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Students' Performance in Face-to-Face Communication: Apologising in English

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Abstract

This paper reports on the results of a corpus study on the development of pragmatic competence in face-to-face communication of Macedonian learners of English at A1, A2, B1 and B2 level, as defined by the *Common European Framework of Reference Levels (CEFR)*. Central to developing pragmatic competence are the speech acts. In this study, we focus on the speech act of apologising. Data for analysis was drawn from the Macedonian English Learner Corpus (MELC) [1] which was compiled in 2011-2012 as a part of a joint project of three universities in the Republic of Macedonia: FON-First Private University, University Ss Cyril and Methodius-Skopje, and Goce Delcev University-Stip. In our analysis we rely on classification of the strategies for formulating apologies in [3] as well as the exponents for apologising that CEFR and the accompanying T-books (Breakthrough, Waystage, Threshold and Vantage) give for each of the levels. We discuss the Illocutionary Force Indication Devices (IFIDs) that are used for framing the speech act, the combination of strategies for apologising that learners apply as well as the linguistic and syntactic means that learners use to intensify their apologies. We also highlight some of the errors and point to their sources. Our study showed that even at B2 level students hesitate how to use the explicit IFIDs and the marker *please*. They are also not sure about the use of the performative verb *apologise* and about the difference between *sorry* and *excuse me*. They use variety of lexical means to intensify their apologies. However, the use of syntactic structures is limited.

Key words: apologies; CEFR; IFIDs; modification; pragmatic competence; speech acts.

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1. Introduction

This paper reports on the results of a corpus study on the development of pragmatic competence of Macedonian learners of English at A1, A2, B1 and B2 level, as defined by the *Common European Framework of Reference Levels (CEFR)*. Pragmatics is “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” [1:240]. With the introduction of the communicative approach, it has become obvious that learning the rules of lexicon, grammar and phonology is not enough for successful communication. For the realization of their communicative intentions in the second/foreign language, learners have to learn both the social rules and the linguistic forms that are required.

Speech acts are central to developing pragmatic competence. So, in this study we focus on the speech act of apologising. We pose the following research questions:

1. Which IFIDs (explicit language means expressing the illocutionary force of the proposition) do Macedonian learners of English use at different levels?
2. Which strategies for apologising do they use?
3. How do Macedonian learners of English modify their apologies?

1.1 Defining apologies

The speech act of apology is of outstanding importance for communication in general, and for cross-cultural communication in particular. All authors who have researched the speech act of apology [9, 3, 10, 1, 11, 12, 13, 14, etc.] define apology as an act of repairing a breach of a social norm and restoring harmony in communication. Thus; “by apologising, the speaker recognizes the fact that a violation of a social norm has been committed and admits to the fact that s/he is at least partially involved in its cause” [3:206]. In research, the speech act of apology has been approached from different perspectives: communication [30, 31, 32]; cross-cultural pragmatics [10, 20, 1, 21, 26, 16]; developing pragmatic competence in L2 learners [22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28]; or classroom practices in language teaching [17, 18, 19, 29].

Speakers can reach for several strategies by means of which they can perform an apology. For this study we accept the classification proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain [3], according to which the linguistic realization of the act of apologising can take one of two basic forms, or a combination of both:

- a) Apologising is most directly realized by explicit Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFID). In English they are *I'm sorry, I apologise, I regret it, Excuse me, Forgive me* and *Pardon*.
- b) Another way in which one can perform an apology, with or without an IFID, is to use an utterance which contains explicit apology + one of the following strategies: 1. an explanation or account of the cause which brought about the offence; 2. an expression of the speaker's responsibility for the offence; 3. an offer of repair;

or 4. a promise that it will never happen again.

Holmes [1] classifies offences as light, medium and serious. A light offence, for example, is an accidental collision with another person or untimely return of the book to the library; coming late for a date or damaging something small that belongs to another person would be considered a medium offence; while accidentally injuring another person or causing someone to miss something important is considered a serious offence. According to this classification, the situation we analyze belongs to the group of medium offences. The offender is late or has forgotten to come, thus not showing consideration for the other person. According to Holmes [1], this threatens the negative face of the person who is kept waiting because her/his freedom of movement has been impeded. However, we believe that both her/his positive and negative face has been threatened because s/he can also draw a conclusion for not being liked or respected.

