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Pragmatics Insights of Pakistani English: An analysis of Congratulatory Acts and Apology Responses

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Abstract

Introduction: *This study delves into linguistic aspects among Pakistani English-speaking students, focusing on their perspectives regarding expressions of congratulations and apologies. It aims to elucidate the influence of cultural, individual, and gender-specific factors on these expressions within the Pakistani context.*

Methodology: *A qualitative approach was employed to gather viewpoints from Pakistani English-speaking students regarding congratulations and apologies. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes and patterns.*

Results/Findings: *The findings underscore the cultural significance of accountability, empathy, and sincerity in apologies among Pakistani English-speaking students. Gender differences were observed, with female students placing more emphasis on timing and interpersonal relationships in receiving apologies, while male students tended to respond in a straightforward manner. Additionally, male students occasionally*

exhibited unprofessional responses in congratulatory situations, though both genders recognized the importance of cultural expressions.

Implication/Future Direction: *Understanding and respecting these cultural and gender-specific differences are crucial for effective communication among English-speaking Pakistani students. Future research could explore strategies for enhancing cross-cultural communication skills and promoting mutual understanding in diverse linguistic contexts.*

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Pakistani English, Speech Acts, Cross Cultural Communication*

Introduction

Communication is a process that is influenced by various factors such as culture, personal experiences, and gender. In this study, the focus is on how Pakistani students express congratulatory and apology responses within the context of Pakistani English. Pakistani English is a unique variety of English that has its own distinct morphology, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics. Worldwide demand for English language proficiency has grown as a result of the language's significance in the fields of technology, education, and the economics, among others. English is extremely important since, in Pakistan, although Urdu is the national language, English is considered as the “Unofficial” language of Pakistan (Murtaza, & Yasmin, (2022). It is worth noting that the morphology and pragmatics of Pakistani English are often directly influenced by other native languages spoken in Pakistan such as Urdu, Balochi, Pashto, and Punjabi. As a result, congratulatory acts and apology responses reflect not only the morphological aspects but also the cultural elements of the speaker's native language. The aim of this paper is to gather first-hand examples through interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to further comprehend the cross-cultural connection between native languages and English. By examining these factors in depth, we can gain a better understanding of communication patterns within multicultural contexts.

Literature Review

The study of apologetic speech acts has drawn attention from academics, and various points of view have contributed to our understanding of their nature and significance in interpersonal communication. Leech, (2014) asserts that apologizing is a habitual speaking act and emphasizes the ways in which behavior impacts relationships. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) highlight the significance of apologies in maintaining social harmony among individuals in diverse social roles.

Agyekum, 2006; Anwar, & Kamran, 2021) investigate the psychological aspects of it and contends that it is necessary to resolve interpersonal conflicts and speaker insecurity. Holmes (1995) emphasizes the importance of expressing regret after committing an offense and states that an apology is an expression of regret (Saleem, Batool, Saleem, & Azam, 2020) Pakistani English speakers Apologies in a politer yet direct manner.

Majeed and Janjua (2013) build on this understanding by characterizing apology as a supporting gesture and emphasizing its function in reestablishing public balance and stability. Saleem, Azam, and Saleem (2014) provide an expanded definition of apologetic speech actions, defining them as expressions meant to mend relationships between speakers following an offense. Saleem, et al, (2020) said that Pakistani speakers respond with the basis of their own culture. Sultana & Khan (2014) highlight cultural variations by pointing out that apologizing can take many different forms depending on the culture. Saleem, & Azam, (2015) said that social status plays a role in apology responses. Further, are the examinations of language strategies and pragmatic responses to apologies by Waluyo, 2017; Wu & Wang, 2016; Adrefiza & Jones, 2013; Shabbir, & Yan, 2023. However, these studies often overlook the subtleties of sociocultural and socio pragmatic factors (Hafeez, Iqbal & Imran, 2021).

Khalil (2015), research focused on gender disparities and was based on in-person meetings on special occasions. Aziz, 2018; Abbas, Anjum & Pasha, 2019 investigated the kinds of positive politeness methods that Pakistani graduate students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) employed in their congratulations (Oad, Khan & Khoso, 2020).

Methodology

Research Design: Focus groups and street surveys are combined in a mixed-methods approach.

Participants/Subjects: Thirty-five (35) Baluchistan university students, evenly distributed by gender, were chosen at random to participate in focus group talks. Furthermore, feedback was obtained from friends and people on the street, resulting in a varied group of participants.

