these results generally support Wierzbicka's claim that SAs and other verbal behavior cannot be truly understood without reference to cultural values and attitudes. She argues that linguistic differences are due to "aspects of culture much deeper than mere norms of politeness" (1985, p.145), and are related to cultural values

(e.g. spontaneity, intimacy, affection, distance, anti-dogmatism, etc.). This assertion would generally share Watts's perspective to politeness.

VIII. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

As mentioned before, all conclusions drawn here are preliminary and need to be supported by further research. In addition to a larger number of subjects, different variables, both *social* (different SD and relative status of participants, recipients of the apology with different ages and gender) and *contextual* (different types of offences, etc.), are needed to be included in further studies in order to reach final conclusions regarding the realization of the SA of apology in the Spanish society. An additional limitation of the present study deals with the method, as real naturalistic spontaneous data would be more reliable. Besides, and very importantly, the variety of Spanish here considered has been named *peninsular*, in an attempt to describe common features occurring on the realization of the SA of apologizing in the Spanish society. However, it is very important to note there is no such variety on the Spanish language, but rather there are many different varieties of Spanish within Spain. Furthermore, as pragmatics is not only about language but rather about culture and socio-cultural groups, it also needs to be observed that the Spanish society entails several diverse cultures with different values and linguistic patterns, which will therefore show different pragmatic norms/rules.

Further research on Pragmatics is still needed in order to (1) achieve a better understanding of cultures and avoid stereotypes, and (2) raise awareness of foreign language learners about the cultural differences that can lead to misunderstandings with speakers of another or the same language.

All things considered, the present study aims at offering a further contribution to the development of pragmatic research in the Spanish language, as well as emphasizing the importance of pragmatic studies on cultural understanding, as well as second language acquisition.



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