

The Effect of the Length of L2 Education and L2 Exposure on Apologies Produced by Saudi Females

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of the length of language education and Language exposure on English apologies as produced by female Saudi learners. Second language research studies stress that learning a second language from a younger age often results in a higher level of language proficiency. Nevertheless, factors such as language exposure outside of the classroom setting can have a significant effect on the learners' fluency and competence. This paper investigates the relationship between these two concepts, focusing on the speech act of apology. The current study will attempt to answer the following research question: In terms of L2 apologies, which factor seems to help the learners achieve better and more accurate results: longer periods of formal EFL classroom education or longer periods of EFL exposure outside of the classroom? In this research, forty-eight Saudi female participants responded to an online questionnaire which was the main data collection method in this study, along with interviews. The respondents were divided into four groups: group one was introduced to English at age three; group two learned English at age six; group three learned English at age twelve, and group four started learning English at the university level. It seems fitting to suggest that the respective four groups systematically represent the following linguistic proficiency levels (advanced, upper-intermediate, lower-intermediate, and beginner). The results concluded that there was a positive correlation between the years of language education and the application of apologies, in that the earlier a participant started learning English as a second language, the more appropriate her apologies were linguistically and pragmatically. However, a few exceptional cases were found where group one used apologies at the beginner level. Alternatively, group four displayed advanced competencies in employing apologies, despite their shorter years of formal English classroom education.

Keywords: Apology, Saudi females, second language education, second language exposure, speech acts

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Introduction

Most researchers use the terms learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and second language (L2) exposure interchangeably. Formal learning of EFL usually begins and stays in an EFL classroom at school or any other educational setting. Exposure to EFL, however, happens whenever there is contact with the targeted language in the outside world through the media, books, newspapers, T.V shows, magazines, radios, etc. Many studies have been made in this field, but nearly all of them have focused on students' knowledge of L2 gained inside schools and classroom settings, not through natural exposure to L2. Therefore, given the lack of studies made on the possible effects of L2 exposure, this paper aims to examine the effects of general L2 exposure vs. classroom language education by comparing different groups of students with different types and amounts of L2 competencies. The main difference between the groups is the age at which they formally began learning English. Through background questionnaires and post-survey interviews, learners provided further information about the time and extent to which they were exposed to EFL. According to their answers, levels of EFL exposure and EFL learning did not always coincide. For example, a learner who started learning English at school at the age of six did not have high exposure to English outside of the classroom. Alternatively, a learner who began learning English from the age of twelve previously had a large amount of L2 exposure through exhibiting a real passion for the target language, watching T.V. shows in English, reading books in English, and so on.

In any experimental research where different elements or groups are being evaluated, there must always be a controlling factor with which the groups are being compared. The reason apologies were chosen as the main variable in this study is because they, as other speech acts (Austin, 1962), are great indicators of how well learners can produce and/or understand the intended meaning being communicated in L2. Since Speech Act Theory has gained worldwide popularity after Searle (1969) devised a system of speech act categorisation, many linguists studied speech acts to better understand human communication. In the context of second language learning, it is often difficult for learners to produce speech acts using correct language (linguistic competence) and in an appropriate manner (pragmatic competence) in the language being learned. Therefore, analysis of speech acts collected from learners' data can provide substantial cues on the learners' linguistic and pragmatic abilities in communicating certain acts with native speakers.

Along with requests, apologies have been one of the most studied speech acts since the theory's birth. Ogiermann (2009) imputes the popularity of apologies in pragmatics research to their vital social function of restoring and maintaining harmony in societies. The choice of apologies in this paper primarily stems from apologies being an integral part of politeness in many speech communities. Moreover, failure in performing apologies according to correct social standards may lead to cross-cultural miscommunications with native speakers and an abrupt breach

of smooth social interaction between interlocutors. To this end, the current study will attempt to answer the following research question:

- In terms of L2 apologies, which factor seems to help the learners achieve better and more accurate results: longer periods of formal EFL classroom education or longer periods of EFL exposure outside of the classroom?

This paper will start with the literature review and methods sections, ending with presenting the data results and analysing them.

Literature Review

The CCSARP project inspired a global influx of research on speech acts, in particular requests and apologies. In the case of apology studies involving Arabic and Arab participants, investigations branched further into enquiries which primarily highlighted one or more of the following criteria:

- 1- Studying apologies in a single language/culture (monocultural): among these are Syrian Arabic by Hodeib (2019), Qassimi Arabic by Alrshoudi (2020), Saudi Arabic by Altayari (2017), Libyan Arabic by Elgadri (2020), Moroccan Arabic by Anssari Naim (2011), and Sudanese Arabic by Nureddeen (2007).
- 2- Comparing apologies from two or more languages (cross-cultural): American and Jordanian by (Bataineh and Bataineh, 2008), American and Egyptian by (Soliman, 2003), British and Saudi by Qari (2019), and Saudi and Australian by Al-Ali (2012)
- 3- Contrasting native English vs. non-native English speakers' apology responses (interlanguage): Americans vs. Iraqi EFL learners by Humeid (2013), Americans vs. Saudi EFL learners by Binasfour (2014), and Americans vs. Moroccan EFL learners by Ezzaoua (2020).
- 4- Comparing respondents' apologies in their first language (L1) and their second language (L2) usually to study the elements which are transferred from L1 to L2 (pragmatic transfer): (Ahmed, 2017; Alzumor, 2011; Ghawi, 1993; Rizk, 1997; Qari, 2017)
- 5- And eliciting differences in data by controlling social variables such as gender and power (Humeid, 2013; Alabadla and Ahmed, 2021; Alasqah, 2021; Al-Hudhaif, 2000; Alsallal and Ahmed, 2020; Alghamdi, 2013; Alhojailan, 2019; Goni, 2017; Harb, 2015).