The speech act of apologising can be intensified with the following devices:

- a) an intensifying expression within the IFID (*I'm terribly sorry*);
- b) expressing explicit concern for the hearer with a non-IFID expression (*Have you been waiting long?*);
- c) using multiple strategies (\pm IFID and one or more of the strategies previously mentioned).

The intensification which operates within the IFID can be realized with adverbs (*very, really, so*), exclamations, as well as repetitions or combinations of the IFIDs.

2. Materials and Methods

Data for analysis for this study were drawn from the Macedonian English Learner Corpus [1] which was compiled in 2011-2012 as a part of a joint project of three universities in Macedonia: FON-The First Private University, University Ss Cyril and Methodius-Skopje and Goce Delcev University-Stip. The materials were produced by students from state schools, language centers and universities. Data for studying spoken language were elicited by a Discourse completion task (DCT). The aim of this task was to provide insights about speech act production. The DCT consisted of four situations, some of which elicited apologies. We analyzed the following situation in particular:

You were planning on having coffee with your close friend June this morning but as you wake up, it is already 40 minutes past the time you were supposed to be at the cafe. You call your friend's cell phone and apologise.

The situation represents a medium offence among close friends. Accordingly, the findings are relevant for this type of situation. The elicited conversations were divided in two groups according to learners' age: 5-15 and 16-60. They were first analyzed separately and then in relation to one another.

2.1 Connecting the speech act of apology to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

Point of departure for this analysis was the CEFR [2] which primary aim is developing communicative competence. The CEFR discusses communicative competence at length, including pragmatic competence. While the descriptors in the CEFR about the pragmatic competences are too general, the T-books related to the CEFR levels give more detailed descriptions: Breakthrough [7] is related to A1 level, Waystage [2] to A2, Threshold [4] to B1, and Vantage [5] to B2. Table 1 gives the exponents of apologising for each of the levels.

As the tables shows, at A1 level learners are expected to be able to use the explicit IFID for apologising *Sorry*. The list of IFIDs does not expand at A2 level, but learners are expected to be able to intensify their apology with the adverbs *very* and *so* (*I am (very) sorry! I am so sorry!*).

Table 1: Exponents of apologising distributed according to the CEFR levels

Level	Function	Exponent
A1 <i>Breakthrough</i>	Apologising	<i>Sorry!</i>
A2 <i>Waystage</i>	Apologising	<i>I am (very) sorry! Sorry! I am so sorry!</i>
B1 <i>Threshold</i>	Offering an apology	<i>Sorry! I am (very) sorry! I am so sorry.</i>
		<i>Please forgive me.</i>
		<i>I apologise. I do apologise.</i>
		For disturbing someone <i>I beg your pardon</i>
B2 <i>Vantage</i>	Apologising, asking forgiveness	<i>Excuse me, please.</i>
		(I'm) (so/very) sorry (for NP/VP gerund)
		<i>Sorry for the chaos.</i>
		Please forgive me (for NP/VPgerund)
		<i>Please forgive me for shouting at you.</i>
B2 <i>Vantage</i>	Apologising for disturbing somebody	I (do) apologise (for NP/VPgerund)
		<i>I do apologise for arriving so late.</i>
		<i>I beg your pardon.</i>
B2 <i>Vantage</i>	Apologising for disturbing somebody	<i>Excuse me, please.</i>

At B1 level, learners are expected to append their list of explicit expressions with the performative verbs *forgive* and *apologise* and to be able to intensify their apology with *please* and *do* (*Please forgive me; I apologise; I do apologise*). At this level two types of apologies are distinguished: offering an apology and apologising for

disturbing somebody and the exponents *I beg your pardon* and *Excuse me, please* are introduced for the latter.

At B2 level there are two sub-categories of apology: apologising, asking forgiveness and apologising for disturbing someone. Learners performance of apologising is expected to improve syntactically by the use of more complex expressions with *for + NP/VP gerund* after the performative verb (*Sorry for the chaos; Please forgive me for shouting at you; I do apologise for arriving so late*).

