

A LINGUISTIC EXPLORATION OF APOLOGY IN TURKISH AND ENGLISH

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Abstract: *The aim of this study is to examine the usage of speech act of apology by Turkish and native speakers of English. The association between politeness and culture and culture in interactions has been at the center of pragmatics for a long time. The main focus of this paper will be the analysis of the distinctions between apology strategies in Turkish and English. By means of this comparison of apologies in these two languages, it is attempted to gain more insights into the distinctions and/or similarities in terms of the strategies employed by the speakers in daily language. To this end, the function of apologies both in Turkish and English from the cross-cultural and socio-pragmatic perspectives will be addressed.*

The study reveals that the apologetic speech employed in Turkish conforms to some patterns in English. On the other hand, distinctive features exist in both languages due to cultural variations. The impact of first language and the cultural background on speakers can be one of the leading factors for those discrepancies.

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Speech acts, Apology, linguistics, culture*

Türkçe ve İngilizcede Özür Dileme ile İlgili Dilsel Bir Araştırma

Öz: *Bu çalışmanın amacı, özür dileme söz edimlerinin anadili Türkçe ve İngilizce olan kişiler tarafından kullanımını incelemektir. Nezaket ile kültür arasındaki ilişki, ayrıca kültürlerin birbirleri ile etkileşimi uzun süredir pragmatikğin merkezinde yer almaktadır. Bu makalenin ana odak noktası ise Türkçe ve İngilizce özür dileme stratejileri arasındaki farklılıkların analizi olacaktır. Bu iki dildeki özür dileme söz edimlerinin karşılaştırılması sayesinde konuşmacıların günlük dilde kullandıkları stratejiler açısından farklılıklar ve/veya benzerlikler hakkında daha fazla fikir edinilecektir. Bu bağlamda, kültürler arası ve sosyo-pragmatik perspektiflerden hem Türkçe hem de İngilizce olarak özür dilemenin işlevi ele alınacaktır.*

Çalışma, Türkçede kullanılan özür dileme söylemlerinin İngilizcedeki bazı kalıplara uygun olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Öte yandan, kültürel farklılıklar nedeniyle her iki dilde de ayırt edici özellikler vardır. Ana dilin ve kültürel arka planın konuşmacılar üzerindeki etkisi, bu farklılıkların önde gelen unsurlarından biri olabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Pragmatik, Söz edimleri, Özür dileme, dilbilim, kültür*

INTRODUCTION

As the roots of human language remain a mystery, it is agreed by linguists that the first humans, the homo sapiens, used some spoken language. Thus, any attempt to define the language definitely encounters with various multi-disciplined fields such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy and so on. However, the language itself, having been used as a tool, though in different versions, since the dawn of the civilization has had a huge impact with conveying messages and, expressing oneself with thought and feelings. Language as a set of symbols and common sounds functions in two fundamental ways, both of which are intimately linked to culture: a) through

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what it says or what it refers to as an encoded sign (semantics), and through what it does as an action in the context (pragmatics). Various explanations can be given to define the language nearly with the same meanings. The American linguists Gittens formulated the following definition:

“A **language** is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates.” Any succinct definition of **language** makes a number of presuppositions and begs a number of questions. The first, for example, puts excessive weight on “thought,” and the second uses “arbitrary” in a specialized, though legitimate, way (2019: 71-72).

Julie S. Amberg and Deborah J. Vause (2010: 5) defines the language as “language is a rule-based system of signs which is rule-based and which usually makes people think of other kinds of situations where rules are enforced by a particular authority. Halvor Eifring & Rolf Theil (2015: 2) defines language as follows:

Human beings can communicate with each other. We are able to exchange knowledge, beliefs, opinions, wishes, threats, commands, thanks, promises, declarations, feelings – only our imagination sets limits. We can laugh to express amusement, happiness, or disrespect, we can smile to express amusement, pleasure, approval, or bitter feelings, we can shriek to express anger, excitement, or fear, we can clench our fists to express determination, anger or a threat, we can raise our eyebrows to express surprise or disapproval, and so on, but our system of communication before anything else is language.

According Cohen and Olshtain (1993: 34), what makes selecting appropriate strategies more complex is that apology and other speech acts are conditioned by a host of social, cultural, situational, and personal factors.

According to Ruth Benedict (1949), culture is what binds (people) together. Culture is all the accepted and patterned ways of behavior of a given people such as behaviors, taboos, folklore, clothing, music and so on. A very broad term, concept or word to be handled is without any doubt is that “culture” has various meanings and usages. Some people regard culture as practices, whereas the others as information. While the practice is about the usage of a specific learned code in the society or on the language, the information is having it as static information stored and resorted to it when required. Because it clearly reveals itself both in life and in language, where the message or the meta-message are conveyed especially through the latter. Hence, it has a social point, not isolated but as a product of the society. It has a growing or developmental part as it might change through social interaction in either developing or decreasing ways. Another point is that culture is shared through customs, values, beliefs, traditions or knowledge. Moreover, it is learned through behaviours consciously or unconsciously.