In the following section, the findings of some of the studies mentioned above will be stated, as well as other studies which are closer to the research's line of investigation, exploring different angles and still filling an important gap in this particular field.

Humeid (2013) designed a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) questionnaire and distributed it to a group of Iraqi EFL learners and American English native speakers. The results indicated that the native speakers employed a longer and wider variety of apology linguistic realisations

(including colloquial terms) than the EFL learners. In terms of pragmatic use, it was found that the Iraqis employed a higher number of apology strategies with hearers of higher status, whereas the Americans used more strategies with people of lower rank and equal status. Humeid refers to the transfer of Iraqi social and cultural norms to the apology productions in L2. He states that in the Arabic culture, status and power play an essential role in the way societies behave and interact, especially in offences and face-threatening situations. Similar results were obtained from Binassour's study (2014) which compared apologies provided by Americans and Saudi EFL learners. The findings indicated that like Humeid's data results, Brown and Levinson's social power had a noticeable impact on the learners' choice of apology strategies. It was shown that the higher power the offended party held, the more apology strategies the learners tended to employ.

More recently, Moussa Farraj's (2022) research resulted in similar findings. She investigated apologies made by female faculty members at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Her main aim was to find out whether there was a relationship between the faculty's years of experience and the apology strategies they used. The findings of the study showed that social power, which is derived from having more or fewer years of experience, affected apology strategies used among Saudi female faculty members. The more youthful faculty members tended to use syntactically longer sentences in apologies compared to their older colleagues to show more respect. The researcher sees the findings as an important reflection of the Hejazi culture located in the Western Region of Saudi Arabia, as well as the Arabic culture in general which usually places higher status on people in power.

Another theme that emerged was the Arabs' extensive use of verbal and non-verbal positive politeness apology strategies. This was recorded in some Arabic studies. For example, Nureddeen (2008) pointed out that in her apology investigation of Sudanese Arabic, some Arab respondents opted out of linguistic apologies, avoided blaming themselves, and resorted to humour and brushing off the incident as a funny unintentional encounter. She explains that in this case, the S is attempting to save her positive face, which in Arabic and other positive politeness cultures seems far more important than Brown and Levinson's negative face.

In addition, Rizk (1997) reported that the Arab participants employed the same theme above. In his study, some of the Arabs evaded apologising verbally by offering food to the H instead. Offering food in Arabic cultures is an act of generosity and action that enhances friendliness and solidarity between the interlocutors. In Jebahi's (2011) and Al-Ali's (2012) investigations, the Arab participants used religious terms to swear their good intentions to the H. The use of religious terms stresses the S's intrinsic good nature. The Arabs also used sarcasm to calm the H down and referred to the H with affectionate names in an attempt to remind the H of the close social relationship between the interlocutors.

Moving on to EFL apology research studies which compared learners from different levels of proficiencies, quite recently, Al-Harbi and Mahfoodh (2021) examined the effects of English language proficiency on Jordanian EFL students' apology strategies. Their sample included 270 Jordanian EFL learners divided into three groups: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The researchers found a positive correlation between the students' L2 proficiency levels and their apology strategy selections in that the more advanced the student was, the more often he or she would give coherent and appropriate L2 apology responses. Advanced learners also produced two expressions of apology and two intensifiers more than the other two groups, and in general, seemed more able to comprehend the various pragmatic functions associated with different apology strategies.

Similarly, Aboud and Shibliyev (2021) found a positive correlation between producing L2 apologies and the Arab participants' proficiency levels. For example, advanced students used more linguistically complex apology realisations than the intermediate-level group. Also, when giving reasons to the H, the advanced learners were more able to clearly explain the causes for their misconduct than the other less advanced ones. However, when comparing the groups' percentages of apology strategy selections, the relationship was not statistically significant which suggests that in terms of frequency of strategy use, the groups were quite similar in their choices. Additionally, no first language influence was detected in the Arab students' L2 apology productions.

In her cross-sectional apology study, El-Dakhs' (2018) confirmed that the lower and higher-level learners chose similar strategies across the apology situations; the most commonly used being IFIDs, offers of repair, and explanations. The rest of the strategies were used by less than 5% of both groups. However, when combining apology strategies, the higher level learners used 195 sequences of apology strategy patterns, whereas the lower level group employed 96 apology combinations. In this study, the influence of Arabic as a first language was also investigated. It was concluded that there was a much greater difference between native speakers of Arabic and EFL learners than between the latter and native speakers of English. This seems to suggest that in terms of apologies, the learners mirrored apologetic behaviour closer to native speakers of English than native speakers of Arabic. The researcher further stressed that, in some instances, the EFL learners portrayed apologetic behaviour as different from both groups of native speakers which El-Dakhs imputes to the uniqueness of interlanguage (Selinker 1972) being a whole "system in its own right" (Selinker, 2014, p. 230).

In conclusion, the above literature review of Arabic apology studies has added a huge value to the body of research concerning speech acts, cross-cultural pragmatics, and politeness research. However, these studies have not properly addressed the issue of the length of formal language learning vs. exposure to L2, and the effect they can have on Saudi EFL learners' apologies in English. Carrying out a thorough search of relevant literature yielded no exact match of Arabic

studies which previously explored this paper's main focus; namely, to study the effects of different lengths of L2 learning and L2 exposures on Saudi EFL learners' apology strategy selections. Contrasting apology strategies used by two samples of Arab EFL learners and native speakers of English, as done by most researchers, does not give specific results about the apology strategy preferences for EFL learners from different levels of exposure to L2. Furthermore, the sample of Saudi female learners is generally underrepresented in speech act and interlanguage research (Almghams, 2020). According to the researcher's knowledge, this group was never investigated in terms of apology behaviours vis-à-vis different lengths of exposure to L2. Thus, to fill in this literature gap, this study identifies a new point of investigation which will hopefully add to the existing corpus about the relationship between different lengths of L2 learning and L2 exposures and their effect on EFL learners' apologies; in this case, Saudi female learners.