3. Results

3.1 Apology IFIDs found in MKAM

We will open our analysis with review of apology IFIDs found in our corpus. The percentages of their occurrence are given in Table 2. The table shows that in the given context, learners of all levels and ages show preference for formulating their apologies with *sorry*, which can be used on its own as *Sorry!*, or in the expression *I'm/am sorry*. The percentage of their occurrence varies the highest being with the young A1 group (96.3%) and the lowest with the adult A2 group (77.3%).

Table 2: Apology IFIDs found in MKAM

Explicit IFIDs	A1		A2		B1		B2	
	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66
sorry	96.3	/	89.5	77.3	90	80	84.5	85.3
apologise	3.7	/	2.1	22.7	2	9	5.6	7.4
forgive	0	/	2.1	0	1	6	5.6	5.5
excuse me	0	/	0	0	0	0	0	0.9
absence of IFID	0	/	6.3	0	7	5	4.3	0.9
Total	100	/	100	100	100	100	100	100

As for the rest of the explicit IFIDs of apology, there were only few occurrences of *apologise*, *forgive*, and *excuse*. Only the adult A2 level group displayed a higher percentage of occurrences of expressions with *apologise* (22.7%). It seems that Macedonian learners begin to use *apologise* at a very low level (A2). According to Ogiermann [11], native speakers use the expressions with *apologise* in more formal situations, such as official public or written apologies [11:95]. However, our learners are not quite aware of the situations in which it is more appropriate than *I'm sorry*, i.e. of its formality connotation. It seems that they perceive *apologise* as a verb which intensifies their apology and makes it sound more sincere. Half of the utterances containing the verb *apologise* also contained an expression with *sorry*, as in the examples below:

- (1) Oh, I do apologise. I didn't wake up on the time. I'm sorry! (A2)
- (2) Oh, sorry. I'm really really sorry. I do apologise. (B1)

In our corpus we have noted the use of the following expressions:

A2 - *my apologise, Apologise, I'm apologise, Again I'm apologise, please exceptet my apologise*

B1 - *I (do) apologise, I really apologise, I call you to apologise, I want to apologise, Can you apologise me?*

B2 - *I apologise, I want to apologise, I have to apologise, My apologise June, Please accept my apologise, I'm calling to apologise*

This limited number of examples demonstrates that although Macedonian learners know the verbs *apologise*, they are not aware of the corresponding noun *apology*, not even at B2 level. As a result, we could find examples of the type *My apologise/ Please accept my apologise* at all levels. We believe this could be a result of several misinterpretations on the part of the learners: hesitation between the plural form *apologies* and *apologise*, the higher frequency of occurrence of the verb form in comparison with the noun, and teachers not paying enough attention to word formation in class.

In addition to *apologise*, we were able to note a few examples with *forgive*. At B1 and B2 level, it was reinforced with *please* or a modal verb: *Please forgive me* or *Will/Can/Could you (ever) forgive me (please)?* As for *Excuse me*, there was only one example at B2 level.

We would also like to point out that there was a significant difference in the occurrences of the expressions with *Sorry* and *I'm/am (intensifier) sorry*. Table 3 shows that only at A1 level do Macedonian learners show preference for *Sorry!* (69.2%). At all other levels learners prefer expressions with *I'm/am (intensifier) sorry*. The number of occurrences increases from level to level and from 30.8% at A1 level, it reaches 81.7%, i.e. 87% at B2 level. As learners proceed from one level to another, the range of linguistic means at their disposal expands and they become more efficient in achieving their communication goals. Obviously, learners perceive *Sorry!* as too short, too simple and not sufficient for successful realization of the apology in this situation.

Table 3: Frequency of occurrence of explicit IFIDs with sorry (in percents)

	A1		A2		B1		B2	
	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66
Sorry!	69.2	/	49.4	29.4	31.1	23.8	18.3	13
I'm/am (intensifier) sorry	30.8	/	50.6	70.6	68.9	76.2	81.7	87
Total	100	/	100	100	100	100	100	100

The use of *Sorry!* and *I'm/am (intensifier) sorry* in our study is in compliance with the findings of other studies of the speech act of apology. One of the reasons may be that “the short form is generally associated with trivial

offences that do not cause any great damage or disturbance, such as ‘momentary slips of physical control’ or ‘slips of the tongue’” [13:67]. Keeping your friend waiting is yet a more serious offence than bumping into a stranger and it can bring about a serious breach of communication between friends. In this case *Sorry!* seems too short and not salient enough to maintain long lasting friendship.

