Politeness in a Moroccan EFL Classroom: How Students of High School Using Apologizing Strategies in English?

Zaid Hmouri
Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco
Hmouri.za@gmail.com

How to cite:
Hmouri, Z.. (2022). Politeness in a Moroccan EFL Classroom: How Students of High School Using Apologizing Strategies in English?. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies 3*(3).97-112. https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v3i3.240

Abstract
This qualitative/quantitative study investigates Moroccan high school EFL learners' apologizing strategies based upon a theoretical framework of politeness strategies and the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) model. It investigates whether they approach native speakers' apology norms or their own cultural way of apologizing. To achieve this goal, four first-year baccalaureate classes (Science Experimental Physics major) were observed and then a sample of 64 subjects was randomly selected to fill in a written discourse completion test which had 6 apology situations. All the responses are classified according to both politeness strategies and CCSARP model used by Blum-kulka et al. (1989). The observed classes during the training showed that Moroccan first-year baccalaureate students used an off-record super strategy while apologizing (the use of hints) to the teacher, whereas the teacher used positive politeness while addressing his pupils. The results of the discourse completion test (DCT) revealed that Illocutionary indicating devices (IFIDs) plus an explanation of account (IFIDs + Account) is the most frequently used apology strategy by the subjects. More than 60% employed this semantic formula in all six situations. The use of IFIDs and explanation of account were significantly linked to the effect of subjects' L1 and due to the impact of their own collective-agency culture. Hence, choosing to use that strategy by the subjects was pragmatically unsuccessful and would be inappropriate by the apologizer since it does not meet the apology norms of native speakers of English, and it indicates and follows the Moroccan culture norms and rules. The paper concludes with some practical suggestions for improving the teaching of apologies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Politeness is one of the most significant qualities of human beings in the sense that they cannot live and interact with each other in a society where conventions of politeness are not observed. Thus, it is just natural that every culture and every language has its own ways of displaying respect, deference, and good manners. In the last decades, a considerable number of researchers have become interested in understanding the functioning of language in the context of communication. Several studies, therefore, were conducted on communication strategies, the principles and universals of human communication, and interlanguage studies, such as Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1978), Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (1987), Grice (1975), Lakoff (1973), Watts (2003), etc. However, of all linguistic politeness theories, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is considered to be the most influential and comprehensive work because it claims universality.

The current study focuses on linguistic politeness patterns, in particular apology strategies of first baccalaureate Moroccan EFL learners. Furthermore, it examines apology strategies in the light of Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) and the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) model used by Blum-kulka et al. (1989). By applying the CCSARP framework and Brown and Levinson's theory in this study, it is hoped to reach some valid conclusions about Moroccan EFL learners, in particular first-year baccalaureate students, use of apologies and whether they approach native speakers' apology norms or their L1 norms. Therefore, with this issue in mind, this paper investigates the apology strategies of Moroccan EFL learners. The paper examines how first-year baccalaureate learners' productions can be linked to their first language. The goal is to shed light on the Moroccan learners' communicative competence[1] in English because this particular area has been marginalized for decades compared to their grammatical competence.

Choosing to work on this topic is due to several reasons. One is that the speech act of apology is considered one of the main functions that play an important role in polite communication. The speech act of apology softens the threat to face and aims to maintain social harmony (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Thus, it is necessary for successful communication. The investigation of Moroccan EFL learners' use of apologies was first instigated by the lack of studies undertaken in such an important area in Morocco. The majority of the few studies carried out so far have not addressed one specific speech act. Some of them studied politeness formulae used by Moroccan learners (Davies, 1987). Other studies tackled the acquisition of modal auxiliaries and their pragmatic uses to carry out the speech act of requesting (Melouk 1989). Another study focused on the development of some sociopragmatic aspects by pre-schoolers (Boussfiha, 2005). A few other studies applied the CCSARP framework of analysis to apologies (Kamaoui, 2003), refusals (Kabel, 2002), and requests (Abdou, 1999; Latif, 2001).

In this respect, the current paper sheds light on the interlanguage apology used by Moroccan EFL learners. The present study has immediate relevance to EFL pedagogy in Morocco. It can help teachers increase their awareness of the deviations and failures faced by Moroccan EFL learners in their production of apologies in English. Furthermore, it can help textbook writers and teachers improve how apologies are currently presented and taught in Moroccan schools.

Accordingly, the main aims of this paper are to shed light on interlanguage apology in a Moroccan EFL context, investigate first-year baccalaureate students' apologizing productions in English, determine what politeness features seem to be at work as performed by the participants, and how the various politeness patterns found are coded. These objectives are formulated in the following research questions:

1. What are the apology strategies used by Moroccan EFL learners at Ibn Aabad high school?

2. Do first-year baccalaureate EFL students approach native speakers' apology norms or not?

3. Based on the participants' linguistic choices, what are the main politeness super strategies used by Moroccan EFL learners inside the classroom?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness has to be acquired. This has been maintained by Watts (2003) "one thing at least is certain about politic behavior, including polite language; it has to be acquired" (p.9). However, when it comes to defining the notion of politeness, it is worth saying that it is not simple to come up with a clear-cut definition. That is to say; politeness is complex. For this reason, Watts (2003) argues that "the very fact that (im)politeness is a term that is struggled over at present, has been struggled over in the past and will, in all probability, continue to be

---

[1] See Canale & Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) for more information.

struggled over in the future" (p.9). Among the famous linguists who sifted through linguistic politeness, we have Grice (1975), Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), and basically Brown and Levinson (1987). These scholars proposed different theories.

2.1. Brown and Levinson's Model

Brown and Levinson (1987) present a detailed theory in which the speaker and hearer are Model Persons (MPs). An MP is "willful fluent speaker of a natural language" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 58). Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that "all MPs have positive and negative face, and all MPs are rational agents" (p. 59). Thus, all MPs are endowed with two universal features which are "rationality" and "face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 58).