The Speech Act of Apology

Apologies have been defined as "reactions to offences, such as violation[s] of social norms or failure to fulfil personal expectations" (Fraser, 1981, p. 259). They have been also regarded as post-event highly-conventionalised speech acts that tend to be aggregated (Leech, 1980). Contrary to Brown and Levinson's framework (1987) which establishes a strong connection between politeness and indirectness, in the case of apologies, the more direct a strategy is, the more polite it is usually considered to be. For example, as opposed to the bare performative of the request speech act ([I] ask, [I] request), the performative of an apology ([I] apologise) appears to satisfy the politeness level needed to achieve a sincere apology. The reason for this contradiction can be explained with reference to the nature of apologies in comparison with other speech acts such as requests and complaints. Not only is performing an apology beneficial for the hearer (H), it is often expected from the speaker (S) after an offence has occurred. During an offence, the S damages the H's negative face or positive face or both; hence, the apology which follows acts as an attempt from the S to restore the social imbalance between her and the H caused by her wrongdoing.

The linguistic realisations associated with making an apology can be classified as positive politeness or negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness apology strategies tend to be aimed at maintaining a close amicable relationship with the H in the future (e.g. showing concern for the H, providing reasons for the offence, explaining the S's good intentions, offering to repair or replace what has been forgotten or misplaced, using informal address terms, endearment names, as well as first names). These strategies also focus on strengthening in-group solidarity and often indicate a low level of distance between the interlocutors. Negative politeness apology strategies, on the other hand, tend to convey respect towards the H and the H's right to privacy and non-distraction (e.g. use of IFIDs, use of formal or deferential address terms, and avoidance of using personal pronouns such as "I" or "we").

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) divided apologies into five strategies, based on data collected from one of the first and most comprehensive speech act research projects of all time: “the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project” (the CCSARP). These strategies are IFIDs [*sorry, excuse me, I apologize, forgive me, I regret, pardon me*] taking on responsibility [*self-deficiency, self-blame, denial of fault*], explanation [*explicit/implicit*], an offer of repair [*specified /unspecified*], and promise of forbearance [e.g. *this won't happen again*]. (pp. 207-208).

In this study, apologies collected from the data will be classified according to the CCSARP coding manual.

Methods

Participants

In this study, forty-eight Saudi female EFL learners responded to a written DCT questionnaire, which was distributed online and was the main data collection method, along with post-survey interviews. The researcher also collected demographic data from the respondents where background information such as age, education, and length of exposure to English as a second language was obtained. The participants were between twenty-five and forty years old and were all at the university level or higher. Accumulatively, none of the participants spent more than three months at a time in an English-speaking country.

Based on the collected background information data, the respondents were divided into four groups: twelve participants represented group one (G1) which was introduced to English at the age of three; twelve participants represented group two (G2) which started learning English at the age of six (they attended Saudi private schools); twelve represented group three (G3) learning English at the age of twelve (they attended Saudi public schools); and in the final group, group four (G4), a further twelve participants only started learning English formally at university level (they had previously attended Islamic schools where English classes were not offered on campus). Based on their years of formal EFL education, the four groups represented the following linguistic proficiency levels (advanced, upper-intermediate, lower-intermediate, and beginner) respectively.

The minimum age of the participants being twenty-five may indicate that in this study, the learners represent a small sample of a Saudi generation who were learning English through the internet, especially as young children, which was often inaccessible. Although internet services officially started in Saudi Arabia in 1997, the wide use of the internet in every Saudi household only began in the early 2000s. Before that, individual EFL learners exerted every effort to learn English by purchasing books and dictionaries, and later personal computer CDs. Moreover, TV shows at that time were mostly shown in Arabic as opposed to the current situation where you have the choice of language in which to watch a cartoon show, live on the same channel.

Research Instruments

In this study, data were collected by distributing online DCT questionnaires. The test was composed of eight scenarios in which respondents had to provide apologies for different offences. In the case of interlanguage research, DCTs are considered a valuable data collection method as it is viewed as a language test which examines the students' differences in performing certain speech acts. Ogiermann (2018) points out that the "DCT is the only available data collection instrument that generates sufficiently large corpora of comparable, systematically varied speech act data" (p. 229).

The DCT in this study was influenced by Ogiermann's (2009) cross-cultural apology study design. Ogiermann created her DCT taking into consideration Brown and Levinson's three social variables (power P, distance D, and ranking of imposition R). The apology situations that were chosen included alternating variable combinations (e.g. (+P, -D, +R), (+P, +D, +R), (-P, +D, -R), (-P, -D, +R), etc.). Moreover, regarding her situation, Ogiermann picked diverse types of offences; some being legal in nature (getting on a train without a ticket), others derived from everyday life (leaving a mess on your friend's table while at their house) and academic life (misplacing your professor's thesis) (p. 84). In addition, she managed to implement apology situations which could potentially offend the H's positive face (e.g. forgetting to return a friend's books) and the H's negative face (e.g. mistaking a stranger for a close friend). Below are the eight adopted offensive situations included in this research:

- 1- Your friend asked you to look after some fish and some of them died in your care.
- 2- Your friend asked you to return the books you borrowed and you forgot.
- 3- You hit someone in their back thinking it was your friend (identity mistake).
- 4- You opened a heavy door and let go and it hit the person behind you.
- 5- You had borrowed your professor's thesis and you misplaced it.
- 6- You are studying at your friend's house and you discover that your pen has been leaking on their table.
- 7- You walk out of a shop with an unpaid item and you get stopped.
- 8- You go on a train without a ticket and you get caught.

