Social distance and speech behavior: A case of Pakistani English speakers’ apology responses

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Abstract: This study investigates the production and perception of apology responses (ARs) of English-using Pakistanis (L2), British English speakers (Native speakers of the target language), and Pakistani Urdu speaker (L1) under the influence of social distance variables. For data collection, two instruments are used; a discourse completion test (DCT in English and Urdu) and a scale response questionnaire (SRQ in English and Urdu). Findings signal that three groups tend to use more Acceptance strategies with the interlocutors of social distance than the close and neutral level respondents, moreover, close and distant level participants tend to favor the use of Acknowledgement ARs than neutral social distance participants, besides, the Evasion category demonstrates that BritE speakers of close social distance prefer the use of Evasion (EV) ARs more often than EuP and PakU. Further, this study also suggests that speakers from Pakistan use more apology strategies under the influence of social distance variables. The study extends the findings of our previous work in the direction of future research in similar fields.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Our research focuses on the investigation of apology responses under the influence of social distance variables. We view the social distance scale as a continuum, we would find complete strangers at one extreme and intimates at the other end, with friends and acquaintances nearer to the middle. Findings signal that three groups tend to use more Acceptance strategies with the interlocutors of social distance than the close and neutral levels respondents, moreover, close and distant level participants tend to favor the use of Acknowledgement ARs than neutral social distance participants, besides, the Evasion category demonstrates that BritE speakers of close social distance prefer the use of Evasion ARs more often than EuP and PakU. Further, at neutral and distant levels, three groups tend to use a similar proportion of EV strategies. The least number of ARs interacting with social distance factor is used in Rejection category.
at neutral and distant levels, three groups tend to use a similar proportion of EV strategies. The least number of ARs interacting with social distance factor is used in Rejection category. The close social distance level participants of three groups (EuP, BritE, and PakU) tend to prefer the use of more Rejection strategies than the participants of neutral and distant social distance levels. The SRQ results indicate the operation of negative pragmatic transfer where English-using Pakistanis have assigned the similar values in Situation 1 and Situation 4 as the PakU group participants have allocated. Generally, both EuP and PakU group approximated the target culture’s sociopragmatic knowledge, both groups assessed the speaker’s close and distant social relation quite significantly equal a pattern that indicates development towards the target culture’s sociopragmatic norms while still under the influence of the L1.

Subjects: Arts & Humanities; Humanities; Cultural Studies; Language & Literature; Language & Linguistics; Language Teaching & Learning

Keywords: Apology acceptance strategies; influence of L1; social distance variables; negative pragmatic transfer; sociopragmatic knowledge

1. Introduction

Hymes (1971) argued that communicative competence requires going beyond the knowledge of grammar and lexicon to include knowing what to say, how to say it, and when to say it to whom. Since then, later models of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980) have situatuated pragmatic competence as a critical component of communicative language ability because of its vital role in providing second language (L2) learners with the ability to communicate effectively in real-life social contexts. According to Leech (2016), pragmatic competence includes two types of knowledge—pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. The former is concerned with knowing “the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions” (Leech, 2016, p. 11), while the latter focuses on the influence of social and contextual factors on our linguistic choices. L2 pragmatics, a sub-field of second language acquisition (SLA), investigates how L2 learners develop knowledge of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, and what factors affect the process of development (e.g., target language experiences, proficiency, and instruction) (Adams & Kampf, 2020; Cohen, 2020; McConachy, 2019; Shakki et al., 2020; Taguchi, 2019; Taguchi & Kim, 2018; Taguchi & Roever, 2017).

Over the last four decades, speech acts have been a major focus of research on L2 pragmatics (Alerwi & Alzahrani, 2020; Chang & Ren, 2020; Tsoumou, 2020). Among the speech acts studied (e.g., apologies, refusals, requests, congratulations, compliments), apology responses (ARs) have attracted much interest due to their face-threatening nature. Because inappropriate apology responses could “lead to unintended offense and communication breakdown” (Dhami, 2016, p. 117), ARs have attracted much research interest from scholars in L2 pragmatics (e.g., Saleem et al., 2020; Waluyo, 2017; Wu & Wang, 2016).

The current study investigates the production and perception of the apology response speech act of English-using Pakistanis (EuP), Pakistani Urdu speakers (PakU) compared to British English speakers (BritE). The study examines pragmatic transfer in the production and perception of ARs from the first language (L1 henceforth) to second language (L2 henceforth). The current investigation, specifically, examines how the three groups of participants with different social distance categories perceive the context-internal variables. Since recognizing the interlocutor’s social distance appropriately is very crucial for the speaker to be able to produce the
most appropriate and suitable way while interacting with others who have different cultural backgrounds.

In the present study, social distance variable is divided into three categories or levels (close/familiar, neutral/intimates, and distant/strangers). The first category involves those who have close social distance and the second category involving those who have neutral social distance while the third category involves those who have distant social relation (Al Masaeed et al., 2020; Danziger, 2020; Nilsson et al., 2020).