Rationality means the ability of applying a specific mode of reasoning which guarantees inferences from ends or goals to means that will satisfy those ends (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 64). Therefore, a MP inherited with rationality is always capable of making appropriate linguistic choices when he/she wants to achieve certain goals. Concerning the notion of face, Hu (1944) and Ho (1976) claim that many researchers investigate it, and they all borrow it from Goffman (as cited in Lin, 2005, p. 29). Following Goffman's view on face, Brown and Levinson offer a descriptive analysis of the strategies that could be used by interlocutors so that to maintain their faces in social interactions. Brown and Levinson (1987) believe that "all competent adult members of a society have (and know each other to have) 'face,' the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61). Moreover, face is something that is "emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). In addition, Brown and Levinson (1987) divide face into two components, "positive face" and "negative face," which are two related aspects of the same entity and refer to two main desires or "wants" of any person in an interaction:

- Negative face: "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction i.e. the freedom of action and freedom from imposition."

- Positive face: "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image is appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants."

Given the universality of "face" and "rationality," Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that many communicative acts involve imposition on the face of either one or both the speaker or the hearer. In other words, these acts are intrinsically face-threatening acts (FTAs). Acts that appear to hinder the addressee's independence of movement and freedom of action threaten their negative face, whereas acts that threaten the addressee's positive face indicate that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings and wants, etc.

Examples of acts that threaten the addressee's negative face include orders, requests, suggestions, advice, threats, warnings, and so forth, whereas acts that threaten the addressee's positive face include expressions of disapproval or disagreement, criticism, contempt, complaints, insults, and so on (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 65-66). Brown and Levinson (1987) noted that there is an overlap in the classification of FTAs because some of them intrinsically threaten both negative and positive face, such as complaints, interruptions, threats, strong expressions of emotion, and requests for personal information (p. 67).

Thereafter, Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 69-70) suggest four politeness super-strategies of doing an FTA:

- Bald on record: (in conformity with Grice's Maxims of Co-operation) this super-strategy does not attempt to minimize the FTA to the hearer's face. Hence, it is mostly direct, clear, unambiguous, concise, and without a redressive action. Furthermore, bald on record is characterized by efficiency and urgency (the speaker may claim that other things are more important than face, or maybe the act is no FTA). Using bald on record will shock the

interlocutor, so it is usually employed in situations where the speaker has a close relationship with the hearer, such as family and close friends.

• Positive politeness is directed towards the hearer's positive face, the positive self-image that he/she claims for himself/herself. It also seeks to minimize the threat to the hearer's positive face. This super-strategy is composed of fifteen output strategies that are generally used to make the hearer feel good about themselves and their interests. Positive politeness is used, mainly in situations where the audience knows each other pretty well. Some positive politeness output strategies include statements of friendship and solidarity.

• Negative politeness: basically, it is oriented towards the hearer's negative face, and it emphasizes avoidance of imposition on the H. Negative politeness presumes that the speaker will be imposing on the H.

• Off record: (violates the Gricean Maxims) it uses indirect language. Therefore, it removes the speaker from the responsibility to be imposing. Linguistic realizations off the record involve metaphor and irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, tautologies, and all kinds of hints.

The four politeness super-strategies are claimed to depend on the extent to which the risk of face loss is involved (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60). Put simply, the more an act threatens the speaker's or the hearer's face, the more the speaker will choose a more polite super-strategy.

2.2. Apologizing Strategies

A considerable number of researchers, such as Owen (1983), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Trasborg (1987) Hussein and Hammouri (1998), among others, find that the speech act of apology can be performed in one of the two forms or a combination of both. The first one is through explicit illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), which are performative verbs expressing the apology. For example, "I'm sorry," "excuse me," "I apologize," "Forgive me and "pardon me." The second way is via using four potential strategies (with or without IFID). These strategies are (i) expression of responsibility, (ii) explanation or account of the cause brought about by the offence, (iii) an offer of repair and (iv) promise of forbearance (AL-Fattah, 2010, p. 230). However, this paper focuses on the strategies used by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Trosberg (1987), Holmes (1989) and Hussein and Hammouri (1998) to analyze the data. Their strategies can be categorized as follows:

a. Expression of an apology: this strategy contains an offer of apology, such as in "I want to apologize", an expression of regret as in "I am sorry", and a request for forgiveness. i.e. "I want you to forgive me" and "I will feel sad if you do not forgive me".

b. An explanation or account: Here, the apologizer tries to lessen his or her rude act (oral or action) via an explanation of the account.

c. Acknowledgement of responsibility: this strategy occurs when the apologizer admits and accepts his/her offensive behaviour towards the hearer. He or she blames himself/herself.

d. An offer of repair: S attempts to pay for the damage he/she caused. This strategy is always linked to future time.

e. Promise for forbearance: in this strategy, the apologizer promises the hearer that his/her offensive act will not be repeated in the future.

f. Expressing concern for the hearer occurs when the speaker feels unease for the hearer.

g. Intensification: Here, the speaker's apology contains an IFID and an intensification marker or adverbials (e.g. very, extremely, deeply, etc.). For example, saying, "I am very sorry". Furthermore, the speaker may repeat the adverbial use for a more powerful apologetic utterance, such as saying, "I am very, very sorry . . . "

Moreover, there are strategies called non-apology strategies. These non-apology strategies are those the offender uses to avoid taking responsibility for his/her rude act. Among these strategies, there is avoidance of the person or the topic (in which the speaker violates the maxim of relevance), blaming the victim (i.e., the speaker blames the hearer for what happened), and brushing off the incident as unimportant (in which the apologizer asks the hearer not to take the issue seriously).

2.3. Previous Studies on Interlanguage Apologies

Most studies that are conducted within interlanguage pragmatics are concerned with whether some uses of a second language are universal or specific to a particular target and native languages. Here, the discussion will focus on the work of some researchers whose contribution to inter-language pragmatics is valuable in shedding further light on the main reasons that cause non-native speakers' pragmatic failure while performing apologies in the target language.

Borkin and Reinhart (1978) have distinguished between I'm sorry and excuse me. The researchers hold that I'm sorry is used as an expression of regret at an infraction caused to the speaker or the addressee, whereas excuse me is an expression planned "to remedy a past or immediately forthcoming breach of etiquette or other minor offence on the part of the speaker" (p. 57).

Coulmas (1981) tries to show fields of similarities between the speech acts of apology and thanking. Coulmas suggests that each speech community, as a socio-cultural group, has its own values and rules about what actions elicit apologies and thanks- a fact indicating that apologies and thanks are culture-specific.