Findings

According to Tables one and nine (see Appendix section below), the main apology strategies used by the four groups in situation 1 were *IFIDs* (46), *stating a fact* (41), *admitting responsibility* (11), and *explanation* (10). In terms of the numbers of strategies employed by each group, G1 and G2 employed an equal number of strategies (30), followed by G4 (27), and then G3 (25). Therefore, in terms of the number of strategies used, the group with higher numbers of L2 education seemed to use slightly more strategies than the groups with fewer years of L2 learning. In regards to exclusive strategies, the strategies *denying responsibility* and *offering repair* were

only used by G2, while the strategy *admitting responsibility* was used by all the groups except for G3.

The groups also offered apologies which consisted of combinations of strategies such as (*explanation + offer of repair*) “e.g. *This happened against my well [sic], I will buy you new ones if you would like.*” However, the number one strategy combination used by all four groups was the *IFID plus statements of facts* (e.g. “*I’m very sorry but your fish died*”, “*some of your fish died.. sorry*”, “*so sorry but your fish has died*”). This apology combo was largely used by all four groups. The reason may have stemmed from the decision to classify responses such as “*your fish died*” as *stating a fact* rather than *admitting responsibility* or *explanation*, which might also explain the variance in the number of uses of the strategies *stating a fact* (41) vs. *admitting responsibility* (11) and *explanation* (10). This type of classification was inspired by Ogiermann (2009) who classified apology strategies in which the offence is portrayed neutrally as merely ‘*mentioning or admitting a fact*. According to her, “admissions of facts occupy a middle position on the responsibility scale; they neither reduce nor accept it” (p. 141). Based on this line of analysis, the strategy “*your fish died*” appeared to be suitably classified under this category since it includes no reference to the S’s involvement in the offence. This strategy is widely used in situations where the S has to inform the H about what happened. Furthermore, this strategy usually accompanies IFIDs, as was the case in the data at hand. By responding in this way, it seems that the S believes the IFID alone is sufficient to show her regret to the H since the other strategy is merely a declaration of what had occurred. Nevertheless, the use of the conjunction “*but*” in this case acts as a “preparer” since *but* triggers an implicature that what follows runs contrary to expectation. Hence, it intends to give headway to the H of what is yet to come and makes the S appear less offensive.

According to Tables two and nine, the most frequently used apology strategies in situation 2 were *IFIDs* and *explanation* (both 44), then *offers of repair* (17). A typical response from the groups for this situation was as follows: “*I’m sorry, I forgot your books, I’ll bring them tomorrow*”. Collectively, G3 employed the highest number of strategies (29), followed by G2 (28), then by G1 (27), and finally G4 (24).

Regarding exclusivity, the strategy *promise of forbearance* was only used by G3, and the strategy *stating a fact* was used by all groups except G3. It was further noticed that in this situation the strategy *responsibility* was not used by any group.

On closer inspection of the groups’ differences, it appears that the appropriacy level of the L2 apologies did not always correspond with the groups’ years of L2 education. In clearer terms, sometimes, responses from groups three or four were more grammatically correct and pragmatically appropriate than responses offered by candidates from the other groups with longer periods of EFL education.

As an example, a candidate from G1 gave the following response for this situation “*your books my house.. come later*”. When interviewing this candidate later, she explained that she meant that her friend’s books are still in her house, and she is asking her friend to come later to her house to collect them. When asked if she thought she should be the one returning the books since she was the one who borrowed them in the first place, she said: “she is my friend, she must understand”. This was an indication of two things. First, the candidate may have been influenced by the collective nature of her L1 culture, where the boundaries between friends are different from the culture of L2. Second, the high number of L2 formal education did not seem to give her full advantage since her response was linguistically incorrect and culturally inappropriate.

On the other hand, a few candidates from G3 and G4 showed advanced levels of L2 linguistic and pragmatic competencies. For example, when a candidate from G3 was asked why she chose to use the strategy *promise of forbearance* in her response, she replied that “*I want to make sure that I have a good relationship with my friend so she can trust me in the future*”. She further added, “*I will only say that if I care about this friend and care for her friendship*”. Although starting her EFL classroom education only from the age of 12, this candidate exhibited an advanced level of L2 apology behaviour, both pragmatically and linguistically. The candidate later declared that before her formal EFL school education, she was keen on learning English by herself and spent a long time reading books, listening to songs, and self-teaching herself about English, from both perspectives of language and culture.

Based on Table three, the most frequently used apology strategies in situation three were *IFIDs* (45) and *explanation* (41). The strategy *showing concern for the H* was used by G3 and G4 only, whereas the strategy *compliment* was only used by G2. The last two strategies are new to the data; the former was used in this situation and situation four, whilst the latter was used here and in apology situation seven.

In this situation and situation four, both Hs are strangers. In the first case, the S hits someone on the back thinking they were a close friend, and in the second, the S opens a heavy door and lets go which causes it to hit the H who was just behind. In these two scenarios, there is a suspicion of physical harm or injury being inflicted on the H, thus showing concern for the H’s health is expected. According to some linguists, this strategy is considered sufficient to stand as an apology strategy on its own (Trosborg, 1995), while in other coding schemes, it is viewed as a type of intensification that is external to the IFID head act (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984). In my data, instances of the strategy *showing concern for the H* were used separately without the employment of any other strategies. Moreover, the strategy alone seemed capable of showing the S’s true care for the H’s health and wellbeing.