2. Literature review

Among the speech acts that people engage in daily life situations, apology response speech act is frequently used and not much researched (except a few studies) since it functions as a remedial for restoring and maintaining harmony between the speaker and the hearer (Saleem & Anjum, 2018; Waluyo, 2017; Wu & Wang, 2016). Apology responses are expected from people who are offended and especially when they face the violation of social and cultural norms (Alerwi & Alzahrani, 2020). Apology response has not received a great amount of attention in the field of sociolinguistics because apology speech act has been given much space without giving much importance to the victim's possible reaction. This attention is raised in the current study due to their significant importance as a remedial interchange which aims to re-establish the social harmony after a real or virtual offense has been performed (Derakhshan et al., 2020; Pourmousavai & Zenouzagh, 2020). Su (2020) defines an apology response as “a speech act which is intended to provide support for the hearer who actually apologizes as a result of an offense” (p. 16).

Social distance has been studied as an important sociolinguistic variable in the analysis of speech behavior (Chang & Ren, 2020) within speech act and politeness theories. The concept, in its simplest form, is a measure of the degree of friendship/intimacy (or absence thereof) between interlocutors (see Eelen, 2014; Locher & Watts, 2005; Loewen et al., 2020). Social distance is one of the foremost factors that determines the way in which interlocutors converse precisely because it is an important determinant of the degree of comfort or politeness/dereference in a verbal exchange. This, in turn, determines the constraints felt and the liberties taken in speech exchanges (Koppen et al., 2017; Sharqawi & Anthony, 2019). Regarding specific speech acts, there are those that are used most often among friends and acquaintances (e.g., compliments) and others that are rarely seen among this group (e.g., expressions of disapproval).

In research on speech behavior, the social distance variable has perhaps been most extensively explored in the work of Nessa Wolfson (1989; as cited in Tsoumou, 2020). Wolfson’s (1989) empirical and theoretical work derives from her in-depth study of the two speech acts, invitations, and compliments. Her findings on these two speech acts indicate that they are used as social strategies with the goal of opening conversations, establishing points of commonality, affirming or reaffirming solidarity, and deepening friendships. According to Taguchi (2018), interlocutors who are already acquainted have the greatest likelihood of developing a friendship (closing the social distance gap) based on such solidarity-establishing speech behaviors as compliments and invitations.

In Taguchi’s (2018) analysis of the use of requests and invitations, both appeared in abundance among friends and acquaintances but were infrequent among either strangers or intimates. To explain more clearly, if we view the social distance scale as a continuum, we would find complete strangers at one extreme and intimates at the other end, with friends and acquaintances nearer to the middle. The categories of “strangers”, “friends”, and “intimates” are not discrete categories but are points along this continuum. These three principal points along the continuum are highlighted in the present study in order to achieve consistency with other speech act research that has studied the social distance variable. The work of Li et al. (2019) as well as that of Taguchi and Li
(2020), Culpeper et al. (2018) and others used these broad categories of social distance relationships in their data analysis.

3. Methodology
This data-oriented study is based on a quantitative approach to investigate the apology responses of English-using Pakistanis, British English and Pakistani Urdu speakers in interactive situations. For data collection, a Discourse Completion Test (DCT, see Appendix A) and a scale response questionnaire (SRQ, see Appendix B), having 06 items, was adopted from Thijittang (2010) and Al-Momani (2009). We personally explained and administered the DCT and SRQ. All participant responses were analyzed using (SPSS-20) statistical software and summary narrative methods in order to present a realistic description of Pakistani English speakers performance and perception of ARs.

3.1. Population and sample
The target population of this study was (150) English-using Pakistanis (who reported their responses in English DCTs and SRQs through English) and (150) Pakistani Urdu speakers (who reported their ARs through Urdu in Urdu DCTs and SRQs), consisting of teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, army personnel. All the participants had studied English as a subject till graduation. The current study also included (30) British English native speakers as a reference group to determine the possibility of pragmatic transfer (Al-Momani, 2009). Kasper and Dahl (1991) recommended that “because participants’ responses in crosscultural and ILP speech-act realization studies seem to cluster around specific subcategories, 30 subjects per undivided sample” (p. 16) who respond to “a DCT is a sufficient sample to answer most ILP speech-act realization questions” (see also Taguchi & Roeve, 2017). As mentioned, for the investigation of learner’s second-language pragmatic abilities, three sets of data samples should be given: samples of the target language as performed by L2 learners (interlanguage), samples of the target language as performed by native speakers (L2), and samples of the learners’ mother tongue as performed by native speakers (L1). Native speakers act as control groups “to determine to what extent learner performance differs from native speaker performance and whether the differences are traceable to transfer from the L1” (Al-Momani, 2009; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Ellis, 2003, p. 162). The British English speakers were from British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL), University of Edinburgh, Uk, and the Coventry University, UK. All the British English speakers were the faculty members (English Department) of Coventry University UK, Leeds University UK, and University of Edinburgh, Uk. The Pakistani participants were selected using purposive, convenience, non-random sampling procedures from the capital cities of Pakistan. The sample was comparatively homogeneous in terms of their linguistic and cultural background and academic experiences. There were both male and female respondents in the three groups. The target participants were serving in different public sector institutions. The only criteria for selecting the Pakistani participants from different institutions were that the respondent should be educated (at least up to the bachelor’s level) and should be in a job where the official written work is carried out in English and Urdu language and can exhibit pragmatic competence in the use of apology responses.