The learning especially takes place with repetition or at a place where it occurs. Besides, it is transmitted from one generation to another. It might change because of outside effects; still the collective memory will help people to relate it with its origin. Then it can lead us to relate it with its adaptive aspect. A culture to be varied or unique might be its most striking aspect of all. Cultures are different from each other even in the same culture it would change from time to time and place to place.

This paper’s immediate concern is the concept of “Language socialization” developed by Ochs and Schieffelin in the early 1980s. It refers to the two intertwined competent members of their speech communities, i.e., “socialization through the use of

language and socialization to use language” (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986: 163). The first half of this formulation expresses the notion that individuals acquire socio-cultural knowledge, skills and values by witnessing and participating in verbal interactions and speech routines while the second half argues that through engagement in social interaction individuals acquire not only necessary knowledge of how to communicate thoughts and information (Chomsky’s “linguistic competence”) but also many more specific conversational resources for signaling who they are, how they feel and what they want to accomplish, i.e. how to use it in contextually appropriate ways (Hyme’s term “communicative competence”). In terms of such relatedness of language and culture, we first restrict the scope of the paradigm of this relationship and develop an appropriate methodology (with adequate assumption attached) and then move on to examine the socialization of the assigned issues in different languages.

Our restriction goes along the line of *linguo-cultural analysis of communicating in English and Turkish* involving the following issues:

- 1-Culture-based communicative behaviors
- 2-Ways of looking at apologies in English and Turkish
5. Teaching culture through language

Having discussed the different traditional frameworks for speech acts in general, it will now be proceeded to look in particular at the speech act of apology. In the next section, empirical research on apologies including inter-language and cross-cultural studies will be carried out.

Theoretical Background

Speech acts which is a subfield of pragmatics, can be defined as the action performed by means of utterances, i.e. The speech acts are the essential units of human communication. Here, a brief review of the traditional speech act will be provided, and the focus will be on Austin’s (1962) theory of speech acts, Searle’s (1979) theory, and Grice’s (1975) conversational implicatures.

It is axiomatic that Austin’s (1962) theory of speech acts, Searle’s (1979) revised taxonomy of Austin’s categorization system of speech acts and Gricean (1975) pragmatic theory of conversational implicature constitute the classical contributions to the study of speech acts within the realm of philosophy, and subsequently that of pragmatics.

Apology is a speech act that has received attention from various researchers from diverse disciplines. According to Holmes (1995), an apology is a polite speech act in which the apologizer heals the offence assuming responsibility and, as a consequence, aims to restore social relations between interlocutors. It was Austin who first introduced Speech act theory (1962) focusing that language is employed not only to say something but also to do something. Years later, this theory was developed by Searle (1969) who defines speech acts as the basic unit of communication in which the speaker may express more than he/she actually says. To express different attitudes, the speaker uses a kind of speech act in accordance to the context and his/her communicative intention –i.e. illocutionary force. Each speech act corresponds to the type of attitude of the speaker. For example, to express a statement, the speaker performs a belief, to express his/her annoyance, the speaker performs a complaint or if the speaker wants to express regret, he/she performs an apology. As a part of communication, the success of a speech act is determined by the recognition of the

hearer of the speaker's communicative intention. According to Schmidt and Richards (1980) speech acts are all the actions performed through speaking including attitude, gestures, discourse and context during communication. Further, they define speech acts as actions performed by utterances that are generally given more specific labels, such as complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, request or apology.

According to Austin's theory (1962), there are three kinds of meaning: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act. The locutionary act is the very act of the speaker saying something to someone. For example, if the speaker says, "that cake looks delicious." This utterance has the literal meaning of "that cake looks delicious". The illocutionary act concerns the aim of the speaker to fulfil the social function of what is said. In other words, when the speaker says something, he/she expresses an utterance with some function in mind. As a result, the speaker may express more than the literal meaning of the utterances. Therefore, "that cake looks delicious" can be interpreted as an indirect request for someone to be offered a slice of cake. The perlocutionary act involves the effect the speaker wants to cause over the hearer. Thus, the utterance "that cake looks delicious" can result in the hearer getting a slice of cake.

