

# Gender Differences in the Use of Apology Speech Act in Persian

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## **Abstract**

The present study investigates gender differences in the use of apologies and examines the effect of social status and social distance of on the frequency of performing and receiving apologies among males and females, in a corpus of 500 apology exchanges collected through an ethnographic method of observation in Iran and coded according to Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) model. The results revealed that there were no significant gender differences in the use of apologies in Persian, and that only gender of apologizer affected the use of explanation and promise of forbearance significantly in the corpus. It was also found that males apologized to male strangers with the highest frequency while females exchanged most apologies with their female friends, and that both men and women apologized more to equals. Significant age differences were also observed in the corpus.

**Keywords:** Politeness, Apology speech act, Persian, Gender, Social status, Social distance

## 1. Introduction

The status of Iranian women has changed rapidly in the recent years. The image of traditional Iranian women, as an illiterate, silent, obedient ‘weakling’, who is covered in veil from top to toe and her only role is serving her husband and raising kids, has started to fade away and a new image has begun to emerge that is obsessed with beauty surgeries and cosmetics, ahead of men in taking university degrees and social movements, and raising against inequalities between men and women. Iranian culture, however, is still highly male dominant in almost all aspects.

Since, as Spolsky (1998: 36) declared, “language reflects, records, and transmits social differences”, it is expected that men and women use language in different ways because of gender differences. Thus, it has been argued that women have a different way of speaking from men, a way that both reflects and produces a subordinate position in society which is imposed on women by societal norms in order to keep women in their place (Lakoff, 1975) therefore they are assumed to be more polite than men who are superior to them (Lakoff, 1975; Brown, 1980; Tannen, 1991; Holmes, 1995). Accordingly, it has been claimed that women apologize more than men (Holmes, 1989; Tannen, 1996, 2001; Engel, 2001; Lazare, 2004).

Such claims are mostly based on investigations about language and politeness in western cultures while the notion of politeness might have a different meaning across different cultures. In addition, the studies on gender differences in the use of apologies have mostly taken gender as the only source of difference in the language of men and women while other social variables like social distance, social status, and age also seem to have a key role in the use of language.

The present study, therefore, intends to explore the effect of gender along with social status and social distance on the use of apologies in Persian, as a non-western culture with a unique system of interaction that is based on a constant evaluation of power relations to make strategic decisions for acting and speaking appropriately with the aim of achieving the maximum benefit with the minimum cost. Findings of this study may hopefully shed light on the apologetic behavior of Persian speakers, and also contribute to the existing theories of gender and language.

## 2. Literature Review

Although the effect of gender on apologies has been investigated by many researchers (Fraser, 1981; Schlenker and Darby, 1981; Holmes, 1989; Blum-Kulka et. al., 1989; Mattson Bean and Johnston, 1994, Tannen, 1994; Aijmer, 1995; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Tajvidi, 2000; Engel, 2001; Deutschmann, 2003; Lazare, 2004; Pejman Fard, 2004; Bataineh and Bataineh, 2005, 2006, 2008), there is still little consensus among the scholars in this regard.

Holmes (1989), and Tannen (1994) found wide gender differences in the apologetic behavior of native speakers of English in New Zealand and the United States respectively. Working on a corpus of apologies collected through written ethnographic observation, Holmes (1989) reported that women apologized and were apologized to significantly more than men. Tannen

(1994) also observed the same trend in a corpus of apologies recorded in work environments. On the other hand, Mattson Bean and Johnstone's (1994) examined the use of the apology forms during telephone interviews and reported that men apologized more than women during telephone interviews.

On the other hand, many other empirical studies have failed to confirm any gender differences in the use of this speech act in different languages (American English: Fraser, 1981; Schlenker and Darby' 1981, British English: Aijmer, 1995; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Deutschmann, 2003, Persian: Tajvidi, 2000; Pejman Fard, 2004) and thus it seems that as Schumann (2011: 2) puts it, "despite widespread acceptance of the stereotype that women apologize more than men do, there is little compelling evidence of a gender difference in apology behavior."