3.2. Instrumentations
A Discourse Completion Test (translated into Urdu version, see Appendix B) and scale response questionnaire (SRQ), having 6 apology response scenarios, was adopted to collect information from English-using Pakistanis, Pakistani Urdu, and British English speakers about their use of apology responses. The DCT (see Appendix A) consists of two parts – Part A. Demographic Information and Part B. Apology Response Scenarios. The first part is structured to gather certain indispensable information regarding demographics such as participants’ name and status, level of English, and the name of the institution (gender and age are not included in the scope of this study). The part B contains six apology response scenarios designed to gather apology responses (realization of different pragmatic patterns) by adopting those scenarios utilized in the studies of Thijittang (2010), Etemadfar et al. (2019), and Cohen (2020). In the design of the apology situations, the relation of imposition, social distance (close, equivalent, and distant) of the participants and their
interlocutors were also considered. The respondents were requested to jot down responses in DCT while having considered they are interacting in real life scenarios. As mentioned earlier, a Scale Response Questionnaire (SRQ, see Appendix D) was also adopted from Al-Momani (2009) to generate socio-pragmatic results from the participants of the study. Scale Response Questionnaire (SRQ) as mentioned by Al-Momani (2009) is the generally used instrument for gleaning socio-pragmatic information and has previously been utilized by a number of researchers (Taguchi & Kim, 2018). The SRQ in this research provided the same L2 (target language) situations presented in the discourse completion test followed by a question that invited the participants to measure the contextual variable of social distance using a 5point Likert range that varied from 1 to 5. As far as validity and reliability of the instrument were concerned, the DCT and SRQ (both English and Urdu) were piloted with (10) Pakistani English speakers (5) British English speakers (from Coventry University, UK) and (10) Pakistani Urdu speakers in Lahore before the final data collection. In addition, the DCT, an evaluative questionnaire was to be completed by the teachers, practitioners, and researchers (see Appendix C). The results of the evaluation questionnaires required very slight changes in the DCT. The comments of the participants made the DCT more valid and more reliable. In addition, the situations had been confirmed by three professors from Coventry University, UK, five professors from the University of Lahore, 10 Pakistani English speakers, and 10 Pakistani Urdu speakers (the inter-rater reliability = .89) as valid and very close to authentic settings.

3.2.1. Inter-rater reliability
Inter-rater reliability for the participants’ responses in WDCT and SRQ was attained through the judgments given by two raters who were native speakers of Pakistani Urdu and British English. Consistency between the two raters’ judgments was recognized through Cohen’s kappa (κ = .87, 93% CI, .681 to .919, p < .05) and Krippendorff’s Alpha (κα₀ = .85 91% CI, .771 to .949, p < .05) that were calculated utilizing SPSS. Cohen’s kappa value of .87 and Krippendorff’s Alpha of .85 showed a strong and dependable agreement (Hayes, 2007; Hallgren, 2012) between the two raters’ subjective judgments.

3.3. Data collection procedures
Before administering the DCT for data collection, we first sought permission from the heads of the institutions selected for this study. Responses were collected from participants working in different public sector institutions. From British English speakers, the data were collected through e-mails. Two instruments were used for data collection: a Discourse Completion Test (both in English and Urdu) and a scale response questionnaire (SRQ) were adopted from the study of Thijittang (2010) and Al-Momani (2009). Ethical issues of the research were taken into account in gathering data. At each organization, we personally invited participants to take part in the Informed Consent Sessions. Participants were provided with the information related to this study and requested to participate in the study. Each participant was provided with the Informed Consent Sheet and DCTs and SRQs. Participants who consented to take part in the research were asked to complete the Discourse Completion Test. They were allowed to keep anonymity while filling the DCTs and SRQs, but everyone provided their names while filling the demographic information. We explained to respondents that the study focuses on language use and apology response strategies, not language ability. We also explained each situation to the participants before they complete the DCTs and SRQs.

3.4. Data analysis procedures
The DCT data were analyzed by using SPSS-20, descriptive statistics were run to find out the similarities and differences within the three groups ARs behavior. For the analysis of SRQ data, One-way ANOVA was run to investigate the three groups’ pragmatic competence of social distance factor (i.e., close, neutral, and distant). As suggested by Kasper (1992), the following criteria were used to establish the occurrence or absence of negative pragmatic transfer. The negative pragmatic transfer was operational if there was a significant statistical difference in the frequency of a certain pragmatic feature between the PakU and BritE groups and between the EuP and BritE groups and no statistically significant difference between the PakU and EuP
Table 1. Apology response framework