In another important study, Cohen and Olshtain (1985) conducted a new study designed to measure the apology performance of Hebrew speakers learning English as a second language. The researchers (1985) assume that the socio-cultural rules of appropriateness that monitor the apology speech act vary across cultures; thus, to ensure effective communication in the second language, they believe that learners need to be aware of the appropriate rules in addition to having acquired the linguistic knowledge.

Among the current studies conducted in the Arab world, Humari (2018) introduces the similarities and differences between the apologizing strategies used by Jordanian undergraduate students and Asian undergraduate students. The most frequent apology strategies used among the Jordanian and the Asian participants were account and compensation. It also shows that gratitude is less used among Asian participants when apologising to equal and lower-status people.

Ezzaoua (2020) analysed his study data, all responses were categorized according to Trosborg's (1995) apology speech act set. The results show that learners of English in higher education significantly deviated from the overall desired strategies as compared to American native speakers of English. Meanwhile, some developmental patterns towards native-like norms were perceived. The results of his study indicate that apology strategy use tends to be universal, as suggested by previous literature, especially with the use of direct apologies strategies as the most frequent ones. The study also revealed some cross-cultural differences concerning certain strategies and formulas.

3. METHOD
3.1. Instrument

The present study used a mixed method study that combines two research approaches,

qualitative and quantitative, using three research instruments: i.e. teacher's classroom observation, unstructured interviews (two qualitative research methods), and a discourse completion test (quantitative research method). This combination is used to gain more valid and reliable data findings.

The classroom observation was based on the teacher's observation of his students inside the classroom. The study primarily relies on discourse completion tests. The discourse completion test or the so-called production questionnaire is a widely used method to collect data in inter-language and cross-cultural pragmatics. This method was used for the first time to study speech act production by Blum-Kulka (1982). After, it has become widely popular among researchers in the fields of inter-language and cross-cultural pragmatics. Normally, the DCT measures a group of respondents' opinions, attitudes, and actions. Discourse completion tests consist of several situations that reflect a particular cultural and social context.

The discourse completion test delivered to the participants contains 6 situations. Every situation breaks a particular classroom rule. A section introduced the situations. The section gives instructions that the participants should follow while reacting to the questionnaire carefully, realistically, honestly and accurately. The first section also includes personal information, such as name, gender, age, level, high school, etc. The reason was to familiarise students with the questionnaire before reacting to the situations. Alongside with the discourse completion test, the researcher made some interviews with some subjects to elicit more detailed data about the situations.

3.2. Subjects

The discourse completion test was constructed only in English without translating it for the subjects. The DCT was completed by 64 first-year baccalaureate students at Ibn Aabad high school in Kenitra, Morocco, bearing in mind that the gender of participants will not be controlled in this study, but the number of females who participated in the study slightly outnumbered that of males. The participants were eager to help after explaining the purpose of this research paper. Sixty-four students were selected from the four classes observed. After selecting the subjects, the participants were kindly requested to take the DCT home with them and return it as soon as possible. Most of the students returned the DCT the following day. All the 64 selected subjects returned the questionnaires full of data, with a response rate of 100%. However, most of the students were between the ages of 16 and 18 with a suitable mastery of English.

3.3. Procedures

Classroom observation was the major method used before handing the DCT sheets to the subjects. At the level of classroom observation, the student's usage of English apologies was observed. A checklist was used to assess their English language usage. At the level of the DCT, Ibn Aabad's first-year baccalaureate EFL learners (the targeted population) were asked to complete the test. As it is mentioned above, the selection of subjects was done randomly. Before handing them the task sheet, enough explanations and clarifications were given to the subjects about the purpose of the study and about the test itself.

The selected participants were very willing to fill in the task. All of them returned the DCT sheet, with a response rate of 100%. Generally, the participants were very helpful and most of them were very interested in the task.

3.4.The Coding Method

The data analysis of this study is based upon a coding system used by Cohen and Olshtain (1981& 1983) and the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) model used by Blum-kulka et al. (1989). Furthermore, and most importantly, it will be based on Brown and Levinson's politeness model. The linguistic realization of the speech act of apologizing can take one or any combination of the strategies mentioned in the literature review (see the speech act strategies in chapter two for more information). The semantic formulas presented in apologizing strategies (2.2) are the coding system used to collect data in this research paper. For example:

- Illocutionary Force Indicating Device:
- ✓ An expression of regret (the use IFID): e.g. I am sorry.
- ✓ An offer of apology: e.g. I apologize
- ✓ A request for forgiveness: e.g. Please forgive me
- Account: e.g. the bus did not come on time.
- Taking on responsibility:
- ✓ Accepting the blame: e.g. I missed the bus, it was my fault.
- ✓ Expressing self-deficiency: e.g. I am sorry, I was confused.
- ✓ Expressing lack of intent: e.g. It was an accident.
- ✓ Recognizing the other person as a deserving apology: e.g. You are right
- ✓ Expressing embarrassment: e.g. I feel ashamed about my act.
- ✓ Refusal to acknowledge guilt: e.g. It wasn't my fault
- Showing concern for the hearer: e.g. Are you all right?
- Offer of repair: e.g. I pay for the damage I made.
- Promise of forbearance: e.g. I promise you that I will not be late again.
- Intensification: e.g. I am very sorry.

The coding scheme above consists of the apology categories used to interpret and analyze the data in this study. Thus, the participants' responses will be classified according to The CCSARP coding scheme shown above.