Further, other researchers (e.g., Cameron, 1995, 1996, 1997; Bergvall et al., 1996) have questioned the assertions about gender differences in apologies, arguing that viewing men and women in a dichotomized way not only ignores the diversity of speech within groups of women and groups of men but also ignores cultural differences and those that may result from other social variables such as class, age, and ethnicity and thus, as Freed (1995:55) declares, it serves to perpetuate stereotypes about male and female discourse.

Also, it has been argued that variation in the realization patterns of apologies might be subject to the effect of a variety of social factors, among which power and social distance, as well as their subsets like age and gender have been argued to be the most important ones (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989). A number of studies have also provided evidence for the effect of power and social distance on apologies (Fraser, 1981; Holmes, 1989, 1990; Vollmer and Olshtain, 1989; Olshtain, 1989; Afghari, 2007). Holmes (1989), for instance, reported that women apologized most to hearers of equal power while men apologized to women regardless of status, and women apologized most to female friends whereas men apologized most to female strangers.

Therefore, it seems that there is a need for further studies to investigate the effect of gender along with other social variables on apologies in different languages and cultures in order to find a more accurate picture of realization of this speech act that plays a key role in restoring interpersonal relationships. The present study intends to explore the effect of gender, social status, and social distance on apologies in Persian, as a non-western culture. More specifically, it attempts to find an answer to the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between men and women in the frequency of apologies they perform, or receive?
2. Does gender affect the use of apology strategies significantly in Persian?
3. Do men or women apologize more to men or women?
4. Do men and women tend to apologize for the same offences?
5. Do men or women apologize more to people of higher, equal, or lower status?

6. Do men or women apologize more to friends or strangers?

### 3. Methodology

The data for the present study come from a corpus of 500 apology exchanges collected through an ethnographic method of observation. This method was used by Manes and Wolfson (1981) as well as Holmes (1990) in their studies on apology speech act. As it has been explained in detail in previous papers published by the author and her colleagues (Shariati & Chamani, 2010; Chamani & Zareipur, 2010), the corpus was collected with the help of two assistants who were asked to write down the apologies in everyday situations like home, workplace, university, shop, street, outdoors, and even on the bus or taxi during a period of more than one year in some forms prepared beforehand for such a purpose. The forms included demographic information about interlocutors (gender, age, education, and occupation), contextual details (where, when, who apologized to whom, and why), and the exact words of the actual conversations (see Appendix) so the data was written down rather than recorded.

As it was not predictable how many apologies were going to be performed during a specific period of time, haphazard accidental sampling was used for data collection. The observers had to wait until apologies were performed to write them down. This means that the study was longitudinal, taking a period of over one year, and at the same time cross-sectional in that a team of observers did it simultaneously in different cities of Iran. For the ethics of research, the friends and relatives of the observers were informed that their apologies would be noted down as part of some research. However, the data were made anonymous both for those who were aware of our purpose and for others.

The collected data then was analyzed according to the framework provided by Olshtain and Cohen (1983). It is claimed that this model has been developed empirically and its universal applicability has been successfully tested on various languages (Olshtain, 1989). According to Olshtain and Cohen (1983) if the offender accepts the responsibility for the offense committed, s/he may select five possible strategies to apologize, which are as follows:

1. An expression of apology
  - A. An expression of regret, e.g., I'm sorry (mote?asefam)
  - B. An offer of apology, e.g., I apologize (ozr/ma?zerat mix âm)
  - C. A request for forgiveness, e.g., forgive me (bebaxšid)
2. An explanation or account of the situation, e.g., The bus was late (otobus dir kard).
3. An acknowledgement of responsibility
  - A. Accepting the blame, e.g., It was my fault (taqsire man bud).
  - B. Expressing self-deficiency, e.g., I was confused (man gij budam).
  - C. Recognizing the other person as deserving apology, e.g., you are right (haq b â šomâst).