| Strategy               | Expressions in English | Expressions in Urdu |
|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| **Acceptance (AC)**    |                        |                     |
| Absolution             | “That’s OK”            | نتهانگا حس کیا ہے |
| Dismissal              | “It doesn’t matter”, “Don’t worry” | اس میں کوئی فرق نہیں، کیا ہے، ہر آنیا | |
| Formal                 | “I accept your apology”, “I forgive you” | من کئے اپو کے نائل، من ہوگیا ہے |
| Thanking               | “Thanks (for apologizing)” | مہربانی کا نزدک |
| Intensifiers           | “It’s OK, really “, “It’s Ok, It’s Ok” | یہ ہے بالا نہیں، یہ ہے بالا |
| **Requests**           |                        |                     |
| Expressing Empathy     | “I understand that stuff happens” | من میں یہاں ہے ہے |
| Expressing Emotion     | “I’m disappointed”     | نہیں، نہیں ہے |
| Questioning/Surprise   | “How could you do that to me?” | تم کی چھڑکی، تماشا ٹھچی ہے تو |
| **Acknowledgment (AK)**|                        |                     |
| Absolution Plus        | “That’s Ok, but …”     | نتهانگا حس کیا ہے نہیں |
| Dismissal Plus         | “It doesn’t matter, but …” | اس میں کوئی فرق نہیں، ہر آنیا نہیں |
| Formal Plus            | “I accept your apology, but …” | من کئے اپو کے نائل، ہا ہے |
| Advice/Suggestion      | “You should be quite vigilant next time” | من کے ہے پین کرنا جا آؤے ہے |
| Accepting Remedies     | “Don’t do that again next time” | یہاں گانے نہیں ہے |
| Evaluating             | “It’s ridiculous”      | یہاں نہیں ہے |
| Accepting Promises     | “I accept your words but …” | من کئے اپو کے ہے ہے |
| **Evasion (EV)**       |                        |                     |
| Deflecting/Explaining  | “I have not seen you for a long time” | من نہیں ہے ہے |
| Providing Solution     | “Go back and complete the task quickly” | ہا ہے ہے |
| Minimization           | “Hey! It’s nothing yar (buddy), just a carpet” | یہاں گانے نہیں ہے |
| Expressing Concerns    | “Are you OK?”           | ہے ہے |
| Shifts of Topic        | “Forget about it, I’ll buy a new one” | من نہیں ہے ہے |
| Shifts of Blame        | “It was bad weather”    | یہاں نہیں ہے |
| **Rejection (RJ)**     |                        |                     |
| Refusals               | “It’s not gonna work with meal” | یہاں نہیں ہے ہے |
| Description            | “We could have done for better” | ہے ہے |
| Blaming &Complaining   | “You are really quite careless, Bad day” | ہے ہے |
| Warning                | “Find ASAP, otherwise I’ll issue you explanation” | ہے ہے |
| Swearing               | “You are really shit”   | ہے ہے |
| Asking for Compensation| “You have to replace it with the new one” | ہے ہے |

(Continued)
groups. The positive pragmatic transfer was operational if there was no statistically significant difference in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature between the L1 (first language), IL (interlanguage), and L2 (second language/target language). The probability level for statistical significance was set at p < .05, the standard in the applied linguistics field (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991). The present study based its data analysis on Adrifiza and Jones (2013) apology response classifications. The responses of the participants were first grouped into general strategy classifications, using language expressions provided by Holmes (1990, 1995) (see Adrifiza & Jones, 2013). Nevertheless, in the present study, AR detailed strategies in Urdu and English are grouped as follows:

4. Results and discussion
Social distance represents the level of acquaintance between the speakers. This element was categorized into three groups: close-close friends or colleagues who are acquainted with each other quite well; neutral-acquaintance or people who are familiar with each other but not quite well; distant-strangers or people who are not acquaintance with each other quite well or unfamiliar. From a Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) questionnaire; a speaker and a friend (situation 2) are close friends; work colleagues, an officer and a boss (situation 1), have been taken as people who know each other well or close acquaintance (close social distance). A speaker and a workmate (situation 4) and a senior and junior officers (situation 3) are acquaintance or people who know each other but not well (neutral social distance) and strangers or unfamiliar people a junior officer and senior officer (situation 5), senior and a junior (situation 6) have been taken as people who do not know each other well or are unfamiliar (distant social distance).

4.1. Pragmalinguistic results
A general picture is illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 1 of apology response strategy distribution of social distance variables through three groups data consist of English-using Pakistanis, British English, and Pakistani Urdu speakers. It can be seen that the three groups tend to use different ARs patterns keeping in mind the social distance factor (close, neutral and distant) in different interactive situations. It is noticeable that, within the social distance variables, the three groups exhibit different distribution patterns according to close, neutral and distant levels.

