Tarbiat Modares
University

Avoiding Sincere Apologies among Iranian Politicians and Its Cultural Justification: A Pragmatic Study

Hossein Rahmani* iD

Political apologies, are among special type of apologies, which the politicians state to protect their own faces and to fulfill the communal need. But apologizing has its own strategies. Kempf (2009) introduces some verbal strategies such as Using lexical and syntactical means, omitting or blurring the gent, denying responsibility, selecting a specific victim, undermining the existence of the victim, and apology for a component of the offense (and not for the entire occurrence), etc. by the use of which the politicians avoid sincere apologies. Through Investigation of 100 utterances of apologies by politicians as broadcasted in the national and local media, the present article claims that these apologies are insincere. The results indicate that these insincerities have their roots in the Iranian cultural Memes of collectivism, overstating and truth avoiding.

*Keywords***:** Apology, Omitting or blurring the agent, Apology for a component of the offense, Iranian Politicians, Kampf

*Corresponding author: Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, University of Payam-e-Noor, Tehran, Iran; *Email: hosein_rahmani@pnu.ac.ir*
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2570-6256

1. Introduction

Apology is a speech act in which someone who has done or is responsible for something wrong tries to get the offended appeased and thereby save his own face. Likewise, in political apologies which are a sub-type of public apologies, a politician needs to both save his/her own face and to fulfill the communal need to appease the damaged face of people. But most of the time their apologies are regarded to be insincere. The present article, based on Kempf's (2009) verbal strategies of apologies (using lexical and syntactical means, omitting or blurring the agent, denying responsibility, selecting a specific victim, undermining the existence of the victim, and apology for a component of the offense (and not for the entire occurrence), etc.) claims that the Iranian politicians blur their responsibility most of the time and in some cases, they only take responsibility only for a component of the offenses. Though insincere, the politician's apologies are justifiable due to Iranian cultural Memes such as of collectivism, overstating, truth avoiding. This research intends to answer the following questions:

1. Which strategy was mostly used by politicians to avoid sincere apologies?

2. How does political positions affect the use of apologizing strategies?

3. How the insincerity of the Iranian politicians' apologies is justified?

2.Literature Review

To have a proper grasp of the relative literature, they are categorized as follow:

2.1. Apology Verbs

Apologies should include explicit Illocutionary indicating devices (*IFIDs*) such as *sorry* and *excuse me* in order to be perceived as apologies. Aijmer (1996) investigated 215 apologies and found out 82.7% of them include *sorry*.

Blum-Kulka and Olshtein (1984), Holtgraves (1989) and House (1989), Holmes (1990), and Meier (1992) found excuse me, *sorry,* and *I'm sorry* to be of highest frequencies, while Trosborg found *sorry* to be of low frequency. Shariatin and Chamani (2010) found *excuse me* to be the most frequent type of verbal apology in Persian.

2.2. Comparative apology studies

There has been numerous research which tried to compare apologies in English with their native language. Cohen and Olshtein (1981), Olshtein (1989), Meier (1996), Garcia (1989), House (1989) and Elsami Rasekh (2004) which compared English with Hebrew, Austrian, Spanish, German, and Persian are among the typical examples of the related literature. Generally, they found similarities among languages.

2.3. Gender and apology studies

The majority of the researchers who focused on the relations between apologies and gender such as Gonzales et. al (1990), Cody and McLaughlin (1990), Mills (2003) an Holmes (1990, 1995, 2014) concluded that women apologize more than men and attributed it to the politeness of women.

2.4. Public Apologies

Research in this field started late compared with the other studies. Having face consideration in mind, Olshtein (1989), Gruber (1993), Bull (1996), Thompson (2000) De Ayala (2001) considered apologies vital for the apologizer's social status. Blaney and Benoit (2001), Benoit (1995) regarded apology a necessity for the politician's face maintenance. Lind (2008), James (2008) and Rener (2008) considered apologies as a way for keeping social peace. Harris et.al. (2006) believe that it is necessary that the apologizer accept

the responsibility clearly and his apology should be free of any excuses. Davis, Merrison and Goddard (2007) have looked into apology in email exchanges. Page (2014) focused on how companies apologize their customers. There has been research on apologies made by celebrities (Kaufman, 2012), sportsmen (Brazeal, 2008), politicians (Kampf & Lowenheim, 2012) and company managers (Park et al., 2011).