D. Expressing lack of intent, e.g., I didn't mean to (manzuri nadâštam).

4. An offer of repair, e.g., I'll help you get up (komaket mikonam boland ši).

5. A promise of forbearance, e.g., It won't happen again (dige tekrâr nemiše).

However, if the offender rejects the need to apologize, s/he may not react at all; yet where s/he has a verbal reaction, it can be:

1. A denial of the need to apologize, e.g., There was no need for you to get insulted

2. A denial of responsibility

A. Not accepting the blame, e.g., it wasn't my fault.

B. Blaming the other participant, e.g., it's your own fault.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Before reporting the results, it seems necessary to give a brief account of the offenses that motivated apologies in the corpus as well as the age of interlocutors that seems to play an important role in apologizing. Then, the distribution of apologies will be described, and the effect of social status and social distance on the frequency of apologies will be explored among men and women.

##### 4.1 Offense Types

Analysis of the corpus revealed that 54% of apologies were real apologies performed in relation to the concept of the 'prototypical' apology (i.e. an expression of real regret for a serious offense). The remaining apologies occurred for either trivial offenses (37%) or they served other functions like showing gratitude or request (9%).

Table 1 categorizes the offense types that motivated the apologies in the corpus according to the Holmes' (1990:177) categories. It should be noted that this is not a vigorous classification of offense types in Persian and what presented here is neither comprehensive nor conclusive. However, it provides a useful indication of the range of offences in the data.

Table 1. Interaction of apologizer sex with offense type

Offense type	Apologizer sex			
	Female		Male	
	No.	%	No.	%
Inconvenience	92	36	85	34
Space	53	21	63	26
Talk	35	14	28	11
Time	17	7	24	10
Possessions	51	20	44	18
Social gaffe	5	2	3	1
<i>Total</i>	253	100	247	100

As Table 1 illustrates, some differences were observed between males and females in apologizing for different offense types, yet, they were too small to be statistically significant (a significance value of 0.54). The analysis of the data revealed that both men and women performed most apologies for the actions that had inconvenienced the addressee in some way, such as where the apologizer had failed to provide inadequate service, or requested information. At the same time, women apologized for this offense more than men, perhaps since women possess lower status in Iranian society than men, they are expected to provide good services, otherwise they will be questioned and blamed; at home they should provide good food and take care of family members, and in the workplace they should satisfy the boss or manager (who is usually a man).

By contrast, social gaffe called for the smallest proportion of apologies between the two genders. Although social gaffes were too small to show a specific tendency, it appears that females apologized for them more than males, perhaps because a respectful Iranian woman is not expected to belch in public, or it is likely that they did so less often than males in the corpus. Quite the opposite, Deutschmann (2003) found that in his data males apologized more for social gaffes than females do. This discrepancy might be due to the cultural differences between Iranian and British speakers, or the differences in the overall pattern of the data in these two studies.

Gender differences related to time offenses were also insignificant, yet males apologized for them more than females. One possible explanation is that in Iran, men are responsible for working and making money, as well as arranging or attending meetings, thus they are more likely to be late. In addition, since men are always busy with their job, they care more about time than females do. It is also important to whom you are making an apology for a time offense, to your boss or your little kid. Holmes's (1989) also reported that in her research men apologized for time offenses significantly more than women, suggesting that probably because men consider time as a very valuable commodity.

On the contrary, woman apologized for possession offenses more than men, possibly because in Iran, men works and deliver the money to their wives and women decide how to spend it, thus they are cautious not to destroy what they themselves or others possess.

Women also apologized more than men for talk offenses. One possible reason is that they are care about other people's feelings more than men do. On the other hand, there is a *myth* that says women talk more than men; probably, more talk includes more faults that obligates more apologies. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that power relations affect the way people talk, less powerful group should take more care of what they say to avoid consequences.