### Table 2. AR distribution interacting with social distance variables

|          | AC |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|          | CL | NL | DT | CL | NL | DT | CL | NL | DT |
| EuP      | N  | 43 | 31 | 59 | 34 | 12 | 19 | 09 | 05 | 09 |
|          | %  | 18.3 | 11.2 | 25.3 | 13.2 | 5.6 | 8.1 | 4.7 | 2.6 | 4.1 | 3.4 | 1.5 | 2.4 |
| BritE    | N  | 45 | 36 | 64 | 17 | 09 | 18 | 33 | 16 | 21 | 05 | 02 | 04 |
|          | %  | 19.1 | 13.7 | 27.6 | 7.1 | 4.5 | 7.9 | 12.7 | 7.2 | 9.3 | 2.5 | 1.1 | 1.6 |
| PakU     | N  | 46 | 29 | 59 | 32 | 10 | 20 | 08 | 06 | 11 | 08 | 02 | 05 |
|          | %  | 19.6 | 10.3 | 24.2 | 12.8 | 4.9 | 8.9 | 4.5 | 3.2 | 4.7 | 4.0 | 1.1 | 1.8 |
It can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 1, the results demonstrate that distant social level participants of three groups EuP, BritE, and PakU (23.3%, 27.6%, and 24.2%) tend to use more Acceptance strategies than the close (18.3%, 19.1%, and 19.6%) and neutral (11.2%, 13.3%, and 10.3%) levels respondents.

In the Acknowledgement category, a noticeable difference can be observed at the close and distant levels. Among the three groups’ close (13.2%, 7.1%, and 12.8%) and distant (8.1%, 7.9%, and 8.9%) levels participants tend to favour the use of Acknowledgement ARs than neutral (5.6%, 4.5%, and 4.9%) social distance participants. Further, it can be seen that BritE of neutral social distance level participants tends to use fewer strategies than the close and distant levels participants.

The Evasion category demonstrates that BritE (12.7%) of close social distance prefers the use of Evasion ARs more often than EuP (4.7%) and PakU (4.5%). Further, at neutral (2.6%, 7.2%, and 3.2%) and distant (4.1%, 9.3%, and 4.7%) levels, three groups tend to use a similar proportion of EV strategies.

The least number of ARs interacting with social distance factor is used in Rejection category. The Table 2 and Figure 1 show that close social distance level participants of three groups (EuP, BritE, and PakU) tend to prefer the use of more Rejection strategies with a ratio of (3.4:2.5:4.0) than the participants of neutral (1.5:1.1:1.1) and distant (2.4:1.6:1.8) social distance levels.

Social distance variables are one of the most important factors which affect the production and interpretation of linguistic behaviours including thanking behaviours. Leech (2016) identifies it as a crucial dimension in determining politeness behaviour or linguistic tact; Wolfson (1989) recognizes the weight of social distance in accounting for differences in politeness behaviour; and Holmes (1995, p. 11) identifies this factor as “one of the most basic factors determining appropriate levels of politeness behaviour in most, if not all, societies”.

Data also reveal the effects of social distance on the strategies of responding to apologies used by the three groups. All the three groups tend to use more Acceptance strategies when they are interacting with social distant level interlocutors. This result is consistent with Lect and Abdulkhalque (2020) who state that speakers use more Acceptance strategies when interacting with distant level interlocutors, and social distance determines the choices of speech acts in different social scenarios. At the same time, speakers prefer to use less Acceptance strategies when responding to close and neutral social distance level speakers (Wardat & Alkateeb (2020). English-using Pakistanis, British English speakers, and Pakistani Urdu speakers tend to display their responses like:
In the officer’s mess, a senior officer stepped on your foot passing by you. Senior officer says?
(Situation 4)

**Senior officer:** I’m sorry, I was in hurry. You fine?

**EuP:** Alhamdullah, I’m Okay! You didn’t hurt me badly,

**BritE:** That’s OK – I was able to save myself.

**PakU:** Khuda ka shukar he k men theek hun, muje koi zeda chat nhi lagi. Bus zara sa bruise aya he/Thanks God, I’m fine; I didn’t get much hurt. Only I’ve received a little bruise) respectively.

In the example above, it can be seen that data from English-using Pakistanis illustrate the use of socio-religious term “Alhamdullah”, and Absolution (I’m Okay) strategy in combination with Deflecting strategy (You didn’t hurt me badly). The data from British English speaker display the similar type of response without socio-religious term but with different sentence construction; using Absolution (That’s OK) with an extended expression of Deflecting (I was able to save myself). Simultaneously, Pakistani Urdu speaker’s data also provide quite an analogous type of expressions based on socio-religious term “Khuda ka shukar he” plus Absolution (Theek he/That’s Ok) and “Deflecting and Explaining” (muje koi zeda chat nhi lagi. Bus zara sa bruise aya he/I didn’t get much hurt. Only I received a little bruise). The three examples show that the EuP and PakU speakers produced culture-specific and language-specific content in their responses, clearly displaying the influence of cultural traits on their ARs. Ezzaoua (2020) argues that English as second language learners are more often influenced by their L1 in their use of speech acts in target culture language which hinders their communication and often creates misunderstanding among speakers. As far as social distance is concerned, three groups speakers in this study keep in mind the public face of the interlocutor and try to mitigate the situation by using both Acceptance and Evasion strategies.