4. RESULTS

4.1.Situation 1: A student being late

Figure 1 displays the apology strategies used by Moroccan EFL learners at Ibn Aabad high school. It represents the percentage distribution of EFL learners in situation 1.
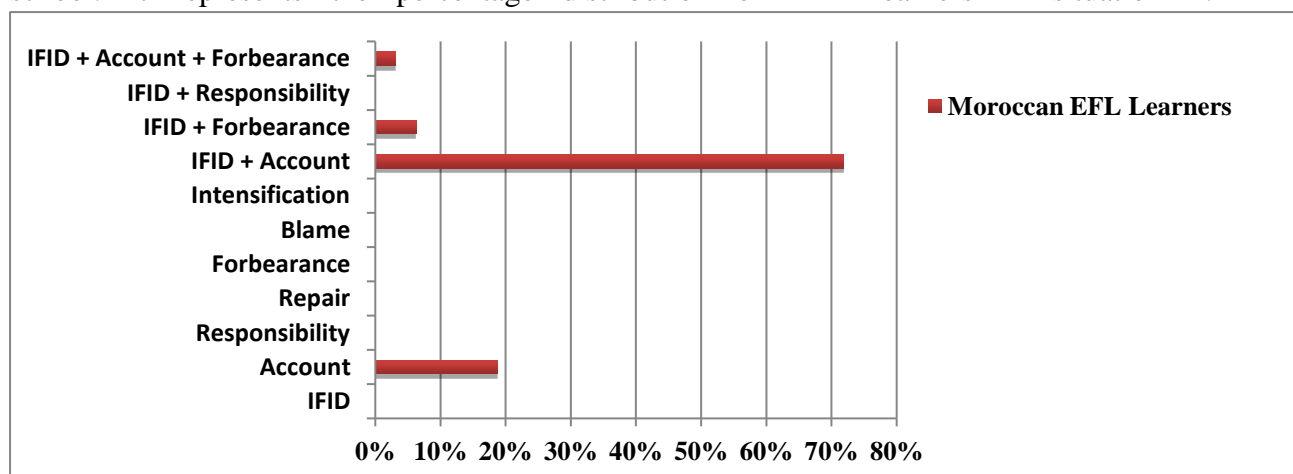

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of Moroccan EFL learner apology strategies in situation 1.

In the data analysis, we have found that the frequent apology strategy used by the targeted Moroccan EFL subjects is the use of IFIDs plus account. This shows that there is a mixture between the two strategies. For example, "I'm sorry for being late. The bus was late; "Excuse me for being late. I missed the bus." The participants use an IFID, such as "I am sorry", and then an account or an explanation to lessen the situation (e.g. The bus was late). This strategy is accounted for 60% of the overall strategies used. The second frequent apology strategy used is account. This formula is accounted for 19% of the general strategies. Here the subjects gave only the reason for being late (e.g. I'm late because of the bus; I had a problem with transportation). The third formula used is IFIDs plus Forbearance. It is accounted for 6% of subjects (e.g. I am sorry teacher, it will not happen again). The last frequent apology strategy used is IFIDs + Account + Forbearance 3% (e.g. I am sorry teacher, the bus was late. It will not happen again).

This means that the participants preferred to combine two strategies: the expression of apology (IFID) and an explanation. The subjects defended their choice by stating that they would gain the hearer's compassion and accept their apology. However, by doing so, their apology would be interpreted as an excuse rather than an apology.

4.2.. Situation 2: A Student does not return a classmate's textbook

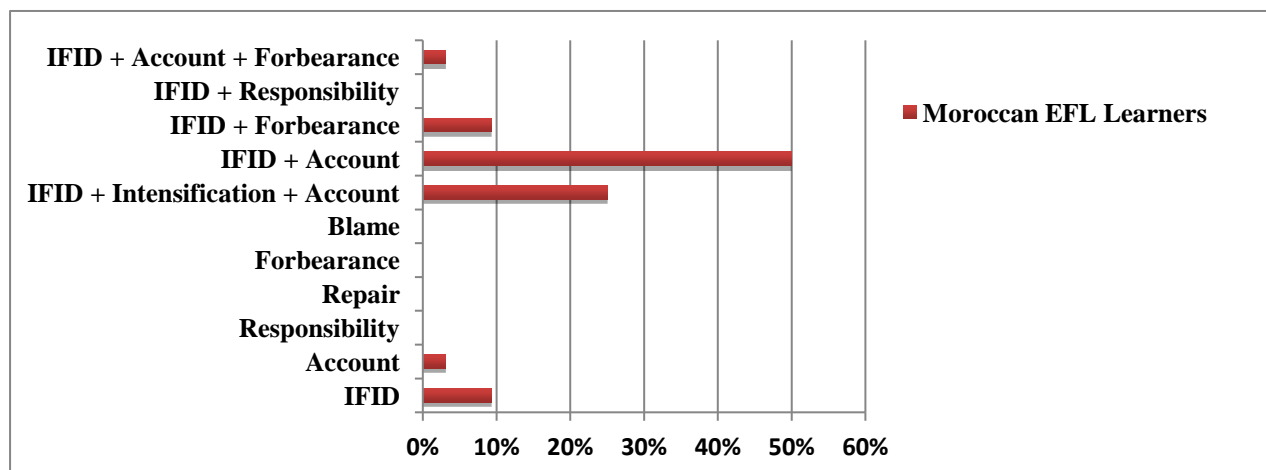Consider figure 2 for the percentage distribution of apology strategies.

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of Moroccan EFL learner apology strategies in situation 2.

The most frequently used apology strategy in situation 2 was IFIDs plus account, with a response rate of 50%. For instance, "I am sorry, I forgot; Excuse me, I have just finished reading it." The participants' expressions usually contain an expression of regret (I am sorry) and an explanation of account for their infraction (I forgot). The second frequent apology strategy used in situation 2 was IFIDs + Intensification + Account with a rate response of 19% (e.g. I am very/so/really sorry teacher, but I had a headache). Participants choose to use the adverbials very/so/really to make their apology more effective and powerful. The next two frequently used strategies after IFIDs + Intensification + Account were IFIDs 9% (e.g. I am sorry) and IFIDs + Forbearance (e.g. I am sorry; I will not repeat what I did). The use of account 3% (e.g. I forgot it) and IFIDs + Account + Forbearance 3% were less frequently used by the participants. Some apology strategies did not occur at all, such as responsibility, blame, forbearance, and repair.

This shows that our participants preferred to go for IFIDs + account over the other strategies. Their choice would not be acceptable if addressed to a native speaker of English since it would be interpreted as an excuse. Some participants justified their choice and stated that the apologizee would sympathize with them via uttering the explanation.