On the other hand, men apologized a little more than women for space intrusion. One possible explanation is that touching women other than mother, sister, aunt, daughter, and wife is considered a sin according to Islam. Iranian culture also heavily condemns intruding women as less powerful community in society. Committing such an offense may result in serious punishment or penalty from the offended woman's family, her relatives, stranger observers, or even police. On the other hand, nowadays, many teenagers or young men who are wandering around the streets, sometimes, intentionally intrude women for sexual ambitions, and then

perform a virtual apology in order to avoid the consequences while they would appreciate it, if some women intentionally or accidentally bump into, or fall on them. They would consider it as a favor rather than an offense.

Holmes (1989) and Deutschmann (2003), on the contrary, reported that females apologized for space offenses significantly more than men. The observed disparities might be the result of cultural differences in the sampled populations; what obligates the two genders to apologize in Iranian society might not be the same as in Western cultures like New Zealand and Britain.

#### 4.2 Age of Interlocutors

The interlocutors in the corpus were classified into 6 age groups (i.e., below 12; 13-19; 20-44; 45-64; and above 60) which are illustrated in Table 2 and Table 3. Significant age differences were observed in the apology rates in the corpus that is in line with previous studies on the effect of age on apologies (Deutschmann, 2003; Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

Table 2. Distribution of apologies and apologizer's gender and age

Apologizer Age groups	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
-12	17	6.9	7	2.8	24	4.8
13-19	46	18.6	68	26.9	114	22.8
20-44	170	68.8	172	68	342	68.4
45-64	12	4.9	5	2	17	3.4
65+	2	0.8	1	0.4	3	0.6
Total	247	100	253	100	500	100

Table 3. Distribution of apologies and apologizee's gender and age

Apologizee Age groups	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
-12	10	4	3	1	13	2
13-19	28	11	61	24	89	18
20-44	172	70	173	68	345	69
45-64	31	13	13	5	44	9
65+	5	2	4	2	9	2
Total	246	100	254	100	500	100

Analysis of the corpus revealed that 54% of apologies were real apologies performed in relation to the concept of the 'prototypical' apology (i.e. an expression of real regret for a serious offense). The remaining apologies occurred for either trivial offenses (37%) or they served other functions like showing gratitude or request (9%).

As Table 2 and Table 3 show, the speakers in the 20-44 age group performed and received the highest rate of apologies and no gender differences were observed in the use of apologies in this age group. The younger people also apologized more than older ones and as age increased the number of apologies decreased. This pattern reflects the social norms of Iranian culture that gives superiority to the older interlocutors and obligates the younger people to show more respect to them, no matter they are male or female, since it is believed that age brings wisdom, maturity, and integrity, thus it is accepted as an unwritten rule that the older is always right. For example, in the corpus there was a case in which some grandmother stepped on her grandson's toe, who was lying down on the floor, and he groaned in pain, she started blaming him for lying in her way and this was the grandson who made an apology in the end, not her.

In addition, in Iranian culture apologizing seems to be a sign of weakness and only people of lower status perform it to avoid the negative consequences, thus older people, especially traditional rural ones, do not apologize. However, the new generation of Iranians, who are living in global village and are in more contact with western culture, consider apology as an act of politeness that shows good manners of the apologizer. Therefore, they are more willing to apologize than their parents and grandparents.

#### 4.3 Gender of Interlocutors

In this corpus, no significant gender differences were observed in the distribution of apologies. Table 4 summarizes the apology patterns in the data.

Table 4. Distribution of apologies between males and females

Apologizer - Apologizee	No.	%
Female-Female	173	35
Female-Male	80	16
Male-Female	81	16
Male- Male	166	33
<i>Total</i>	500	100

As it shows, within 500 apology exchanges examined, men performed 49 % of apologies and received 49 % of them, while women gave 51% of apologies and received 51% of them. It is clear that, in this corpus, there was no significant difference in the rate of apologies performed (a significance level of 0.788), or received (a significance level of 0.721). This is in line with findings of the previous studies on apologies in Persian (Tajvidi, 2000; Pejman Fard, 2004).