Owen [13] gives the following syntactic structures as possible with the IFID expressions with sorry (intensifier): *(intensifier) sorry; I’m/am (intensifier) sorry; (I’m) (intensifier) sorry to/if/for VP/(that); (I’m) (intensifier) sorry about that/it*. Table 4 shows the syntactic frames with *sorry* as distributed in MKAM according to age and level.

Table 4 shows that apart from A2 learners, Macedonian learners of English show significant preference for the construction *I’m/am (intens) sorry* and that there is no significant difference at how syntactic structures are used at different levels. However, we were able to find one construction in our corpus, which is not on Owen’s list [13]. That was the construction with *but*, i.e. *(I’m) sorry but ...*, which are explained in more detail in [11] when analyzing realization of the speech act of apology in English, Polish and Russian. Namely, she points out that *but* downplays the speaker’s responsibility; the speaker admits the offence, but implicates that it was not all his or her fault.

Table 4: Number of syntactic structures with *sorry*

Syntactic frames with <i>sorry</i>	A1		A2		B1		B2	
	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66
(Intensifier) sorry	18	/	42	5	28	19	11	12
I’m/am (intens) sorry	4	/	29	7	54	52	45	58
(I’m) (intens) sorry for VP/(that)	0	/	6	1	3	1	3	8
(I’m) (intens) sorry about that	0	/	0	0	0	1	0	2
(I’m) sorry but	1	/	6	4	5	6	1	12
(I’m) sorry because	3	/	2	0	0	1	0	0
Total	26	/	85	17	90	80	60	92

3.2 Other strategies employed by Macedonian learners of English

As it was previously mentioned, another way in which one can perform an apology, with or without an IFID, is to use an utterance which contains explicit apology + one of the following strategies: 1. an explanation or account of the cause which brought about the offence; 2. an expression of the speaker's responsibility for the offence; 3. an offer of repair; or 4. a promise that it will never happen again. Table 5 presents the numbers of strategies used by Macedonian learners of English.

Table 5: Apology strategies used by Macedonian learners of English

Syntactic frames with <i>sorry</i>	A1		A2		B1		B2	
	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66
explanation	16	/	53	11	59	70	46	91
expression of the speaker's responsibility for the offence	1	/	5	1	1	9	0	4
offer of repair	0	/	11	3	30	8	27	68
promise that it will never happen again	0	/	6	0	5	2	2	10
Total	17	/	75	15	95	89	75	173

The above table shows that Macedonian learners of English most often used the strategy of giving an explanation or account of the cause which brought about the offence regardless of the age. In reference [11], explanations and accounts are classified in several groups. In the situation analyzed in this paper all explanations represent justification for being late, as in the examples below:

- (3) Sorry June. I slept in. (A2)
- (4) I'm so sorry, but I had a little accident on the way to the restaurant. (B1)
- (5) June, I'm so sorry. Last night I stayed all night long to study so I forgot to set my alarm. Are you going home now or? (B2)

By trying to justify their being late, the learners more or less admit their guilt. This strategy is most often combined with an offer of repair, as in the examples below:

- (6) Oooh! June sorry, really sorry. I had fallen asleep, but I'll come as soon as possible. (A2)
- (7) Oh I am so sorry June. I was very tired so I overslept. How can I make it up to you? (B1)
- (8) I'm sorry. I just woke up. I'll be there in 10 minutes. (B2)

Less often, the explanation is combined with a promise that it will never happen again:

- (9) Hey June! aamm I'm really sorry for today. I woke up late this morning, but I promise you next time I'll be on time. (B1)

(10) Don't be mad June. I am so sorry! And if you can't wait go. I hope i will see you soon. I won't be late anymore I promise. (B2)

(11) Hey June. I want to apologise for that, but I just woke up. It won't happen again I promise. (B2)

According to Brown and Levinson's theory [15:102], these two strategies represent positive politeness. As such they perfectly fit the function of apologies for achieving equilibrium in previously disrupted communication.