In another situation of social distance, the three groups’ preferences for ARs are illustrated as:

You were assigned to do a report with your workmate. You were told to see him at the main door of the meeting room but your workmate came almost half an hour late. The reason for being late was because he missed the first bus. (Situation 6)

**Workmate:** Sorry I missed the train. Mom didn’t make me wake up

4.2. Early. And buses you know mostly come late but today came well in time and I was late

**EuP:** It’s OK now. It has happened what has to happen. Take it easy.

**BritE:** That’s OK. It does not matter. But you should not blame your mother.

**PakU:** Khair he, Leikan bataoo ab karna kya he. Hamre pas waqt kamhe or kam zaidar/That’s OK. But tell me what we got to do. We have less time and more work to do).

The examples here demonstrate different combinations of extended speech acts, the EuP data show the use of Absolution (It’s OK now) with extended expressions “Expressing Emotion” (It has happened what has to happen) exactly demonstrating the construction “it has happened what has to happen” based on native language. At the same time, the BritE speaker’s response also shows the use of “Absolution” in combination with “Dismissal” strategies (It does not matter) and an “Advice” (You should not blame your mother). The Pakistani Urdu speaker’s data have the use of Absolution plus (Theek he/that’s Ok) with extended expressions “Seeking for solution” (Tell me what we got to do), and Description (Hamre pas waqt kam he or kam zaidar/we’ve less time and much work to do). The next examples also demonstrate ARs in another situation of social distance like:

A friend promised to return your laptop after a week. However, he/she kept it for almost two weeks. Then you asked your friend to return it. He/she says.

**Friend:** O’ Sorry yar, forgot, really I’ll give you tomorrow, promise.

**EuP:** Don’t be sorry. It’s alright. But please return when you’re done.
We can observe here different combinations of extended expressions of ARs in this situation of social distance. The EuP data illustrate the use of Dismissal strategy (Don’t be sorry) in a combination of Absolution (It’s alright) and the use of Absolution with a Request strategy (but please return when you’re done). The BritE data display the use of Absolution (That’s OK) in a combination of Dismissal (No worries) and “Suggestion” (Be at calm). The PakU data show the use of Dismissal (Koi masla nai) in a combination of Absolution (Sabe theek he) and Expressing Emotion (Maze karo). The examples discussed above exhibit that respondents tend to use different structures of ARs keeping in mind the social distance of their interlocutors.

Noticeably, social distance is found to have a great effect on AR behaviors in all three groups. In general, as scholars argue (Hitomi, 2017; Thijittang, 2010; Wu & Wang, 2016), the greater the social distance between the speaker and the hearer, the more frequently Acceptance expressions (direct and/or indirect) are employed. More specifically, people almost always Accept (directly and/or indirectly) when strangers apologise to them for an offense, and very often, they use “that’s OK” (BritE) “no worries, it’s OK”, “it does not matter” (EuP), “khai he/that’s ok”, “koi masla nai/no problem” (PakU) in their expressions. With friends, as Chang and Ren (2020) state that Acceptance (directly and/or indirectly) is also very frequent but less than with strangers; “Questioning, Thanking, and Emotion” expressions are used in some scenarios but these appear to be situation-specific. With intimates, “Questioning and Thanking” expressions are found in all “intimate interlocutor” situations investigated, and the number of responses with these Expressing Emotions strategies is nearly equal to that of the responses with thanking strategies. The findings are acknowledged by Su (2020) who argues that when there is interaction with the distant level interlocutors in AR scenarios, more politeness is displayed and there are more chances of responding to an apology by using Acceptance strategies than any other strategies. The findings are also consistent with Derakhshan et al. (2020) who state that social distance determines the choices of ARs in different social scenarios. The three groups’ participants, especially EuP and PakU tend to use more Acknowledgement strategies with the respondents of close and distant level interlocutors and prefer to use less Acknowledgement strategies with neutral level respondents. It shows that speakers do not want to let the interlocutors of close and distant level get off the hook easily, and prefer to accept apology indirectly, quite often using extended expressions of Acknowledgement including Absolution plus, Dismissal plus and Advice/Suggestion. In contrast, BritE speakers tend to use less Acknowledgement strategies and prefer to use more Evasion strategies (Spencer-Oatey, 2011). Here, the evidence of sociocultural transfer is quite clear, as EuP respondents and PakU respondents almost tend to use a similar type of AR. They are found exactly translating the Urdu expressions into the target language. Though this transfer is not negative in nature, English-using Pakistanis lacked sociocultural competence of the target language, and could not comprehend the situation as the British English speakers did, and they adhered to their native cultural norms. The results are in line with (Ahmed, 2017; Alerwi & Alzahrani, 2020; Aziz et al., 2020; Hitomi, 2017; Saleem et al., 2018; Wu & Wang, 2016) studies who argue that EFL learners are found quite competent in grammatical competence and are less aware of pragmatic competence. At most of the occasion, especially while interacting with social distance phenomenon, EFL learners prefer to utilize their cultural-specific responses which are inappropriate and can lead to miscommunication or breakdown with the target language speakers. Nevertheless, the speakers of this study tend to use more Acceptance strategies with strangers than close friends or colleagues and intimate relations. This might be because speakers often tend to keep healthy relation with the distant interlocutor and use more positive politeness strategies. Furthermore, it is supported by past studies (Adams & Kampf, 2020; Ahmed, 2017; Hitomi, 2017; Hussain & Aziz, 2020; Loutfi, 2016; Nu & Murray, 2020; Nagraha & Rekha, 2020; Sarani & Malmir, 2020), who found the use of more detailed strategies with interlocutors of distant level and less with close friends and intimates.
### 4.3. Socio-pragmatic findings