4.3.. Situation 3: A Student does not returning teacher's textbook

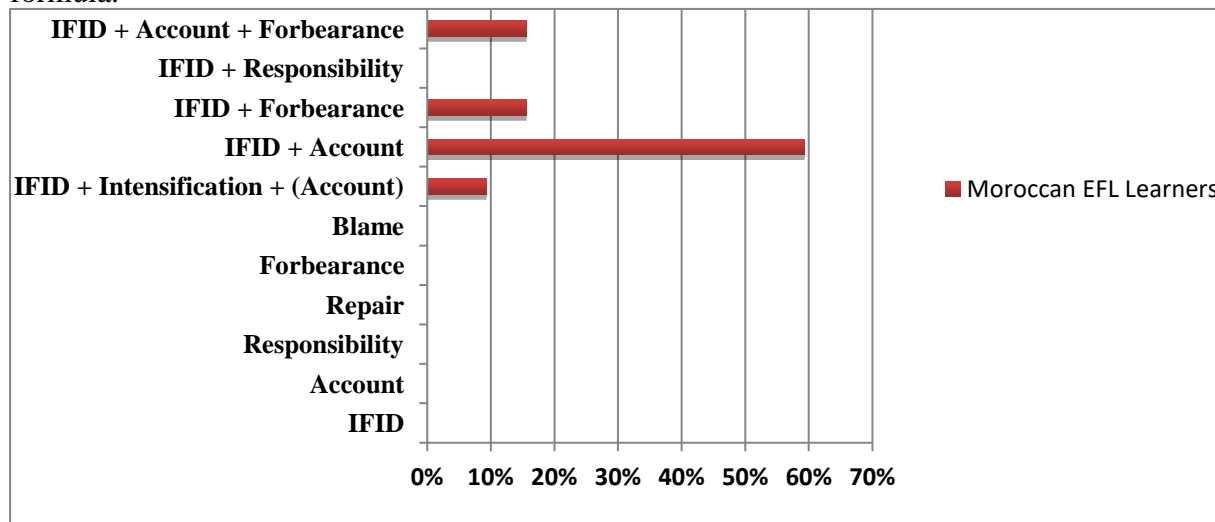Figure 3 includes the percentage distribution of apology strategies with their semantic formula.

Figure 3: Percentage distribution of Moroccan EFL learner apology strategies in situation 3.

Situation three was about a student not returning the teacher's textbook. Therefore, a social power between the student and the teacher may affect the choice of apology strategy in use. However, as figure 3 reveals, subjects employed four main apology strategies. A considerable number of subjects employed the IFIDs + Account formula. This strategy represents 59% of the total number of apology strategies. The use of IFIDs + Forbearance and IFIDs + Account + Forbearance strategies have the same percentage distribution, which is 16%, while the use of IFIDs + Intensification + (Account) strategy by subjects did not exceed 9%. However, some strategies did not occur in the subjects' responses, such as blame, forbearance, repair, and responsibility.

Hence, using "IFID + account" or "IFID + Forbearance" was pragmatically unsuccessful and would be refused by the apology. When asked to justify their choices, especially the use of "IFID + account", some interviewees stated that saying the explanation would make the apologizee sympathize with them. "I'm really sorry. I feel embarrassed." apology expression would be the appropriate expression to use in situation 3 since it sounds sincere and the apologizer feels at least a small amount of guilt for the situation and the apologizee's negative feelings.

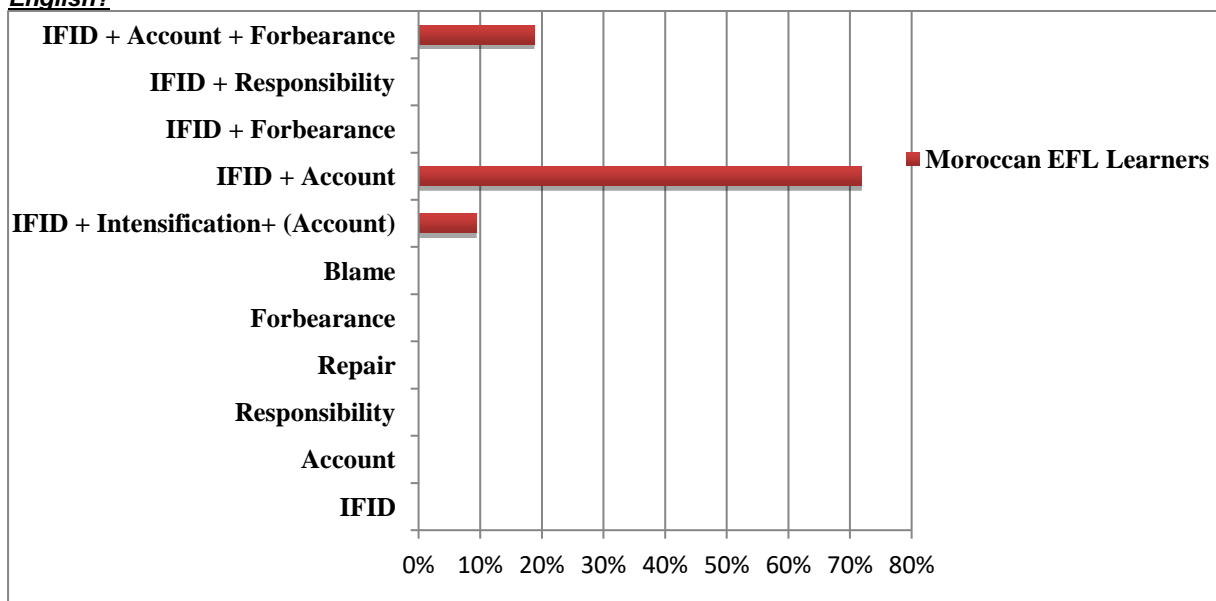### 4.4. Situation 4: Forgetting a meeting with a friend

Figure 4: Percentage distribution of Moroccan EFL learner apology strategies in situation 4.

In this situation, IFIDs + Account is ranked first with a response rate of 72%, followed by IFIDs + Account + Forbearance 19%, whereas IFIDs + Intensification+ (Account) ranked last with a response rate of 9%. This shows that Moroccan EFL learners seem to prefer the use of IFIDs + Account strategy over the other strategies.