Furthermore, it was revealed that males apologized to males more than females. Conversely, females apologized to females more than males, probably because in Iranian society there is less interaction between males and females, and some borders usually keep them away from each other. For example, there are separate educational settings for males and females; there are also separate places in transportation system for them. Consequently, fewer interactions occur between males and females which lead to fewer apologies between them.

These results are in line with other studies that reported no significant gender differences in using apologies while they do not support the previous research that suggest woman

apologize and are apologized to more than men, usually because women have an inferior status in society relative to men and thus they need to be more polite (Engel, 2001; Holmes, 1989; Lazare, 2004; Tannen, 1996; 2001). According to such argument, Iranian women should have shown a higher level of politeness than western women do as Iranian society is far more male dominant than western cultures.

#### 4.3.1 Apology Strategies and Gender of Apologizer

Table 5 shows the overall distribution of apology strategies among men and women in the corpus. Since in many cases a combination of apology strategies or sub-strategies was used to perform an apology, the total number of apology strategies in Table 5 is 856.

Table 5. Apology strategies used by males and females

Apology strategies	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
A. Explicit expression of apology				
1. Expression of regret (moteʔasefam)	5	1	9	2
2. Offer of apology (ozr/maʔzerat mixâm)	58	14	51	12
3. Request for forgiveness (bebaxšid)	152	35	165	39
4. Expression of shame (šarmandam)	32	7	28	7
Subtotal	247	57	253	60
*B. Explanation or account	48	11	31	7
C. Acknowledgement of responsibility				
1. Accepting the blame	11	3	7	1.66
2. Expressing self-deficiency	62	14	80	18.91
3. Expressing lack of intent	10	2	11	2.60
Subtotal	83	19	98	23
D. Offer of repair	33	8	30	7
*E. Promise of forbearance	22	5	11	3
Total	433	100	423	100

\* indicates the areas in which significant gender differences were observed

As Table 5 shows, there were little differences in the number of IFIDs used by men and women (a significance level of 0.509). Request for forgiveness (bebaxšid) was the most frequent IFID and expression of regret (moteʔasefam) was the least frequent one among the two genders. Expression of shame (šarmandam) was a new IFID faced in the corpus that seems to be quite popular as a routine formula for making apologies in Persian. It has not been reported as an IFID in other investigated languages.

However, there were significant differences between men and women in the use of explanation (a significance level of 0.02). Men provided more explanations than women perhaps because providing explanations requires stronger cognitive abilities and males seem to have such abilities or probably because men feel more responsibility to convince the hearer that they did not mean any offense or harm. The gender differences in acknowledging the responsibility were too small to be significant (a significance level of 0.334). Distribution

of offer of repair also showed no significant differences (a significance level of 0.613).

Whereas, significant gender differences were observed in the use of promise of forbearance (a significance level of 0.04). Males employed this strategy more than females perhaps because males possess a higher status in Iranian society, they can make and fulfill their promises easier than females do or probably because they need to promise for forbearance in order to maintain their relationship, especially with women. There is a Persian proverb that says “A real man never breaks his promises”. Besides, as Holmes (1990) mentioned, promise of forbearance is used in weightier apologies. Thus, it seems that males evaluate offenses and the need to apologize differently from females and consequently they use this strategy more than females.

Overall, it appears that Persian males and females use the same set of apology strategies with relatively the same proportions while they have preferences in the use of some apology strategies or sub-strategies.

#### 4.3.2 Apology Strategies and Gender of Apologizee

Gender differences in receiving apologies were also examined in the corpus. Table 6 illustrates the apology strategies received by men and women. As it shows, the gender differences in receiving IFIDs were not statistically significant (a significance level of 0.281). The overall proportion of explanations received by males and females was almost identical and the differences were too small to be significant (a significance level of 0.281). In addition, there were little differences in the number of times that responsibility was acknowledged by men and women, yet they were not significant (a significance level of 0.20). Also, gender differences in receiving offer of repair were not significant (a significance level of 0.418), and there were no significant gender differences in receiving promise of forbearance (a significance level of 0.654).