3. Methodology

3.1. Kempf's Tactics for Compromising Apologies

Kempf (2009: 8-24) demonstrated how speakers use various tactics that focus on each one of Deutschmann's four components (The IFID, the offence, the victim and the offender) in order to lessen their responsibility for misdeeds. Each component has its own subcategories:

1.The IFID

When a public transgressor encounters with an avoidance conflict after a demand for apology, there are two major ways to incorporate an explicit verb in the utterance without truly apologizing: (1) Using a verb with several pragmatic functions that does not necessarily count as an apology, or (2) Realizing a non-performative speech act. Both of these allow speakers to project an appearance of regret (and, in turn, a moral persona), without taking self-threatening responsibility or juridical liability for the offense.

2.The Offense

There are five ways to lessen the responsibility of the transgressor even in cases in which he includes an *ifid* in his utterance. He can (1) apologize while undermining the claim that he offended someone; (2) apologize for the outcome (and not for the act); (3) apologize for the style (and not for the essence); (4) apologize for a specific component of the offense (and not for the entire occurrence); and lastly, (5) apologize while using syntactic and lexical

means to downgrade his responsibility.

3. The Victim

The third cluster of tactics of avoiding responsibility centers on drawing a question mark regarding the identity of the offended party. In doing so, the apologizer undermines one of the basic premises of the remedial act: an acknowledgment that the act caused harm to a specific victim. Without the existence of a specific victim, there is no real damage caused from the act, and thus it cannot be framed as a transgression. Three tactics for undermining the offended party were found in the corpus: (1) Undermining the existence of the victim, (2) Selecting a specific victim, and (3) Blurring the identity of the victim.

4. The Offender

The last cluster of tactics to reduce responsibility and guilt in the apology utterance is focused on the offender. Several tactics for avoiding agency have already been considered by Bavelas (2004) who analyzed the way in which apologizers position themselves as the grammatical subject of acts described in their utterance, using simple active voice to admit agency and passive voice or omitting the agent all together to avoid agency. In this paper, I discuss two more tactics that reduce the agent's responsibility and, as in the last category of the "victim," violate the preparatory condition which demands the existence of a specific wrongdoer: (1) Denying responsibility and (2) Omitting or blurring the offender.

3.2. Data

The data includes 100 cases of apologies found in websites and social networks by different politicians with different political status. The search began with looking for the term 'apology' in different search engines and the results were categorized based on the speaker ranging from president, vice-president, ministers, governors and … The data is not restricted to a special period, though the majority of the apologies belong with the president Rouhani's presidency.

The analysis is void of any political side-taking and is merely linguistic.

3.3. Method

The data gathered were categorized based on five major political groups (President and his deputies (1-20), ministers (21-30), state governors (51-72), local governors (73-92), and parliamentary representatives (93-100)). Then based on Kempf's typology, each of these apologies were categorized to see the frequency of each tactic.

4. Results

Investigating the apologies made by Iranian politicians based on Kempf (2009) revealed that 44 out of 100 apologies were based on the offender, 36 cases belong to the offence and 12 cases centered on the victim and 9 cases go to the IFID. In addition, out of the offender-based apology-tactics forty cases, i.e. the most frequent apology tactic, is about omitting or blurring the offender; in other words, the Iranian politicians try hard to show lessen their responsibility. Among these politicians the higher status politicians do not consider themselves responsible for the offences; most of the time, they attribute the offence to the outer factors on which they have no authority. It was also found that the local governors and the parliamentary representatives apologize more and they accept a part of the mistake and apologize for it.