Sampling Methodology: Convenience sampling allowed for a wider range of viewpoints from the general public, whilst random sampling guaranteed a representative selection of university students.

Data collection: Focus group talks investigating apologies and congrats were conducted in a semi-structured manner. Data from the street survey was gathered at random, with replies noted, and voice recordings from friends provided some dynamism.

Variables: Acts of apologies and congratulations are examples of independent variables. Dependent variables include pragmatic expression modifications and participant reactions.

Data Analysis: Themes and patterns were found through a qualitative examination of the transcripts of focus group discussions. Responses to the street survey were analyzed quantitatively to determine trends and frequency. Voice recordings were subjected to content analysis, which revealed a range of expressions.

Research Purpose: This study's main goal is to offer a thorough analysis of the tactics used for congrats and apologetic responses in Pakistani English. This study seeks to provide important new understandings of the communicative patterns found in congrats and apologies among Pakistani English-speaking people. This study seeks to find out if the pragmatics is different between the male and female populace of Pakistani English-speaking community

Research process: This section will present the process of qualitative data collection through the focus group discussion. Below are the questions asked in the F.G.D and the answers from a few students are provided below as most of them answered quite similarly. The students and the professors were asked to speak in English.

Apology responses: (Such questions were asked to 18 students + 2 professors. These are a few of those questions)

Q1: How do you define a sincere apology?

Ans: They have to be honest.

Ans: They have to accept their mistake and ask for forgiveness.

Ans: They have to show humbleness in their body language and maintain a convincing tone.

Ans: A sincere apology involves acknowledging wrongdoings

Q2: What elements do you think make an apology ineffective?

Ans: Insincerity

Ans: Egotistical apology

Ans: Repeated apologies after repeated mistakes.

Ans: Ineffective apologies lack empathy

Q3: In your opinion, how important is taking responsibility in an apology?

Ans: Simply extremely important.

Ans: It is the core part of an apology.

Ans: Taking responsibility is crucial in an apology as it shows accountability.

Q4: Are there any specific phrases that you find more meaningful in an apology?

Ans: I don't want our friendship to end.

Ans: Not the words but the way makes a difference.

Ans: "I was wrong"

Q5: How does the timing of an apology impacts its effectiveness? (This question had a lot of varied results)

Ans: A lot.

Ans: After a long time it doesn't matter.

Ans: The more time it takes someone to apologize, the more impact it carries.

Ans: Timing is crucial; apologizing promptly demonstrates a sense of urgency.

Q6: What do you think carries more weight verbal or non-verbal apologies?

Ans: Body language has a bigger impact.

Ans: Well, actions speak louder than words.

Q7: What role does empathy play in an apology?

Ans: Empathy is crucial. Showing understanding of the other person's feelings fosters connection.

Ans: Its again a core feature.

Q8: Public apologies vs private apologies which is better?

Ans: Public sucks.

Ans: Public is just awkward.

Ans: Both are same. Just depends on the context and timing.

Ans: While private apologies are typically more intimate, public apologies may concentrate on reputation management.

Scenarios (About 30 minutes after the above questions were asked, These scenario question followed)

Q1: Suppose a colleague expresses regret for consistently missing project deadlines and pledges to make improvements. Not too long after, they miss yet another important deadline.

Responses:

Q1: We have patience but it isn't infinite.

2: I will reject the apology.

3: There is no hope for such people.

Q2: Let's say a friend retracts a rumor that has a negative impact on the neighborhood. Acknowledge the impact on other people's emotions.

Responses:

1: Apologize to everyone.

2: Try to remedy the problem caused.

3: Verbal apology doesn't work, try to solve it.

Q3: Your roommate can apologize for their mistake but they can also get away without apologizing.

Responses:

1: Make him accountable for his mistake.

2: I wouldn't take responsibility if I had the chance to avoid it.

Q4: Think about a partner expressing regret for betraying trust, how will you react?

Responses:

1: No matter what they do nothing will work.

2: Nothing can be done.

Congratulations (Such questions were asked to 18 students + 2 professors. These are a few of those questions)

Q1: How do you typically express congratulations?

Ans: I just say Mubarak ho!

Ans: Wow! You did wonderful

Ans: Good for you

Q2: Are there specific words or phrases commonly used when congratulating someone?

Ans: Well, "Mubarak" is the most common word used.

Ans: "Congrats"

Ans: I am happy for you is the most common phrase.

Q3: In what situations is it customary to offer congratulations?