METHODOLOGY

Resting heavily on earlier anthropological studies of "socialization" (Mead 1974), Ochs-Schieffelin's (1984) "Language socialization" considerably broadened the capacity of these two processes and interpreted socialization as a dynamic and language-rich process, and acquisition of communicative competence as a culturally coded experience. Intrinsic to the framework of Language socialization (which shares with linguistic anthropology such common issues as the relationship between linguistic practice cultural knowledge and societal structure) is the notion that language both encodes culture and is employed by culture in contextually sensible ways-what Silverstein (2004) refers to as the "Language-culture nexus." Accordingly, this methodology highlights the fact children acquire not only linguistic resources and the ability to use them but also a host of cultural knowledge which on the one hand facilitates the former and on the other hand is itself learned via discourse.

Assumptions

The strategy that "Language structure is the product of our interaction with the world around us and the way we build discourses and develop linguistic categories can immediately be derived from the way we experience our environment and use that experience in species." Specific communication (Heine 1997: 3) is based on the following assumptions:

1. The main function of language is to convey meaning and the forms used for expressing meanings are motivated rather than arbitrary. Since the motivation for using and developing language are external to language structure, external explanations of language are more powerful than internal ones. (Heine 1997: 3)
2. Language is not a simple reflection of meaning. Content alone is not sufficient to explain why languages look the way they do (Bates and Mac Whinney 1987: 7)
3. Members of various discourse communities encode their experience not only by cutting up reality in different ways. The encoding of experience

also differs in the nature of cultural associations evoked by different linguistic signs.

4. Differences among the languages are due to the semantic meanings attributed to different encoding by language. Using communities: and it is just these meanings that make the linguistic sign into a cultural sign. (Kramsch 2008: 17-18)

5. Culture is not simply a power, something to which social events, behaviours institutions or processes can be casually attributed; it is a context something within which they can be intelligibly ...described (Geertz 1973: 14).

Some of these assumptions are perhaps trivial or unusual and still others are hard to reconcile with widely held views of mainstream linguistic. A few elucidating remarks are therefore in order:

Assumption 1 is based on the observation that when using language, people are worried about how to encode the meanings they want to communicate is the best way possible. This suggests that first; language is goal-oriented and purposive. Second, linguistic form tends to adopt not only to the meaning it expresses, but also to the context and not normally the other way around.

The 2nd part of 1st assumption might seem to contradict one of the basic axioms of post-Saussurean linguistics. However, there are a number of contrasting senses in which the notions of arbitrariness and motivation can be used. E.g.

1 (a) They keep the money

(b) They complaining (the examples are from Heine 1997: 4)

The item “keep” in (1) is associated with two different morpho-syntactic structures and two different meanings: in 1 (a) it functions as a main verb and has the lexical semantics of an action verb, while it is commonly described as an auxiliary verb that expresses aspectual notions in 1(b).

One can decide that phonological identity of “keep” in 1(a) and 1(b) is coincidental or arbitrary hence unmotivated. But shared semantic features of syntactic rules in (a) and 1(b) suggest the existence of a linguistically definable motivated relationship.

Arising from this concept of understanding “Language / Culture” interrelationship, it is obvious that it requires taking into account not only the role of each of them in our daily interactions; it is also essential to specify how and to what extent they are “responsible” for the way we make sense of the world. For this purpose, we think reasonable to consider the above-mentioned aspects of our life in terms of how linguo-cultural rules behave in different languages.

CULTURE-BASED COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIORS

This part of the paper will compare the British English and Turkish. Turks demonstrate their cultural outlook behaving in different ways in identical social situations. Communicative situations in everyday life reflect one's culture values and characters. An individual deal with the social situations presented to him according to what is accepted by his society and what is appropriate for his culture. English speaking cultures (Americans and British) have a distinctive attitude and manner while communicating with each other that is often unusual to Turks. These include oppressions, religion, Customs, Traditions, lifestyle, and so on. As a result of these

cultural effects Turks and the British English Nations developed specific characteristic of communication.

Communicative situations that include other social services also differ across these cultures. In conclusion to interpret properly and successfully communicate across cultures and avoid misunderstandings, it is necessary to gain knowledge of each other's cultures, respect different beliefs and be tolerant of each other's differences.

Ways of Looking of Some Expressions in English and Turkish

For Lakoff (2003: 201) they (apologies) are hard to identify, define or categorize, a difficulty that arises directly out of the functions they perform". Olshtain maintains that "an apology is basically a speech act which is intended to provide support for the H (hearer) who was actually or potentially malaffected by a violation X. In the decision to carry out the verbal apology, the S (speaker) is willing to humiliate himself or herself to some extent and to admit fault and responsibility for X. (1989: 156).