3.3 Intensification of apologies

Most often the speech act of apologising is realized through highly routinized, formulaic expressions. Because of this speakers often feel the need to intensify their apology. Intensification is mostly often achieved by means of adverbial intensifiers (*very, really, terribly*), showing concern for the hearer and application of more than one strategy. We have already discussed the strategies and now we will look at the intensifiers that learners use to reinforce their apology. In particular, we will look at adverbial intensifiers and the politeness marker *please*. Table 6 shows the adverbial intensifiers used by Macedonian learners of English.

Table 6: Adverbial intensifiers used with the explicit IFID expressions

Adverbial intensifiers	A1		A2		B1		B2	
	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66	5-15	16-66
very	1	/	4	1	4	4	3	8
really	0	/	3	2	9	16	6	26
so	0	/	14	0	21	28	14	36
terribly	0	/	0	0	0	0	1	3
again	0	/	1	1	6	7	3	10
one more time	0	/	0	1	0	3	0	1
Total	1	/	22	5	40	58	27	84

In the study presented in reference [11] the following adverbial intensifiers are noted: *really* (155), *so* (75), *very* (22), *terribly* (10), as well as *ever so, truly, once again* and *please*. On the other hand, the author in [12], who studied Hebrew learners of English, lists the adverbs *very, really, terribly, deeply*, etc. They note that:

As a case in point, the non-natives did not use *really* in the way that the natives did. They attributed to the intensifier *very* the same semantic properties as to *really*, while the natives tended to make a distinction- i.e., such that *really* expressed a greater depth of apology and concern. For example, in a situation where a friend scalded another one with coffee in the cafeteria, natives tended to use *really sorry* while non-natives used *very sorry* which sounded less intensified. The overuse of *very* as an intensifier among learners may of course derive directly from the teaching materials which present this form as the most useful or sometimes the only intensifier

of an apology. [12:50-51)

The results of our findings are different from the findings of the two studies mentioned above. Out of the three most frequent intensifiers (*very, really and so*), *very* is the least frequent whereas *so* is the most frequent. It is interesting to note that this tendency is the same for all learners regardless of their age and level of English. The reasons for this should be further investigated.

With regard to other intensifiers, *terribly* was noted in only one occurrence at B2 level, whereas *again* was noted to be used more often. Learners used this intensifier to round up their apology and to show one more time how much they regret what happened. The examples below are illustrative of this use of again:

(12) Again I am apologise. (A2)

(13) I'm sorry again. (B1)

(14) ... and again I'm really sorry. (B2)

It was also noted that Macedonian learners use some specific ways of intensifying their apologies, such as iteration and combinations of intensifiers, as in the examples below:

(15) I'm very, very, very sorry. (A1)

(16) I'm really really sorry. (B2)

(17) I am so so so sorry. (B1)

(18) Oh, sorry, sorry very sorry. I'm very embarrassed. (A2)

Please was also used with the aim of intensifying the apology. The author in [11] also mentions that *please* is used as an intensifier. However, she also notes that it is used only with the explicit *forgive me*, due to which its use is very limited. Contrary to this, Macedonian learners of English use *please* with other explicit expressions, such as *apologise* and *sorry*, as in the examples below.

(19) Please can you sorry me, I'm late? (A1)

(20) I'm really sorry please. (A2)

(21) Hi June. Sorry I didn't come. I wake up this morning but I was late 40 minutes. Sorry, please. (A2)

(22) Sorry again please. (B1)

Similar examples were noted at A1, A2 and B1 level, but not at B2. It seems that at B2 level learners have finally worked out the semantics of *sorry*.

Olshtain and Cohen [12] note that native speakers also intensify their apology with interjections which help them express their emotions. They believe that “Emotionals are expressions such as *Oh, my!* or similar interjections, attached to the apology realization and have been found to be common intensifiers in all languages investigated. In fact, it is these additional interjections that make the apology sound sincere and meaningful” [12:51].

Macedonian learners also use some linguistic means which make the apology sound sincere and bring in emotions. Most often it is interjections of the type *Oh; Oh, no*, as well as the name of the interlocutor, used on its own or with an interjection (*Hey June!*)

(23) I'm sorry June. I'm oversleep (A1)

(24) Oh no! June I'm so sorry for not comeing. (A2)

(25) Oh, I'm so sorry. I slept in! (B1)

(26) Hey, Jane... I'm really sorry, I was too tired yesterday, so I woke up late today. (B2)

At B2 level, the repertoire expands and the expressions *Honey, Darling, Oh my dear*, and *Oh my God* are added.