Another observation which emerged from the data analysis was that exclamations or emotional hedges such as (*Oh!, Oh no! Oops! and OMG*) were used quite frequently. Exclamations, given the appropriate contextual circumstances, can sometimes serve as an apology strategy on their own (Fraser, 1981). These hedges often have a function of expressing “surprise,” which might explain why they are frequently used in scenarios with an unexpected outcome such as the current situation. Although hedges were used in a pragmatically appropriate manner, linguistically, there were a few misspellings, especially coming from G2 respondents, such as (*Oobs, Oof, and OObSi*).

Exclamations were used equally by all four groups. The abbreviation (OMG) was even used by a few G4 learners. G4 learners, in particular, made zero errors in situation three. Table four illustrates the most frequently used apology strategies in situation four: *IFIDs* (43) *explanation* (29), and *concern for the H* (16). The strategy of *shifting responsibility* was used by G3 and G4 only, whereas the strategy of *admitting responsibility* was only employed by G2. What is worth mentioning is that G4 employed the largest number of strategies (25); followed by G2 (23), then by the two groups with the highest number of EFL education years: G1 and G3 (22).

Moreover, in this situation, all four groups employed various types of IFIDs, consisting of different parts of speech, e.g. “verbs” (*apologize, excuse, forgive*), “adjectives” (*sorry*) and “nouns” (*pardon*). The IFIDs in this situation were also heavily intensified: (e.g. *soooooo, totally, very*, and many others). This is expected as in this offence, just like the previous situation, the S might have potentially hurt the H physically, which requires to show for extra concern and regret on the part of the S. Therefore, it is also unsurprising that the strategy of *showing concern for the H* was employed by all groups and was one of the most frequently used strategies in this offence. One note here is that although all four groups employed the strategy *concern for the H*, there were some grammatical errors made by the learners while constructing the apologies (e.g. *Hops that you didn't pain* [sic] (G1), *Did you hurt?* [sic] (G2), *Did you got hurt?* [sic] (G3)). Nevertheless, the appropriateness in employing the strategy by all four groups demonstrates that even learners with fewer years of L2 education were able to realize the pragmatic necessity of demonstrating their true concern for the H's wellbeing in this particular situation.

According to Table five, the most frequently used apology strategies in situation five were *IFIDs* (38), *explanation* (23), and *offers of repair* (13). G1 employed (23) strategies, followed by G2 (22), followed by G3 (20), and finally G4 (14) strategies. In this situation, although the S holds power over the H, the number of strategies used by the groups was not exceptionally high. What was often used as an adjunct, however, was addressing the H with the deferential term “*Prof*”. This points to a possible negative transfer from L1 rules. In the Arabic world, students never refer to their teachers by their first names; it is considered a severe breach of school protocol. The fact that even learners with longer years of L2 education and L2 exposures addressed their university

teachers with their job title (Prof.) stresses the depth in which L1 cultural norms can be rooted for most L2 learners, even at advanced levels.

Moving on to Table six, which reports on data from apology situation six, G1 and G3 employed the same number of strategies (19), followed by G2 (17), and then by G4 (14). The most frequent apology strategies employed in this situation were *offers of repair* (33) and *IFIDs* (30). This is the first situation in which *IFIDs* were not the most frequently used apology strategy by the groups. This might be attributed to the nature of the offence in situation six. In this scenario, the S's pen leaks on the H's table, which typically requires "repair" from the S by cleaning the mess she has made. Offering regret alone might not be sufficient to save the S's positive face; therefore, offering repair for the damage seems more suitable, which was appropriately used by all the groups. Likewise, in situation seven, the strategy *explanation* (31) was used more than *IFIDs* (27). Situation seven is a scenario where the S has committed a legal crime. Therefore, it only sounds appropriate for the S to describe the circumstances surrounding the offence and "explain" to the H the details of what caused the misconduct to happen.

Based on Table eight, which also refers to an unlawful act, the strategies *IFIDs* and *explanation* were employed similarly. The former was used 26 times, whereas the latter was employed 24 times by the groups. What was also noticeable in this situation was that G4 made zero errors, while other groups with more years of EFL education made a few mistakes, such as the following "I thought could buy whilst on train [sic] (G1)" and "I think the ticket when I ride [sic] (G3)".

Summary

To sum up, the findings showed that G1 and G2 employed an equal number of strategies, followed by G4 and then G3. Therefore, in terms of the number of strategies used, the group with higher numbers of L2 education seemed to use slightly more strategies than the groups with fewer years of L2 learning. On the other hand, on closer inspection of the groups' differences, it appears that the appropriacy level of the L2 apologies did not always correspond with the groups' years of L2 education. In clearer terms, sometimes, responses from groups three or four were more grammatically correct and pragmatically appropriate than responses offered by candidates from the other groups with longer periods of EFL education. Therefore, the appropriateness in employing the strategy by all four groups demonstrates that even learners with fewer years of L2 education were able to realize the pragmatic necessity of demonstrating their true apology to the S in situations involving serious offences. In addition, there was a point of transfer from L1 where the respondents addressed the H with the address term "prof". In the Arabic world, students never refer to their teachers by their first names; it is considered a severe breach of school protocol. The fact that even learners with longer years of L2 education and L2 exposures addressed their

university teachers with their job title (Prof.) stresses the depth in which L1 cultural norms can be rooted for most L2 learners, even at advanced levels.

Discussion

First, to answer the research question, based on the results of the data, it seems that long years of EFL classroom education and long exposure to EFL outside of the classroom both help the learners achieve accurate well-constructed apologies in L2. However, according to the study results, high exposure to L2 had a slight advantage in that learners from G3 and G4, who exerted real effort in their EFL learning journeys, demonstrated advanced L2 apologetic behaviour in comparison to the comparatively short periods in which they were formally taught English in a classroom. The opposite was manifested in the data as well; groups 1 and 2 did not always perform better just because they had long years of EFL education. This brings to attention the significance of the quality of the language environment that the student is surrounded with as much as their school or classroom education. If a learner is only exposed to classroom drills and dialogues, they might acquire substantial mastery of classroom skills but still struggle to communicate in a natural L2 environment. Therefore, longer periods of exposure to greater quantities of L2 input outside of the classroom may lead and assist to achieve a successful target language learning experience.