Some languages share the same conventions for apologies "I'm sorry", "I beg your pardon" in English and "Üzgünüm", "Özür dilerim," "Pardon" in Turkish, which is functionally equivalent and have similar meanings. Regarding the variety of definitions of apology, distinct types of apology strategies are available. According to Olshtain and Cohen (1983: 15) apology strategies can be classified into five main categories, which are: explanation, expression of apology, promise of non-recurrence, acknowledgement of responsibility, and offer of repair. To elaborate, for expression of apology "Özür dilerim", "Üzgünüm", "Pardon" ("Sorry", "Pardon"), b) acceptance of responsibility "Haklısın", "Benim hatamdı." ("You are right", "It's entirely my fault"), c) offer of repair "Zararını ödeyebilirim", "Sizi hastaneye götüreyim" ("Let me pay for it", "I'll take you to a hospital"), d) promise of forbearance "Bir daha olmaz" ("I'll never do it again"), e) an explanation of the situation (quoted in Cetinavci 2012: 74). Fraser, (1981: 17) however, come up with nine strategies, i.e. :requesting the acceptance of the given apology, announcing that apology is forthcoming through clauses, stating the offender's obligation to apology with words like "I must apologize", offering to apologize, expressing regret for the offense through the use of intensifiers, acknowledging responsibility for the act, requesting forgiveness for the offense, promising forbearance from a similar offending act, and offering redress to show that the offender really regrets the offense with offers.

With their rich etiquette systems, both English and Turkish system of apologies can refer to various attitudinal aspects of communications:

- 1) I admit I ate the hamster (Responsibility)
- 2) It was wrong of me to eat the hamster / I shouldn't have eaten the hamster (wrongdoing/ regretting)
- 3) Can you find it in your heart to forgive me for eating the hamster? (Wish/request for forgiveness,
- 4) I'll never eat a hamster again as long as I live (abjuration of bad behaviour)
- 5) I'm sorry that I ate the hamster (apology)
- 6) I'm sorry Mr Smith isn't available today (an expression of non-responsible sympathy)
- 7) Well I'm sorry! But you don't know what you are talking about (a denial that an apology is in order (the examples are from Lakoff (2003: 202)

As can be seen in the analysis given above, the functions as responsibility, wrongdoing, regretting, wish, request for forgiveness, abjuration of bad behavior, expression of non-responsible sympathy can be given to express diverse functional semantically messages. With just the change of a few words, the meaning of the sentence might easily can be seen in the sentence focusing on various points with specific functions.

Teaching Culture Through Culture

All the above analyses of how culture has been represented in language allow us to assume that culture is responsible for the way we make sense of the world. It provides us with the rules that guide us through our lives inside our societies. As Johnson and Rinvolutri (2010: 9) state, it is our cultures due to which we feel safe in different zones of our societies because we know exactly what is expected of us and how we should behave in any given situation, but the rules and laws of our culture can be challenged once we step into another culture and in that case we may fall into the trap, which, in turn promotes dangerous essentialist thinking, differences between cultures create and uphold stereotypes and maintain an “us versus them” standpoint (Johnson and Rinvolutri 2010: 7) yet, knowledge of cultural codes builds cultural competence which should be a constituent part of any educational process. Since language is an important part of culture, so learning language is like learning culture, so learning language is like learning culture.

Communication specialists define culture as a complex frame of reference that involves traditions, beliefs, values, symbols, norms and meanings that are shared by interacting members of a community. As an integral part of language learning, culture affects all the aspects of learning. Knowledge of languages is the basic and direct way to approach a culture.

CONCLUSION

In this study it was aimed to find the similarities and differences between the English native speakers and Turkish non-native speakers in terms of using apology in English. According to the study we have implemented, we are likely to come to the point where we can see the precise correlation of language and culture in all walks of life particularly in language culture by applying teaching culture through culture in which the learner might find himself/herself in a safe area where students are motivated for learning. Hence, every word in a language systematizes the semantical tools of language discourse in descriptive forms. That systematized word order is not just the sentence but the expressions of the language with a meaningful syntactic messages.

With this in mind, we can summarize with the following statements:

1. We have dealt with culture as an indispensable attribute of our life, the integral part of which, in turn, is the language through which we communicate, recognize and represent our world.
2. We maintain that language teaching provides a significant set of channels for systematic investigation and acquiring knowledge of the other foreign cultures.
3. Our goal here has been to demonstrate that a theoretically well-founded methodology of teaching/learning culture through language is both possible and necessary.
4. We have also sketched the complex theoretical framework needed to analyze cultural aspects of communicative situations of both languages and

provided a glimpse of the many ways in which cognitive and cultural conventions of different nations are produced in different languages.

Other studies in both cultures should consider socio-pragmatics aspect of apology strategies. Besides, the effect of gender differences on the act of apologizing should also be addressed.

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