As far as socio-pragmatic findings are concerned, the EuP, BritE, and PakU groups assigned quite different ratings of the speaker’s social distance over the hearer. As shown in Table 3, on the next page, the three groups assigned high ratings in close social distance situations (i.e., S3 and S5). In contrast, three groups assigned low ratings in distant social categories (S2 and S6). Regarding each social category, the ANOVA results revealed statistically significant differences in category 1 (F [2, 327] = 16.197, p = .000), and category 4 (F [2, 327] = 9.20, p = .000).

Tukey HSD post hoc pair comparisons indicated the presence of two patterns. The criteria for negative pragmatic transfer were met in situation 1 and 4; while there was not found significant mean differences between the EuP (M = 2.95) and PakU groups (M = 2.95), p = .000, both groups assessed the speaker’s close social status lower than did the BES group (M = 4.25). Situation 4 also displays that there was not noticed significant mean differences between the EuP (M = 3.57) and PakU (3.63), both EuP and PakU groups assessed the speaker’s distant social relation quite high than did the BritE group (M = 2.25), p = .000.

The findings illuminate that the both EuP and PakU group approximated the target culture’s sociopragmatic knowledge in situation 2, 3, 5 and 6; that is, while there were no significant mean differences between the BritE and EuP groups, both groups assessed the speaker’s close and distant social relation quite significantly equal a pattern that indicates development towards the target culture’s sociopragmatic norms while still under the influence of the L1.

As highlighted earlier while mentioning the results of social power, the findings of the social distance are quite similar to social power variable (see Saleem & Anjum, 2018), as it is also one of the most important factors which affect the perception of linguistic behaviors including AR behaviors. As can be seen in Table 3, the three groups assigned high ratings in close social distance situations (i.e., situations 3 and 5). Similarly, three groups assigned low ratings in distant social situations (S2 and S6). The results are consistent with Al-Issa (2003), Al-Momani (2009), and Hitomi (2017), who acknowledged that in the case of social distance, EFL learners were found assessing the familiarity and unfamiliarity of the situation in the similar patterns like native English speakers, which illustrates the progress towards the development of pragmatic competence in the target language. In addition, there are found statistically significant differences in S1 and S4, showing the existence of negative pragmatic transfer, indicating the operation of cultural-specific assessment of familiarity and unfamiliarity of situations. The findings acknowledged the past studies (Cuesta &

| Social | EUP | BritE | PakU | DF |
|--------|-----|-------|------|----|
| S      | Variables | M   | SD | M   | SD | M   | SD | (Errors) | F  |
| S1     | (+P,+D, +O) | 2.95 | .805 | 4.25 | .851 | 2.95 | .848 | 2(327) | 16.197 | .000* |
| S2     | (+P,-D, +O) | 3.00 | 1.04 | 2.75 | .851 | 3.00 | 1.106 | 2(327) | .411 | .665 |
| S3     | (+P,+D, -O) | 3.90 | .889 | 4.25 | .851 | 3.89 | .937 | 2(327) | 1.027 | .365 |
| S4     | (+P,-D, -O) | 3.57 | 1.02 | 2.25 | 1.333 | 3.63 | 1.065 | 2(327) | 9.20 | .000* |
| S5     | (+P,-D, +O) | 3.14 | 1.06 | 3.25 | .444 | 3.16 | 1.11 | 2(327) | .079 | .924 |
| S6     | (+P,-D, -O) | 3.19 | 1.43 | 2.25 | 1.333 | 3.11 | 1.487 | 2(327) | 2.70 | .076 |

Note: EuP, English-using Pakistanis; BritE, British English speakers; PakU, Pakistani Urdu speakers; *p < 0.05.
Ainciburu, 2015; Dilek, 2020) who argue that the negative transfer occurred in the perception of the social distance of advanced Lebanese learners of Spanish because it is sometimes challenging to perceive and understand social distance scenarios in the target culture. The findings also illustrate the EuP participants’ progress towards approximation and development of target culture’s sociopragmatic knowledge, recognizing the judgments of earlier studies in which Zand-Moghadam and Adeh (2020) and Markus (2021) claim that EFL assessed the social distance of their interlocutors in the same way as the American native speakers and British English speakers, showing EFL learners development towards target language sociopragmatic knowledge. Although there is found the negative transfer of sociopragmatic knowledge to the target language in C1, yet we can find some development as well. Hence, it may be concluded that English-using Pakistanis to some extent approximated the target culture’s sociopragmatic knowledge in their perception of social distance variable.