Based on the data results above, a few generalisations can be made. First, G1 (188) and G2 (182), having long years of formal EFL learning, tended to employ more strategies than G3 (171) and G4 (152), who had fewer years of EFL classroom education. However, there were a few exceptions to the rule such as in situations two and four. In situation two, G3 employed the largest number of strategies, and in situation four, G4 used the most strategies. Secondly, the results showed that all the groups had similar rankings for the use of strategies per situation (see Table nine), which means that in each situation, the most frequently used strategies were the highest employed apology strategies by all the groups. This may indicate that all four groups had the required level of pragmatic awareness which suggests the employment of certain apology strategies more than others, as necessitated by each situation. Thirdly, through analysis of the errors made by the learners, G3 and G4 did not make more errors than G1 and G2 just because they had fewer years of learning EFL in the classroom. In fact, in some cases, G4 committed no errors at all (e.g. situations three and eight). Upon interviewing G4 students later about how well they answered situations three and eight, most of them explained that although they have not learned English in a classroom setting before attending university (they attended Islamic only school which does not offer English classes to the students), they educated themselves out of the classroom by making serious effort to learn English. Most candidates agreed that English books from libraries and computer CDs were the largest resources they had in their journeys to learn English. One candidate said that she used to purchase English movie VHS tapes, listen carefully, pause now and then and try to assimilate the actors' American accents.

Conclusion

This study was set out to investigate the relationship between L2 education and L2 exposure and the effect they can have on apologies, as produced by Saudi female EFL learners. In general, groups who have had long years of formal EFL learning employed more strategies than those who have had fewer years of EFL classroom education. Nevertheless, a few exceptions to the rule were found in some apology situations giving more weight to the factor of L2 exposure alone as an indicator of the learners' competence in making apologies. Another observation was that all the groups employed similar strategies in the same apology situations. This might suggest that the groups similarly ranked each apology situation which resulted in equal use of strategies in certain situations. Moreover, groups which have had lesser years of formal L2 education but more exposure to L2 did not necessarily make errors more than groups with more years of L2 classroom instruction. This goes to show the significant impact exposure to EFL outside of the classroom can have on learners' L2 development. This paper is hoped to shed light on the importance of L2 exposure as a strong factor contributing to L2 acquisition. Finally, the researcher recommends EFL learners be continually exposed to English through watching English movies and T.V programs, surfing the internet, listening to the radio in English, reading English books, magazines, and newspapers, and practising the English language as much as possible to overcome their weaknesses and improve their L2 fluency and proficiency in general.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Number of Strategies used in situation 1

Table 1. *Situation 1 (Your Friend's Fish Died in Your Care)*

Apology strategy	Linguistic examples from different groups
IFIDs	<i>I'm sorry for your loss (G1)</i>
G1: 12	<i>I apologize to you my friend (G1)</i>
G2: 10	<i>I'm so so sorry this happened (G2)</i>
G3: 12	<i>I'm very sorry your fish died (G3)</i>
G4: 12	<i>I'm ever so sorry (G4)</i>
Admitting responsibility	<i>I didn't take great care of your fish (G1)</i>
G1: 3	<i>I wasn't able to take care of your fishes [sic] (G2)</i>
G2: 4	<i>I didn't care for it (G2)</i>
G3: 0	<i>Some of your fish died because I did not pay attention to them (G4)</i>
G4: 4	
Shifting responsibility	<i>I couldn't stop what Allah has decided for it. He Almighty took care of it (G1)</i>
G1: 1	
G4: 1	<i>I tried my best but the fishes [sic] don't like me (G4)</i>
Denying responsibility	<i>I have bad news but it's not my fault (G2)</i>
G2: 1	
Explanation	<i>I don't know why, I fed them once a day just like you said (G1)</i>
G1: 2	<i>This happened against my well [sic] (G2)</i>
G2: 3	<i>I took care of them but they died fast (G3)</i>
G3: 4	

G4: 1	<i>I don't know what went wrong.. I took care of them as you told me (G3)</i>
Offers of repair	<i>What can I do to make it up to you? (G2)</i>
G2: 2	<i>I will buy you new ones if you would like (G2)</i>
Stating a fact	<i>I'm sorry but your fish has died (G1)</i>
G1: 12	<i>I'm sorry but one of the fish is dead (G2)</i>
G2: 10	<i>One of your fish is died [sic] (G3)</i>
G3: 9	<i>Some of the fish died (G3)</i>
G4: 10	<i>I tried my best but some fish have died (G4)</i>

Appendix B

Number of Strategies used in situation 2

Table 2. Situation 2 (You Forgot to Return Your Friend's Books)

Apology strategy	Linguistic examples from different groups
IFIDs	<i>I'm sorry (G1)</i>
G1: 10	<i>Forgive me (G2)</i>
G2: 10	<i>I'm really really sorry (G3)</i>
G3: 12	<i>Oh sorry (G4)</i>
G4: 12	
Explanation	<i>I forgot the/your books (G1), (G2), (G3), (G4)</i>
G1: 11	<i>I know I had to bring something but I forgot (G2)</i>
G2: 12	<i>I wrote a note but still forgot (G2)</i>
G3: 11	<i>I forgot to get your books with me [sic] (G2)</i>
G4: 10	
Offers of repair	<i>I'll bring them next time (G1), (G4)</i>
G1: 5	<i>I will return soon [sic] (G1)</i>
G2: 5	<i>I'll send them tomorrow (G3)</i>
G3: 5	
G4: 2	
Stating a fact	<i>Your books my house [sic] (G1)</i>
G1: 1	<i>Your books are with me (G2)</i>
G2: 1	<i>Your books are at my house (G4)</i>
G3: 0	