Ans: Achievement of a goal after consistent hard work.

Ans: Promotion.

Ans: Marriage.

Q4: Do cultural or religious factors influence the way congratulations are conveyed?

Ans: Yes, religion matters.

Ans: We typically say “Mashallah” to praise someone’s work and achievements.

Q5: Are there traditional gestures or gifts associated with congratulating someone?

Ans: Flowers.

Ans: Chocolates.

Ans: Sweets

Q6: Does the tone change between a close friend vs a professional colleague?

Ans: We are usually less formal with friends.

Ans: Personal achievements involve more personal expressions.

Q7: Are there any particular instances in which a written congrats is preferred? (Here most of the male students said that its better to congratulate someone in person while the female students said the other way around)

Ans: A personal congratulation is preferred by me but I may do it when they are far away.

Ans: I'm usually shy, so I mostly send written congratulations.

Ans: Does “Nikah” count?

Q8: How is it customary to congratulate someone in a group setting? (besides a single person, everyone preferred congratulating together when in a group.)

Ans: Group is more fun

Ans: Everything is better with a group of friends

Ans: One by one makes it more personal

Q9: Does expressing good fortune or future blessings accompany congratulations?

Ans: Incredibly often

Ans: Of course it does. May Allah bless them with even more

Q10: In what ways do regional or local traditions affect the content and manner of congratulations gestures or messages?

Ans: Well, even while speaking English we use Urdu or Balochi words.

Ans: Sometimes we give different gifts to people of different regions.

Scenarios (These scenario questions were too asked after 30 minutes of the above questions)

Q1: Consider a buddy of yours who overcame a major personal obstacle. How would you offer him a congrats?

Ans: Meet him personally and share a meal.

Ans: Ask him for a treat of course

Ans: A friend I would ask for a treat. If they aren't a friend then just offer them a simple congratulations.

Q2: Your good friend recently got married. In what way would you offer congratulations? (A few of these answers given by the male students were unprofessional. While the answers given by the female students were exactly as expected)

Ans: I won't congratulate him. He got married before me.

Ans: I would send my condolences.

Ans: I would be the guest of honor.

Ans: I would be the first to congratulate her.

Q3: Your sibling achieves academic excellence and receives honors upon graduation. How do you extend congratulations? (the answers from the male and female students were opposite to each other)

Ans: We would throw a small celebration but nothing grand.

Ans: I would throw the biggest party ever.

Q4: A family member completes a major religious pilgrimage, such as the Hajj. How would you express your congrats? (All of the students agreed on this single answer)

Ans: We would hold a “Quran Khuani”

Q5: A new baby is welcomed into the family by your cousin. How should one congratulate them?

Ans: I would gift him some clothes for the new born.

Ans: Maybe Get some chewing toys for the baby?

Ans: Ask my cousin for a treat.

Q6: Your closest pal receives their college degree. How would you convey your sincere congrats? (Here again, the male students answered very unprofessionally)

Ans: “Congrats on doing nothing”

Ans: Be there at her graduation ceremony, even if I am out of town.

Q7: While completing a significant milestone, a modest coworker downplays their accomplishment. Would you go ahead and congratulate them? (Unexpectedly, this question also separated the male students from the females)

Ans: Throw a party anyway.

Ans: It doesn't matter. We would congratulate them no matter how humble they are.

Ans: I would respect their wishes and celebrate modestly.

Ans: As an introvert myself, I would celebrate with them in private if they wish.

Observational report

(The subsequent report compiles information from participants in daily activities as well as Balochistan University Students. To reduce responder fatigue, a brief set of questions was given, encouraging quick yet careful answers.)

Apology responses

Pakistani English speakers seem to incorporate bonds when responding to an apology. For example, a Pakistani English speaker may respond with: *“it's OK. We are here for each other through thick and thin”*. Another habit that is often observed in Pakistani English speakers is that they often respond to an apology by an invitation to something that can cause the bond to increase and the hostility to be reduced. As an example, a Pakistani English speaker may respond with *“No worries, lets grab a drink together sometimes”*. The next way of apology acceptance is demonstrated when an apology is met with acknowledgement and then