(27) Oh my God! Sorry, I overslept.

(28) Honey I am so sorry , I fall asleep very late and i couldn't wake up. However I will make you up...

(29) Darling, please don't be mad and let me explain you.

(30) Oh my dear. I didn't wake up on time!

We are sure that learners at lower levels are also familiar with these expressions. We suppose that the origins of this failure are multiple. First, they probably don't feel confident enough to add emotions and to experiment with these expressions when communicating in English. Second, the instrument that we used to collect the speech acts elicited written, not spoken real life conversational turns. Third, the data was collected on the University premises, which are perceived as a rather formal environment.

4. Discussion

In this part we will try to analyze and interpret some of the errors that Macedonian learners of English make when formulating their apologies. We will focus on the expressions with the explicit IFID *sorry*, the intensification of apologies and the syntactic frames used with *sorry*.

It was obvious to us that at A1 level Macedonian learners of English often avoided the tasks in the DCT, including the apology task. Yet, the number of the speech acts that we managed to obtain show that they are aware of the function of the word *sorry* as an explicit apology IFID. In spite of this, they are not quite sure about

the semantics of these formulaic expressions. Thus, in (41) they have used *sorry* to ask for forgiveness. As they haven't acquired the verb *forgive* yet, in their interlanguage the word *sorry* fulfills all apology functions, including asking for forgiveness.

(31) You: Hi, June. Please can you sorry me, I'm late? (A1)

June: Yes! I'm sorry you.

The same mistake is also found at A2 and B1 level. Its reinforcement with *please* is yet another prove of learners' insecurity with respect to the semantics of *sorry* (see examples above).

Learners also use the speech act of apologising as a prelude to requests. However, this is a different type of apology, namely apology for disturbance. In these cases, *excuse me* is a more appropriate expression to be used. *Sorry* is misused with this function even at B2 level.

(32) Sorry, do you go to tennis match. (A1)

(33) Sorry, Daniel! Can you help me? (A2)

(34) Sorry Daniel, can you give me a ride, because I need a ride (B1)

The example *June, excuse me, I had fallen asleep late at night I wake up now. Sorry!*, which was found at B2 level, shows that students have problems with the use of *excuse me* and *sorry* even at these level.

The use of *sorry* in the above examples may be due to two reasons:

- a) learners may not know the expression *excuse me* and have resorted to using *sorry* instead;
- b) learners may be influenced by their native language, i.e. Macedonian, in which the expressions *izvini/izvinete* is used for both types of apology.

We are apt to believe that the second explanation is more viable. Our preference is supported by the fact that *excuse* is used in course books since very low levels. *Excuse me, where is the post office* is among the first longer sentences that beginners learn. Yet, it seems that *excuse me* in this case does not have a meaning of its own for them. Learners use these sentences as formulas and *excuse me* is within the formula. Another reason may be that *sorry* is very frequent in books, films, blogs, etc. Learners hear it very often and it has higher communication value for them than *excuse me*. And because in Macedonian one expression is used for both types of apology, they conclude the same for English.

Intensification causes more problems for learners at lower levels. As they rarely use intensifiers, their apology may sound insincere. This is probably not so serious for them because at this level they are not able to engage in a more serious communication. Their interlocutors are aware of this and *sorry* seems to fulfill these functions satisfactorily.

Still, learners feel the need to intensify their apologies. As they don't have the appropriate means for this purpose, they use what they have at their disposal and that is repetition, as well as the magic word *please*, which is understood as a general marker for politeness suitable for all situations.

What seems to be important about higher levels (B1 and B2) is that the group of younger learners (5-15) generally uses intensifiers more rarely than the adult group (6-16). It is obvious that the adult group feels more responsible in case of making an offence and greater obligation to retrieve communication to normal. They also use the intensifiers (*once*) *again* and *one more time* more frequently, which we consider to be influenced by Macedonian.

In reference [12:53] the use of emotional interjections is considered an important element of apologies. One of the goals of the experiment that they conducted was to make learners aware that "in colloquial speech emotionals can intensify the apology and give it a more sincere quality". We have already mentioned the interjections used by our learners and we think that they use them sufficiently. What perhaps needs to be addressed more systematically is expansion of their repertoire, raising learners' awareness of how emotions are expressed and building up their confidence to use them in face-to-face communication.