Table 6. Apology strategies received by males and females

Apology strategy	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
A. Explicit expression of apology				
1. Expression of regret (moteʔasefam)	5	1	9	2
2. Offer of apology (ozr/maʔzerat mixâm)	49	12	60	14
3. Request for forgiveness (bebaxšid)	157	37	160	37
4. Expression of shame (šarmandam)	35	8	25	6
subtotal	246	58	254	59
B. Explanation or account	46	11	33	7
C. Acknowledgement of responsibility				
1. Accepting the blame	11	3	7	2
2. Expressing self-deficiency	62	15	80	18
3. Expressing lack of intent	8	2	13	3
subtotal	81	20	100	23
D. Offer of repair	34	8	29	7

E. Promise of forbearance	15	3	18	4
Total	422	100	434	100

Besides, males and females combined apology strategies with identical patterns and there were not significant differences between them in this regard (a significance level of 0.313). Further, no significant gender differences were observed in the use of these combination patterns for males and females (a significance level of 0.862).

#### 4.4 Relationship between Participants

Research has revealed that the choice of apology strategies is related to contextual factors like social distance and social power between participants, as well as severity of offense (Fraser, 1981; Blum-Kulka et. al., 1989; Vollmer and Olshtain, 1989; Holmes, 1989, 1990; Obeng, 1999).

According to Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory, any increase in the social distance between interlocutors will result in a power differential between speaker and hearer and more seriously assessment of the face threatening act. However, Wolfson's (1988) bulge theory proposes that strangers and intimates are brief, while, friends and other acquaintances are most likely to get involved in long negotiations with multiple repetitions, extensive elaborations, and a wide variety of semantic formulas. Therefore, it is interesting to find out whether there is a significant gender differences in the distribution of apologies with respect to the power and social distance between participants. The following sections consider these differences.

##### 4.4.1 Social Distance

In order to find the effect of social distance on the apology behavior of males and females, three categories were used to classify the data: Intimates: very close friends or intimates like spouses, partners, and family members; Friends: friends or colleagues; Strangers: distant acquaintances or strangers (Holmes, 1989, 1990).

The analysis of the data revealed significant differences between males and females in the use of apologies with intimates, friends, and strangers (a significance level of 0.001). As Table 7 shows, both males and females apologized to strangers most frequently. Yet, males apologized to strangers more than females. On the other hand, females apologized to friends and intimates more than males. It was also found that apologies occurred with the highest frequency in the interaction between male strangers, while, they were exchanged with the lowest frequency between male friends.

Table 7. Gender of apologizer by relative distance of apologizee

Distance	Apologizer			
	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Intimates	64	26	76	30
Friends	48	19	81	32

Strangers	135	55	96	38
Total	247	100	253	100

Further analysis also revealed that the difference between males and females in the use of apologies is sensitive to the gender of apologizee. As Table 8 demonstrates, men apologized most to men strangers, while the largest proportion of female apologies are directed to female friends.

Table 8. Gender of apologizer by relative distance of apologizee

Apologizee	Distance	Apologizer			
		Male		Female	
		No.	%	No.	%
Male	Intimates	34	14	25	10
	Friends	43	17	9	4
	Strangers	89	36	46	19
Total		166	67	80	33
Female	Intimates	30	12	51	20
	Friends	5	2	72	28
	Strangers	46	18	50	20
Total		81	32	173	68

A significant difference (a significance level of 0.002) was also found in the frequency of apologies received by males and females with different degrees of distance between them. As Table 8 shows, apologies were used for both men and women with relatively the same pattern. Strangers are apologized the most and friends are apologized the least. Male strangers are apologized more than female strangers. Yet, female intimates and friends receive more apologies than male intimates and friends.

#### 4.4.2 Relative Power

Determining the relative power of interlocutors in an interaction was not an easy task because many factors like relative socio-economic status, age, social class, gender, experience, and knowledge are involved in particular contexts that affect power relations between participants. For instance, in Iranian culture parents possess more power than their children. However, specific situations were faced in the corpus in which the children obviously had authority over their parents because of their gender or economic status.