praise for the other quality of the apologist. For example, the responder may respond with *“No problem at all. Thank you for catching the error so quickly. It shows your ability to catch and fix such mistakes”*. This creates a positive relation between the apologist and the responder and maintain the friendship. Pakistani English speakers often use explicit language. They speak directly and clearly in what they want from the apologist or anyone for that matter. For example; a person may apologize for a miscommunication. The answer they will receive is often *“To ensure clarity and understanding between team members, please ensure an effective communication protocol”*. This directness might sound rude but this is often preceded by an acknowledgement remark by the responder, such as *“thank you for bringing it up”*. Another way that Pakistani speaker respond to apologies is through downplaying the inconvenience and including self-denying aspects into it. For example, the responder may respond with *“no need to worry. Anyone's responsibilities may come up. We could reschedule another time that is more convenient to you”*. If someone makes a mistake in a group project, they aren't looked at as separate individuals. They are often looked at as being part of a bigger and collective group and responded to accordingly to it. *“It's good that you caught that early But we better work together to make sure that this doesn't happen again”*. This collectivist action is the most prominent value in Pakistani culture. The religious culture has a major impact on the pragmatics of the Pakistani English. The apology is sometimes answered with a religious connotation. For example, the responder may respond with *“what you did was wrong but Forgiveness is a virtue, so please next time, try to do better”*.

These are the ways by how Pakistani English speakers respond to someone apologizing. These are different from normal British English because of the politer nature of Pakistani people and culture. The acknowledgement apology responses are favored by the Pakistani English speakers.

Congratulations strategies

Pakistani English speakers often intensify their congratulations. This gives them a bigger impact to the receiver and shows them that what they did or achieve was of immense value. They also use compound congratulations strategies that often involve the congratulation its self and a prayer of good will. For example, some might say *“Congratulations to your beautiful union! May your journey together be filled with endless blessings and joy”* Instead of *“Congratulation on your wedding!”*. Sometimes Urdu words are used instead of English in the context of a well-deserved congratulation. The Urdu word show that the connections and words are out of care. *“Mubarak ho on your achievement!”* instead of just *“Congratulations on your wedding!”*. Just like in the previous section of “Apology acceptance” religious impact

is also very prominent in congratulation parts also. The use of words such as “*Maashallah*”, “*Alhamdulillah*” or “*Jazakallah*” are used in almost every congratulating context.

There are congratulations strategies that are used extremely infrequently. For example, the suggestion of celebrating something together because of a successful venture by someone. “*lets celebrate your success together!*” isn't often used and only rarely used with in incredibly tight net friends groups of young people. Another thing that isn't expressed is the admission of envy “*I'm envious of your position*”. This doesn't mean that such thoughts don't cross someone's mind. These thoughts are just kept a secret or suppressed. None of the participants interviewed expressed any envy. The expression of surprise is another thing that is rare. This is frowned upon in the context of congratulation someone. For example “*I'm surprised that you managed to get promoted*”. This is seen as incredibly disrespectful.

The way someone congratulates someone is also dependant on the how close they people are to each other. Here are a few examples of it: “*I am happy for your achievement*” vs “*Your success brings a smile to my face*”. “*your dedication is truly inspiring*” vs “*Wow, keep up the good work*”.

Discussion

Conclusion

Diverse viewpoints on congrats and apologies are revealed by research among English-speaking Pakistani students, which is influenced by situational, cultural, and individual factors. Notably, gender variations emerged in answers. Both genders emphasized the value of accountability, empathy, and sincerity while offering regrets. But while female students frequently underlined the importance of time and the influence of interpersonal ties on accepting apologies, male students tended to respond in a more straightforward and unfiltered manner. When expressing congrats, both genders were likely to acknowledge cultural expressions like “Mubarak ho” and similar expressions. However, female students generally maintained a more controlled and polite tone, while male students occasionally responded in an unprofessional manner.

Recommendations/Future Direction

The findings from this study shed light on the diverse strategies employed by Pakistani English speakers in responding to apologies and offering congratulations, which are influenced by cultural, individual, and situational factors. These insights suggest several recommendations for effective communication and cultural understanding among English-speaking Pakistani students. Firstly, acknowledging and valuing the importance of bonds and collective identity in response to apologies can enhance interpersonal relationships and foster a sense of unity

within groups. Encouraging individuals to respond with empathy, understanding, and inclusivity can further promote harmony and cooperation in diverse settings. Additionally, promoting direct and explicit communication while maintaining politeness and respectfulness can help bridge potential misunderstandings and promote effective collaboration. Moreover, recognizing the significance of religious and cultural expressions in both apologies and congratulations underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in communication practices. Future research should explore strategies for integrating cultural and gender-specific communication skills into educational curricula and professional development programs to enhance cross-cultural competence and promote respectful and harmonious communication among diverse linguistic communities.

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