4.5. Situation 5: A Student insulting his/her teacher

To show the percentage distribution of situation 5, consider figure 5 below.
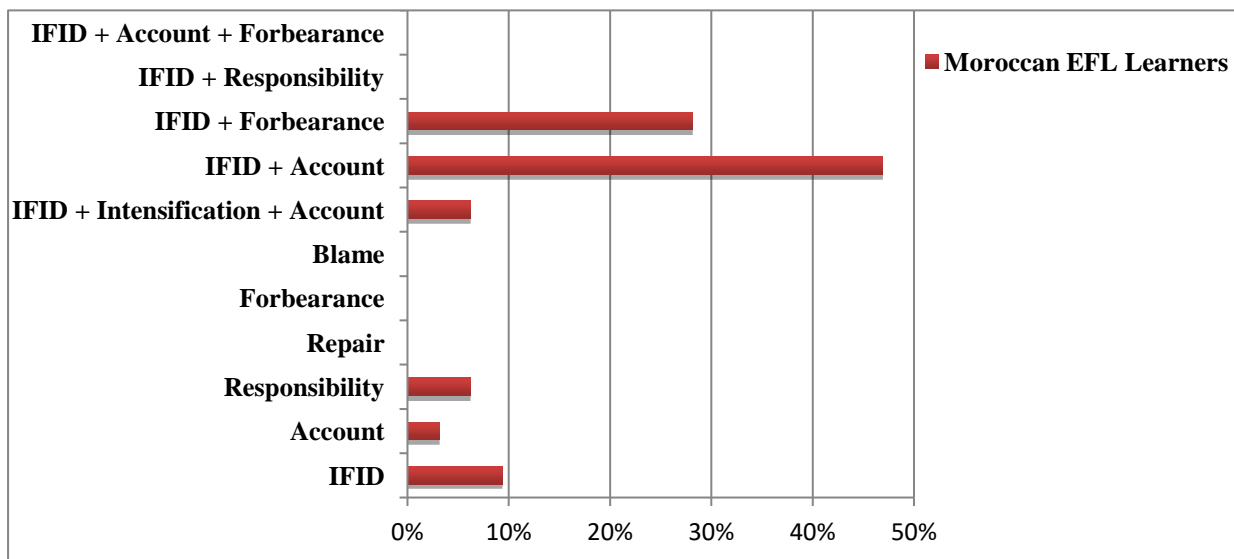

Figure 5: Percentage distribution of Moroccan EFL learner apology strategies in situation 5.

Figure 5 shows the percentage distribution of apology strategies used by Moroccan EFL learners. According to the data above, the most frequently used semantic formula was IFIDs

plus account (e.g. I am sorry sir, I did not mean to insult you). 47% of the subjects employed this strategy that combines an IFID with an explanation. The second one was the use of IFIDs + Forbearance (e.g. I am sorry, I will not repeat it). 28% of the participants used this formula. The last four strategies (IFID, account, responsibility and IFIDs + Intensification + Account) ranked last with less than 9%.

Therefore, the displayed results show that Moroccan high school EFL learners preferred to use the "IFID + account" strategy over the other ones (the same as in the previous situations). This is pragmatically unsuccessful and would lead to pragmatic failure.

4.6. Situation 6: A Student not doing his/her homework

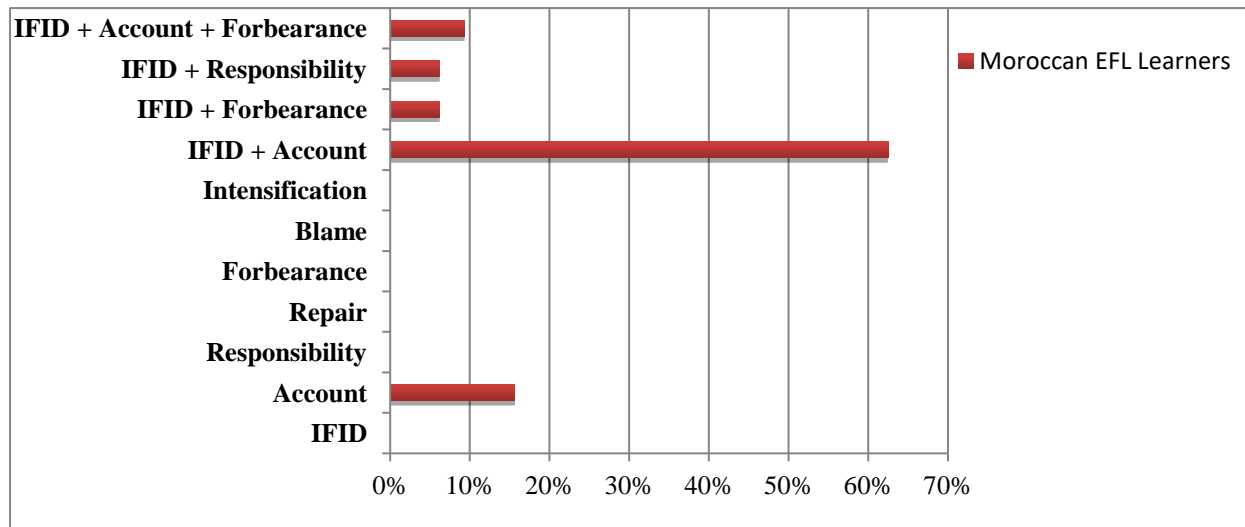Based on the number of subjects' responses, a percentage distribution is made in figure 6.

Figure 6: Percentage distribution of Moroccan EFL learner apology strategies in situation 6.

As it is quite clear from figure 6, "IFIDs + Account" is the most frequent strategy used. This strategy accounts for almost 63% of all strategies used. It consists of two main strategies: IFIDs (Expression of regret and offer of apology) and account. Some of the utterances used by the students for this strategy were: "I am sorry, I was sick", "I apologize teacher, I forgot to do the homework." Explanation of account accounts for 16%. Some of the utterances used by the students for this strategy: "I was sick", "I forgot teacher", "I did not understand the homework", etc. These two strategies exceed 80% of the overall strategies used. Whereas the remaining strategies account for less than 20%: IFIDs + Forbearance 6%, IFIDs + Responsibility 6% and IFIDs + Account + Forbearance. Moreover, some apology strategies did not occur at all, such as IFIDs, responsibility, blame, Intensification, forbearance, and repair.

Thus, our study participants seem to prefer the use of "IFID + account" strategy over the other strategies. Their choice is characterized by the apologizer stating a reason to justify the situation. Their apologies sound something like, "I am sorry, but..." In this scenario, the apologizer uses excuses to justify and rationalize a behaviour they knew was wrong when they did it.