In the present study, Brown and Levinson's (1978: 77) definition has been taken as a criterion for determining power relations. They have defined power as "the degree to which H (Hearer) can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation at the expense of S's (Speaker) plans and self-evaluation". Three categories were used to classify the data: Upward-apology was made to person with more power; Equal- apology was made to person of equal power; and Downward- apology was made to person with less power.

As Table 9 shows, most apologies occurred between equals, however, both genders directed more apologies upwards than downwards and there was a significant difference between males and females in the use of apologies for people with equal and unequal power. Females apologized to equals and upwards more than males. Correspondingly, women used fewer apologies to downwards than men.

Table 9. Gender of apologizer by relative power of apologizee

Power	Apologizer			
	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
Upward	79	32	107	42
Equal	106	43	117	46
Downward	62	25	29	12
Total	247	100	253	100

Further analysis revealed that there was a significant difference between males and females in receiving apologies in the interaction with equals and un-equals. Table 10 illustrates distribution of apologies between the two genders by relative power and gender of apologizee.

Table 10. Gender of apologizer by relative power and gender of apologizee

Apologizer	Power	Apologizee			
		Male		Female	
		No.	%	No.	%
Male	Upward	54	22	25	10
	Equal	87	35	19	8
	Downward	25	10	37	15
Total		166	67	81	33
Female	Upward	60	24	47	18
	Equal	8	3	109	43
	Downward	12	5	17	7
Total		80	32	173	68

As Table 10 shows men received fewer apologies than women, regardless of their relative power. Males directed most apologies to males who were their equals and fewest ones to females of equal status. On the other hand, women apologized to equal women most frequently, yet they used the fewest apologies for equal men.

In the interaction with upwards, both genders apologized to males more than females and women apologized more than men. With equals, males apologized more to males and females apologized more to females, whereas, females apologized more than males. With downwards, both genders apologized to females more than males. Yet, males apologized more than females.

Thus it seems that men's apology behavior confirms to Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987)

model of politeness in one aspect: the frequency of men's apologies is sensitive to increased social distance. However, increased power does not result in performing more apologies by men. On the other hand, women's apology behavior seems to conform closely to Wolfson's (1988) bulge theory. Females apologized most frequently to equal friends. Therefore, as Holmes (1989) mentioned males and females may assume different functions for apologies.

Another possible interpretation is that, in Iran, males are in more contact with male strangers in workplace or public places while females spend their time more with their female friends. Thus, men and women apply more negative politeness strategies to maintain or restore social harmony with those who are more important to them.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study investigated gender differences in the realization patterns of apology speech act, the offense types that obligated an apology between men and women, as well as the effect of social variables of power and social distance on the distribution of apologies among male and female native speakers of Persian. It was based on the analysis of 500 apology exchanges, collected through some written ethnographic method of observation.

In this corpus, no significant gender differences were observed in the rate of apologies or the offense types that motivated apologies while gender of apologizer significantly affected the use of some apology strategies, i.e. explanation and promise of forbearance. Also, more apologies were exchanged in male-male, and female-female interactions.

Further, relative power, social distance, and age affected the use of apologies between males and females significantly. Males apologized to male strangers with the highest frequency while females exchanged most apologies with their female friends. Besides, both genders apologized more to equals; males to equal males, and females to equal females while the highest rate of apologies was directed to equal females. In the interaction with upwards, both males and females apologized more to males, while females apologized more than males. With downwards, both genders apologized more to women. Most apologies were also both performed and received by young interlocutors. Therefore, it seems that, at least in Persian, other social variables have a more important role in realization of apologies than gender.

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Language or accent:

2. Characteristics of the person who is apologized:

Age:

Gender:

Degree:

Occupation:

Language or accent:

3. The relationship between the interlocutors:

The Place in which apology occurs:

Date:

The reason for apologizing:

4. The exact words of apology exchange:

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