Most often the explicit expressions of apologies are followed by independent clauses, separated by a comma or a full stop, as in the example *I'm sorry. The alarm clock probably didn't go on* (B2). Dependent clauses were introduced with *that* and *but*, as well as the prepositions *about* and *for*. Although it is possible to introduce dependent clauses with *that*, in these cases it sounds inappropriate: *Oh sorry that I wasn't listening your explanation* (A2). Probably because the explicit expression is to be followed by a cause and not by a statement, which makes *for* sound more appropriate here.

As for the syntactic constructions with *for*, they begin to appear in learners' interlanguage at A2 level. However, they can't form grammatically correct sentences, e.g. *Sorry for my lateing*. At B1, and especially at B2 level, these constructions are much more frequent and well formulated: *Hey June I'm so sorry for not coming. I overslept* (B1); *I'm sorry for being late* (B2).

Macedonian learners also hesitate when they construct sentences with *for* and *about*. Thus, it would be more appropriate to use *about* instead of *for* in (47), while in (48) *for* would be more appropriate than the used *about*.

(35) I'm very sorry for our plan for today. (A2)

(36) I'm sorry about missing our appointment. (B1)

It is also interesting to look at the mistakes in *I'm so sorry for waiting me, but I overslept* (B1); *Sorry for waiting me* (B2); *Sorry for making you wait* (B2). The constructions used here may be considered grammatically correct, but not with the expressions used here. Learners would have sounded more correct if they had known the expression *to keep someone waiting*. This shows that Macedonian learners even at higher levels, B1 and B2, do not know the appropriate collocations and colloquial expression. As a result, their utterances may sound weird and unnatural.

At lower levels, we were also able to note constructions with *because*, of the type *I'm really sorry because I'm late* (A2); *I'm sorry because I'm late!* (A1); *Sorry because I'm late* (A1). This use of *because* may be due to two reasons. First, it could be formed under the influence of Macedonian language. Second, the sentences with *because* receive great attention in the process of learning English. This conjunction is introduced early in the process of learning English and learners extend its use in these situations.

5. Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to investigate how Macedonian learners of English formulate the speech act of apologising in English. By comparing our findings with the CEFR exponents in Table 1, we may conclude the following:

a) Macedonian learners of English of all levels use the explicit IFIDs of apology *sorry*, *forgive* and *apologise* as well as the intensifiers *very* and *so*. However, they are not confident about their semantic and pragmatic meaning as well as about their intensification until they get to B1 level. In this respect, we have also mentioned the problematic use of *please*.

b) Learners also hesitate about the use of the performative verb *apologise*. Even at B2 level we were able to find constructions of the type *I'm apologise*. And because learners are not aware of the emphatic function of *do*, as in *I do apologise*, they intensify their apologies by using other means (*I really apologise*; *I apologise to you so much*).

c) At B1 level they still hesitate about the use of *sorry* and *excuse me* and are not able to use *excuse me* as an expression of apology for disturbance.

d) Learners do not use variety of syntactic constructions when formulating their apologies. Most often they use constructions containing an explicit expression followed by an independent clause. However, they are not expected to be able to use these constructions until they get to B1 level. At B2 level they correctly formulate constructions with *for* + NP/VP + gerund.

Our research has several limitations: the instrument that was used elicited written responses by the respondents, whereas oral responses would have been more appropriate for studying face-to-face communication. Also, the results presented here were obtained by analyzing one situation only. It represents a medium offence among close friends and is limited with respect to social distance, power and seriousness of offence. We recommend that further research is done by expanding the number of situations with different contextual parameters so that a more realistic picture about students' performance in face to face communication is obtained. It would also be beneficial to collect native speakers' assessment of learners' oral performance, which may provide better understanding of the learners' language behavior.

In spite of all its constraints, we believe that our research will contribute globally to the broader picture of what learner English is like. Locally, it will provide valuable information for Macedonian teachers on their students' pragmatic development in English and the possible areas of their pragmatic failure. There is little doubt that

“[o]ur knowledge of the differences and discrepancies that exist between native and non-native speech acts and speech-act-sets can lead to more effective pragmatic instruction” [16].

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