4.7. Politeness Orientation

It is quite clear from the findings that the linguistic choices made by Moroccan EFL learners could be linked to their preference for different politeness strategies. Data analysis showed that the study participants tended to claim common ground with the offended via the employment

of expressions of familiarity, cooperation, and in group identity markers "we". Furthermore, the subjects' predisposition to prioritize positive over negative politeness is obvious from their linguistic utterances in the six situations. For example, they employed apology strategies, such as accounts, forbearance, determinism, and self-punishment. Using such strategies implies a good familiarity with the apologizee and is likely to minimize the distance even though there is a distance between the offended and the apologizer.

It is also worth stating that the vast majority of subjects tried to use religious expressions, indicating that they chose political strategies according to an Islamic cultural background. For instance, when some participants state that they forgot because of Satan, it means that they are trying to blame a third party in an attempt not to risk interpersonal relationships. All in all, in Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, Native speakers of English, particularly British speakers, are classified as a society that places high value on social distance.

Negative politeness is seen to be the predominant feature that prevails in social interactions. This point has been approved by Stewart (2005), who describes British English as "an avoidance-based, negatively oriented culture"(2005, p.117) and contends that British English is persuaded more toward negative politeness and favours off-record strategies in the contentment of a certain face-threatening act. On the other hand, Moroccan EFL learners' apologies show that they are more to place a low emphasis on social distance. Positive politeness strategies are expected to be a feature in social encounters among people who marginalize social distance.

5. DISCUSSION

Like all other speech acts, an apology is affected by social parameters in that the latter exert some influence on the decision to apologize, strategy preference, and apology intensity. In a general sense, the findings of this study swim in a different direction from the stream of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), in that IFID and taking on responsibility figured in all situations across the English language. Looking at the structure of IFIDs used by native speakers of English (in particular British speakers), it is quite clear that the commonly used expression is "I'm sorry". Furthermore, British subjects preferred to strengthen their apologies through means of adverbs, such as so, really, terribly, etc., or emotional expression.

Additionally, Sari (2016) points out that the strategy chosen by native speakers tend to be simple. It is based on the potential emergence of IFID followed by repair and is responsible for the number of smaller percentages. However, IFID and greetings are not always present in each strategy. It shows the tendency of native speakers to direct on target to achieve communication objectives. Native speakers tend to use the strategy of reduction or diversion efforts, especially in unfamiliar situations. So, for all situations and social levels, native speakers tend to use short and direct patterns.

On the other hand, the most preferred apology strategy by first-year baccalaureate students in all situations is IFIDs + Account. A considerable number of subjects (more than 50%) have employed this semantic formula whenever a breach happens. However, the use of accounts in the six situations would be interpreted by the hearer as an excuse rather than an apology. As a matter of fact, interpreting the apology as an excuse may lead to a misunderstanding in communication or to what is called pragmatic failure. For example, in situation one, many participants say that the bus is the reason for being late. They blamed the bus rather than taking responsibility for their actions. This is typically the Moroccan way of doing it.

Alternatively, a large number of native speakers of the English language prefer to use only IFIDs (e.g. "I am sorry," or "sorry") formulaic expressions of apology, and they do not mix their apology expressions with other strategies (Owen, 1983; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984;

Deutschmann, 2003). Furthermore, a native speaker of English would say that he/she is the one who missed the bus and not the opposite. They would rather blame themselves rather than on the bus.

Therefore, we can conclude that Moroccan EFL learners apologize in English but in a Moroccan way. Participants' cultural background influences their choice of English apology. That is to say, apologies in collective-agency cultures (such as Morocco) are understood to be general expressions of remorse and excuses rather than a means to assign culpability. On the contrary, in individualistic, independent cultures such as the United States (Hofstede 1980), the primary cause of a given action or event is typically attributed to individuals. Thus, native speakers of English would take the blame AND responsibility while apologizing.

Hence, the way Moroccan EFL learners make apologies does not meet native speakers' norms, leading them to have communication breakdowns while communicating with a native speaker of English. The cultural background and L1 effect on non-native speakers can be one of the reasons for these differences, and the similarities between these two groups might be due to non-native speakers' high level of English proficiency Tabatabaei et al. (2018).

Based on the findings, it is obvious that Moroccan EFL learners' linguistic choices while apologizing are not the same as the British or the American way of apologizing. Since the researcher is not a native speaker of English, whatever account he may provide concerning British or American cultures would not be as precise as one given by a native speaker of English. Therefore, being a part of that culture is needed. However, several researchers, such as Sifianou (1992), Watts (2003), and Stewart & Hickey (2005), have investigated British politeness. The researchers all agreed that Britain is a negative politeness culture.

On the other hand, if we have a bird's-eye view of the study subjects' responses, it would be noticed that the participants went for positive over negative politeness across the six situations. They employed apology strategies, such as accounts, forbearance, determinism, and self-punishment. Using such strategies implies a good level of familiarity with the apologizee and is likely to minimize the distance even though there is a distance between the offended and the apologizer.

Regarding the use of mitigators, some participants included some religious expressions. This shows that they choose politeness strategies according to an Islamic cultural background. In Brown & Levinson's (1987) model, western societies, such as Britain, are classified as societies that place a high value on social distance. On the contrary, Moroccan EFL learners produced apologies are, in general, face-saving acts, which are considered a face-threatening act for the speaker in Brown & Levinson's (1987) model of politeness.

6. Conclusion

All in all, this paper was an attempt to describe first-year baccalaureate EFL learners' apologies in English. More specifically, this paper examines the extent to which Moroccan EFL learners can produce appropriate apologies rather than excuses that may lead them to a breakdown in communication.

The results of this study, in particular the observation results, suggested that a large number of students use an off-record super strategy. That is when a student is required to apologize, he/she disobey one of the Gricean maxims (the use of hints). For example, students who end up late in some sessions say only one word, "bus", and then look guilty. The teacher interprets this word as an excuse rather than an explanation of the account. However, according to the observation results of the teacher's politeness inside the classroom, it is quite clear that he uses a positive politeness super strategy. The teacher always tries to create a sense of solidarity.