G4: 1

Promise of forbearance *I'll set a reminder right now so I won't forget next time (G3)*

G3: 1

Appendix C

Number of Strategies used in situation 3

Table 3. Situation 3 (Mistaken Identity)

Apology strategy	Linguistic examples from different groups
IFIDs	<i>I'm sorry (G1)</i>
G1: 12	<i>Am sorry [sic] (G1)</i>
G2: 12	<i>Please accept my apologies [sic] (G2)</i>
G3: 11	<i>Oh! So sorry (G4)</i>
G4: 10	
Explanation	<i>I thought you were someone else (G1), (G2)</i>
G1: 11	<i>You look the same as my friend [sic] (G1)</i>
G2: 10	<i>Oh No! I thought you are another person I know (G3)</i>
G3: 9	<i>Oh! I thought you were a friend of mine (G4)</i>
G4: 11	<i>Oh, I thought you were my friend (G4)</i>
Concern for the hearer	<i>OMG, How are you? (G3)</i>
G1: 0	<i>I will smile and ask about her (G4)</i>
G2: 0	
G3: 1	
G4: 1	
Compliment	<i>Nice hair though! {G2}</i>
G2: 1	

Appendix D

Number of Strategies used in situation 4

Table 4. Situation 4 (The Heavy Door Hit Someone Behind You)

Apology strategy	Linguistic examples from different groups
IFIDs	<i>I'm sooooo sorry (G1)</i>
G1: 12	<i>Please forgive me (G1), (G4)</i>
G2: 11	<i>I apologize for you [sic] (G2)</i>
G3: 9	<i>I'm totally, very, sorry (G2)</i>
G4: 11	<i>My apologies (G2)</i> <i>Parden (G4)</i>
Admitting responsibility	<i>Its my mistake [sic] (G2)</i>
G2: 1	

Shifting responsibility	<i>I don't understand why it is so heavy</i> (G3)
G1: 0	<i>The door is a bit heavy</i> (G3)
G2: 0	<i>The door was too heavy</i> (G4)
G3: 2	
G4: 1	
Explanation	<i>I didn't know you were behind me</i> (G1)
G1: 4	<i>It was a silly accident</i> (G1)
G2: 6	<i>Just accidint [sic]</i> (G2)
G3: 9	<i>I didn't mean that</i> (G2)
G4: 10	<i>I didn't see you</i> (G2), (G3)
	<i>I don't know that you were behind me [sic]</i> (G3)
	<i>I did not know that some behind the door [sic]</i> (G3)
	<i>I didn't mean to hurt you</i> (G4)
Concern for the hearer	<i>Hops that you didn't pain [sic]</i> (G1)
G1: 6	<i>Did you get hurt?</i> (G2)
G2: 5	<i>Are you okay?</i> (G2), (G3)
G3: 2	<i>Did you hurt?</i> [sic] (G2)
G4: 3	<i>Are you hurt?</i> (G4)

Appendix E

Number of Strategies used in situation 5

Table 5. Situation 5 (You Lost Your Professor's Thesis)

Apology strategy	Linguistic examples from different groups
IFIDs	<i>Sorry for losing your thesis</i> (G1)
G1: 12	<i>Hi prof I really apologize</i> (G3)
G2: 9	<i>I apologize Mrs last name [sic]</i> (G3)
G3: 9	<i>Prof please accept my apologies</i> (G4)
G4: 8	<i>Please prof don't be mad</i> (G4)
Admitting responsibility	<i>My mistake</i> (G2)
G1: 0	<i>I will tell the truth</i> (G2)
G2: 2	<i>I know I made a mistake</i> (G3)
G3: 2	<i>Sorry for my mistake</i> (G3)
G4: 0	
Explanation	<i>I misplaced your thesis</i> (G1)
G1: 9	<i>I misplaced [sic]</i> (G1)
G2: 5	<i>I might've lost your thesis</i> (G2)
G3: 5	<i>I didn't completed my homework [sic]</i> (implying that she still needs the thesis) (G2)
G4: 4	<i>I think I didn't use it in its place [sic]</i> (G3) (implying that she did not put it back where she should have)
	<i>I really needed you</i> (G4) (implying that she needed the thesis urgently)

	<i>I forgot (G4)</i>
Offers of repair	<i>I'll look for it again this evening (G1)</i>
G1: 2	<i>I will fix that immediately (G2)</i>
G2: 6	<i>Prof. I will correct the mistake (G2)</i>
G3: 3	<i>Please let me handle it and get for you [sic] (G3)</i>
G4: 2	<i>I will keep on searching until I find it (G4)</i>
	<i>I will think again in order to remember where I kept it (G4)</i>
Promise of forbearance	<i>It will not happen again (G3)</i>
G3: 1	

Appendix F

Number of Strategies used in situation 6

Table 6. Situation 6 (Your Pen Leaked on Your Friend's Table)