5. Conclusion
There was, overall, some relative similarity and disparity between the three groups’ use of apology response strategies: English-using Pakistanis, British English speakers, and Pakistani Urdu speakers. Any discrepancy is constructed on certain aspects: the interpretation of responses to apologies and social distance variables. It was due to the influence of social and religious standards/principles of Pakistani culture that contributed to the pragmatic transfer from Urdu to English. This means, when they were speaking in English, the pragmatic competence of the participants determined the form and role of apology responses. The respondents selected in the current research are undoubtedly able to perform ARs linguistically as they have studied English as a compulsory subject till graduation and serving in different prestigious institutions of Pakistan. This suggests they have sufficient linguistic competence but not obviously pragmatic competence. Nevertheless, the evidence given in this study is only the tip of the iceberg; therefore, I suggest that the extent of transfer be investigated in relation to the degree of both the participants’ linguistic and pragmatic competence.

Funding
The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information
Cite this article as: Social distance and speech behavior: A case of Pakistani English speakers’ apology responses, Tahir Saleem, Uzma Unjum, Munawar Iqbal Ahmed & Ayaz Qadeer, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2021), 8: 1890410.

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Appendix A

Apology response scenarios

Instructions

Please put yourself in the following situations and assume that in each instance you have to say something. Write down what you would say in English in the space provided.

1. At the office, your employee forgot to pass on an urgent letter to you. The next day you complained to your employee that he/she did not pass it to you. He/she says.

**Employ:** Sorry Sir/Ma’am, I forgot to pass it on to you. It won’t happen again.

**You:**



2. Your friend promised to return your laptop after a week. However, he/she kept it for almost two weeks. Then you asked your friend to return it. He/she says.

**Friend:** O’ Sorry yar, forgot, really I’ll give you tomorrow, promise.

**You:**



3. You are a junior officer in an organization. Your head forgot to inform you to join the meeting so you missed it because of your head’s negligence. Your head talked to you about his fault. He/she says:

**Head:** I’m really sorry dear; it just skipped out of my mind.

**You:**



4. In the officer’s mess, a senior officer stepped on your foot passing by you. Senior officer says:

**Senior Officer:** Excuse me, was it you, I didn’t know you were there.

**You:**
Senior officer: Ouch! Sorry dear, I didn’t see you coming. Are you OK? Hope I didn’t hurt you.
You: ________________________________

(1) You are a senior officer, your junior copied an article from a website for his/her presentation, which you found out. Your junior officer says:

Junior officer: I beg pardon Sir/Ma’am, forgive me this time, and assure you it won’t happen again.
You: ________________________________

(1) You were assigned to do a report with your workmate. You were told to see him at the main door of the meeting room but your workmate came almost half an hour late. The reason of being late was because he missed the first bus. He says:

Workmate: Sorry yar I missed the train. Mom didn’t make me to wake up early. And buses you know mostly come late but today came well in time and I was late.
You: ________________________________

**APPENDIX B**

Scale response task

(Assessment of contextual variables/English version)
Please read each situation and rate the 5 variables that follow on a scale of (1-5). The number (1 = lowest) and the number (5 = highest). Circle the number that you think most appropriate.

1. At the office, your employee forgot to pass on an urgent letter to you. The next day you complained to your employee that he/she did not pass it to you. He/she says:

**Employ:** Sorry Sir/Ma’am, I forget to pass it on to you. It won’t happen again.

How much familiarity is there between the speaker and the hearer in this situation?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No familiarity | high familiarity |

2. Your friend promised to return your laptop after a week. However, he/she kept it for almost two weeks. Then you asked your friend to return it. He/she says:

**Friend:** O’ Sorry yar, forgot, really I’ll give you tomorrow, promise.

How much familiarity is there between the speaker and the hearer in this situation?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No familiarity | high familiarity |

3. You are a junior officer in an organization. Your head forgot to inform you to join the meeting so you missed it because of your head’s negligence. Your head talked to you about his fault. He/she says:

**Head:** I’m really sorry dear; it just slipped out of my mind.

How much familiarity is there between the speaker and the hearer in this situation?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No familiarity | high familiarity |

4. In the officer’s mess, a senior officer stepped on your foot passing by you. Senior officer says:

**Senior officer:** Ouch! Sorry dear, I didn’t see you coming. Are you OK? Hope I didn’t hurt you.

How much familiarity is there between the speaker and the hearer in this situation?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No familiarity | high familiarity |

5. You are a senior officer, your junior copied an article from a website for his/her presentation, which you found out. Your junior officer says:

**Junior officer:** I beg pardon Sir/Ma’am, forgive me this time, and assure you it won’t happen again.

How much familiarity is there between the speaker and the hearer in this situation?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No familiarity | high familiarity |

6. You were assigned to do a report with your workmate. You were told to see him at the main door of the meeting room but your workmate came almost half an hour late. The reason of being late was because he missed the first bus. He says:

**Workmate:** Sorry yar I missed the train. Mom didn’t make me to wake up early. And buses you know mostly come late but today came well in time and I was late.

How much familiarity is there between the Speaker and the hearer in this situation?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No familiarity | high familiarity |