At the written discourse completion test level, the most preferred apology strategy by first-year baccalaureate students is IFIDs + Account. More than 50% of the subjects have employed this semantic formula whenever a fraction happens. The usage of accounts in the six situations would be interpreted by the hearer, especially by the teacher, as an excuse rather than an apology. As a matter of fact, interpreting the apology as an excuse may lead to a misunderstanding in communication or to what is called pragmatic failure[2]. Therefore, considering the student's utterance as an excuse or an apology relies on the hearer's understanding and personal interpretation. However, some participants employed other semantic formulas in the written DCT. For example, in situation 5, more than 28% of the subjects employed IFID + Forbearance. Participants write the expression of regret, "I am Sorry", followed by a promise not to repeat the action. This is typically the Moroccan way of doing it. Therefore, we can conclude that Moroccan EFL learners apologize in English in a Moroccan way. Participants' first language influences their choice of English apology. Nonetheless, some apology strategies did not occur at all, with a response rate of 0%.

Certain limitations need to be regarded in the present study. One is that it is difficult to generalize the findings because the data were collected from 64 first-year baccalaureate students EFL learners at Ibn Aabad high school in Kenitra. Furthermore, though the study used both an observation of natural speech inside the class and a written DCT, the findings do not claim any validity for a natural spoken language. Another limitation is related to the participants' weak level of English. Because of it, only 6 situations were included, whereas at least 16 were preferable.

A third limitation has to do with subjects' bad handwriting. Frankly, reading some students' reactions to some situations was hard. A further limitation in this regard is that some methods are not used because of time constraints. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the similar future studies use role plays, interviewing and questionnaires. By using those methods, this paper would have revealed very rich findings. In brief, this study's limitations should be considered when interpreting the results.

This paper suggests a number of implications for further research on speech act, in particular apologizing. Furthermore, because politeness is a social phenomenon represented by language, further research on speech acts is needed to discover the reasons that make social interactions successful. Studies are needed to shed further light on what makes linguistic expressions appropriate or inappropriate. Here in Morocco, studies on cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics are still marginalized. Most studies that dealt with speech acts in Morocco focused on standard Arabic and neglected both Amazigh and Moroccan Arabic varieties. Therefore, further research on speech acts and politeness theory can be implicated to the latter varieties mentioned above in Morocco. Studies on the interlanguage pragmatics field are needed to enable students to use the target language appropriately and avoid pragmatic failure.

REFERENCES

Abdou, M. (1999). *Proficiency level in English and previous linguistic backgrounds constraints on pragmatic competence in EFL in Morocco: The case of requests [*Unpublished DES Thesis, Mohamed V-Souissi University].

Austin, J. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.

Blum, S., & Levenston, E. A. (1978). *Universals of lexical simplification. Language Learning, 28*(2),399–415. https://doi:10.1111/j.1467-1770.1978.tb00143.x

Blum-Kulka, S. (1982). Learning how to say what you mean in a second language: A study of the speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics*, *3*(2), 29-59. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/III.1.29

Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1986). Too many words: Length of utterance and pragmatic failure. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *8*, 165-179.

Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., &Kasper, G. (Eds.). (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: requests and apologies*. Ablex.

Borkin, A. & Reinhart, M. (1978*). Excuse me and I'm sorry. TESOL Quarterly. 12* (1), 57- 79.

Boussfiha, A. (2005*). Aspects of sociopragmatic competence in Moroccan preschoolers' discourse* [unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Rabat: Mohamed].

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, A. (1996). Speech acts. In S. McKay &N. Hornberger (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching* (pp. 383–420). Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, A. D., & Olshtain, E. (1985). Comparing apologies across languages . *In K. R. Jankavsky (ed.). Scientific and Humanistic Dimensions of Language. John Benjamins.*

Coulmas, F. (ed.) (1981). *Conversational routine. explorations in standardized communication situations and prepatterned speech.* Mouton de Gruyter.

Davies, E. (1987). A contrastive approach to the analysis of politeness formulas. *Applied Linguistics*, *8* (1), 75-88.

Ezzaoua, O. (2020). Apologies in EFL: An interlanguage pragmatic study on Moroccan learners of English. *Studies in Literature and Language, 20*(2), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.3968/11640

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In Cole, P. and Morgan, J. (Eds.). *Syntax and Semantics 3/ Speech Acts*. Academic Press

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage.

Hossein, R., & Hammouri, M. T. (1998). Strategies of apology in Jordanian Arabic and American English. *Grazer Linguistics studies*, *49*, 37-50.

 https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/8.1.75

Huwari, I. *(2018).* A study of apology strategies in English: A case study on Jordanian and Asian undergraduate students at Zarqa University. *Arab World English Journal, 9 (1)*, 335-349. https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no1.24

Kabel, A. (2002). *A Pragmatic study of Moroccan EFL learners' refusals* [An unpublished DESA dissertation. Rabat: Mohamed V-Souissi University].

Kamaoui, M. (2003). *An Exploratory study of EFL Moroccan learners' apologies* [An unpublished DESA dissertation. Rabat: Mohamed V-Souissi University].

Lakoff, R. (1973). *Language and woman's place. Language in Society*, *2*(1), 45-80. Cambridge University Press.

Latif, H. (2001). *A Sociopragmatic study of EFL Moroccan learners' requests* [unpublished DESA dissertation. Mohammed V Souissi University].

Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman

Lin, H. H. (2005). *Contextualizing linguistic politeness in Chinese: A socio-pragmatic approach with examples from persuasive sales talk in Taiwan Mandarin* [Unpublished

PhD thesis. The Ohio State University, USA]. http://etd.ohiolink.edu/send-pdf.cgi/Lin%20Huey%20Hannah.pdf?osu1109961198&dl=y

Melouk, M. (1989). *The Acquisition of Modal auxiliaries in English as a foreign language*

About the Author

Hmouri Zaid *is a high school teacher of the English language and a doctorate candidate at Ibn Tofail University, Faculty of Languages, Letters, and Arts, Kenitra. Currently, he is conducting his PhD in pragmatics and discourse analysis. He has published several research papers in international and national journals of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics Studies. He has reviewed research papers for some scholarly international and national journals. His areas of interest include interlanguage, discourse analysis, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, English Language Teaching (ELT), and second language acquisition.*