Apology strategy	Linguistic examples from different groups
IFIDs	<i>I'm so sorry for this mess (G1)</i>
G1: 7	<i>Ooopsi shit so sorry (G2)</i>
G2: 6	<i>I'm really very sorry (G3)</i>
G3: 9	<i>Ohhhh sorry (G4)</i>
G4: 8	
Explanation	<i>I had no idea the pen has been leaking (G1)</i>
G1: 2	<i>pen loose [sic] (G1)</i>
G2: 1	<i>I think my pen is broke [sic] (G2)</i>
G3: 0	
G4: 0	
Offers of repair	<i>Can you hand me a wet cloth I want to wipe this quickly (G1)</i>
G1: 9	<i>I can clean (G1)</i>
G2: 9	<i>I'll clean it right now/ I'll wipe it (G1), (G2), (G3), (G4)</i>
G3: 9	<i>Can you please give me a napkin to clean up this mess? (G2)</i>
G4: 6	<i>Would you please bring me a towel to clean it up? (G2)</i>
	<i>May have some cleaning tools to clean your table? [sic] (G2)</i>
	<i>Let me clean it/that up (G1), (G2), (G3), (G4)</i>
Stating a fact	<i>My pen leaked on your table (G1)</i>
G1: 1	<i>The pen is leaking (G2)</i>
G2: 1	<i>My pen has leaked on your table (G3)</i>
G3: 1	
G4: 0	

Appendix G

Number of Strategies used in situation 7

Table 7. Situation 7 (You Left a Shop with an Unpaid Item)

Apology strategy	Linguistic examples from different groups
IFIDs	<i>I'm sorry (G1)</i>
G1: 7	<i>Forgive me (G2)</i>

G2: 6	<i>I'm really really sorry (G3)</i>
G3: 9	<i>Oh so sorry (G4)</i>
G4: 5	
Admitting responsibility	<i>My bad (G1)</i>
G1: 5	<i>My mistake (G1), (G2), (G3)</i>
G2: 1	<i>I did not pay attention (G1)</i>
G3: 3	<i>I need take some pill for forgetting [sic] (G3)</i>
G4: 0	
Shifting responsibility	<i>The cashier should've checked the items before handing me the bag (G2)</i>
G1: 0	
G2: 3	<i>The cashier must do her job well lol (G2)</i>
G3: 1	<i>It seems they forgot to take out the sensor (G2)</i>
G4: 0	<i>Maybe the cashier didn't remove the barcode (G3)</i>
Denying responsibility	<i>I paid for it (G2)</i>
G1: 0	<i>Of course, I forgot to pay because I won't steal (G3)</i>
G2: 1	
G3: 1	
G4: 0	
Explanation	<i>I thought I (had) paid (for this item) (G1), (G2), (G3), (G4)</i>
G1: 12	<i>I thought I don't have it (G1) (implying that the S was not aware she had the item with her)</i>
G2: 7	
G3: 5	<i>I hurried up [sic] (G2)</i>
G4: 7	<i>I swear to God I didn't realize this item was on me (G2)</i>
	<i>I didn't realize I'm holding/carrying it (G2), (G3), (G4)</i>
	<i>I was looking for the cashier [sic] (G4)</i>
Offers of repair	<i>I'll go back and pay right now (G1)</i>
G1: 3	<i>I'll pay for it [right] now (G1), (G2), (G3), (G4)</i>
G2: 1	<i>I will get back to the cashier and place the payment (G2)</i>
G3: 1	<i>I'll return it straight away (G2)</i>
G4: 1	<i>I pay the money with good tips [sic] (G3)</i>
Compliment	<i>Thank you for being alert (G2)</i>
G2: 2	<i>How impressive is that (G2)</i>

Appendix H

Number of Strategies used in situation 8

Table 8. Situation 8 (You Got on a Train Without Purchasing a Ticket)

Apology strategy	Linguistic examples from different groups
IFIDs	<i>I'm sorry (G1)</i>
G1: 5	<i>Please forgive me this time (G3)</i>
G2: 7	<i>I'm really sorry (G3)</i>
G3: 8	<i>I hope you accept my apology and let me get on the train now</i>
G4: 6	<i>(G4)</i>

Explanation	<i>I thought could buy it whilst on the train [sic] (G1)</i>
G1: 7	<i>I thought I could buy the tickets on board (G1)</i>
G2: 8	<i>I thought I had my ticket with me (G1)</i>
G3: 3	<i>I forgot where I kept my tickets (G2)</i>
G4: 6	<i>It must have fallen out of my pocket (G2)</i>
	<i>I think I lost the ticket (G2)</i>
	<i>I swear I had it with me (G2)</i>
	<i>I think the ticket when I ride [sic] (G3) (implying that she thought she was able to buy the ticket on board the train)</i>
	<i>I didn't have any money (G4)</i>
	<i>I might've lost it (G4)</i>
Offers of repair	<i>Where can I pay? (G1)</i>
G1: 5	<i>Is there any way [sic] to solve this situation without getting me off the train? (G2)</i>
G2: 2	<i>Can you lead me to the nearest ticket office? (G2)</i>
G3: 3	<i>Next time I'll pay for a ticket (G3)</i>
G4: 1	<i>How much should I pay? (G3)</i>
	<i>Is it okay if I pay for the ticket now? (G3)</i>
	<i>I will buy it now (G4)</i>
Promise of forbearance	<i>It won't happen again (G2)</i>
G1: 0	<i>I promise I won't do it again (G3)</i>
G2: 1	
G3: 1	
G4: 0	

Appendix I

Number of Strategies used in all the situations

Table 9. Number of strategies used in all the situations by the four groups

	Sit 1	Sit 2	Sit 3	Sit 4	Sit 5	Sit 6	Sit 7	Sit 8
<i>Strategies with the highest employment rate</i>								
IFIDs	46	44	45	43	38	30	27	26
Resp	11							
Facts	41							
Expl	10	44	41	29	23		31	24
OOOR		17			13	33		
Concern				16				
<i>The overall number of employed strategies</i>								
G1	30	27	23	22	23	19	27	17
G2	30	28	23	23	22	17	21	18
G3	25	29	21	22	20	19	20	15
G4	27	24	22	25	14	14	13	13
Total	112	108	89	92	79	69	81	63