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## Chapter

# Apologies in L2 French in Canadian Context

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## Abstract

This article presents the results of an analysis of apology strategies in native and non-native French in Canadian context. The data used were obtained through a Discourse Completion Task questionnaire that was completed by a group of native French speakers (FL1) and a group of learners of French as a second language (FL2). The goal was to identify and compare pragmatic and linguistic choices made by both groups when apologizing in three different situations. Several differences and similarities emerged between the two groups regarding the use of exclamations to introduce apologies, direct apologies, indirect apologies, and supportive acts. For instance, it was found that the FL1 speakers used “expressions of regret”, “offers of apology” 15 and “requests for forgiveness” to apologize directly, while the FL2 speaking informants used 16 only “expressions of regret” and “offers of apology”. While the respondents of both groups 17 mostly chose “offers of repair” to apologize indirectly, they displayed divergent preferences 18 regarding the use of other indirect apology strategies. Differences were also documented 19 with respect to the use of intensification devices in direct apologies and the use of supportive acts. Implications of the findings for L2 French pedagogy were also discussed.

**Keywords:** apology, politeness, French L1, French L2, interlanguage pragmatics

## 1. Introduction

A number of studies have been carried out in the area of interlanguage pragmatics. Most of them focus on the production/realization of speech acts (e.g., requests, thanks, compliments, advice, complaints, apologies, etc.) in general and on the performance of learners of English in particular ([1], p. 261–270; [2]). The present study focuses on the realization of apologies by a group of Canadian learners of French as a second language, through a comparative analysis of apology strategies in French L1 and French L2. Data for the study were collected from two groups of respondents: a group of Canadian native English speakers and a group of learners of French L2. The chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical background, in which the communicative act of apologizing is defined, and a brief literature review is presented. The methodology is outlined in Section 3, and the findings are presented and discussed in Section 4. The chapter concludes with remarks and perspectives for future research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

An apology is an expressive speech act by which a speaker intends to remedy an offense for which she/he takes responsibility and intends to restore equilibrium between him/her and the addressee, that is the apology recipient ([3], p. 155). From this point of view, an apology is “remedial work” [4]. There are two opposing views on apologies based on Brown and Levinson’s [5] theory of politeness, which uses the central concept of the face of Goffman [4]. The first view considers apologizing as a face-threatening act for the speaker ([5], p. 68): it is perceived as a self-demeaning act because the speaker, by apologizing, directly or indirectly recognizes his or her fault or responsibility for the offense. On the other hand, apologizing is a face-enhancing act for the speaker, since it serves to portray the speaker as someone who recognizes his or her mistakes and humbly says something to “set things right” ([6], p. 373) or to restore a strained relationship with the offended person. Apologies could also be considered as attempts to restore the hearer’s face and social harmony. These contradictory perceptions certainly have an impact on the choices of apology strategies.

Several studies have examined similarities and differences in apologizing across languages and cultures ([7], p. 558–562 for an overview of studies on apologies). Apologies have also been explored from an interlanguage pragmatics perspective. The focus here is on how learners apologize in L2. These include studies such as Cordella’s [8] work on Spanish speakers apologizing in English, Trosborg’s [6] work on apologies by Danish learners of English, Abe’s [9] thesis on apologies in English L2 by Japanese learners, a study of apologies in English by Jordanian Arabic learners [10]. Studies of apologies in L2 French include Warga and Schölmberger’s [11] study of apologies by Austrian learners of French in a study abroad situation and Esmonds’ [12] work on apologies by American learners.

These few studies on apologies in L2 French add to a growing body of research on the production of other speech acts in French L2. These include Kraft and Geluykens’ [13] analysis of complaint strategies in L2 French by German learners of French; Schaeffer’s [14] analysis of complaints in L2 French by English-speaking learners; Mulo Farenkia’s [15] study of compliments in L2 French by English-speaking Canadian learners of French; Bae’s [16] thesis on request strategies in L2 French by Korean learners of French; Warga’s work [17] on requests in L2 French by Austrian learners of French, and Mulo Farenkia’s [18] study of the realizations of offer refusals by Canadian learners of French as a second language. The present study adds to this growing body of research aimed at understanding “how non-native-speaking ( ... ) learners of a language acquire pragmatic competence in their target language” ([1], p. 261), and if they can communicate effectively in an “L2-speaking environment where the learner’s target linguistic behavior is, ultimately, that of the [native speaker]” ([1], p. 261). The present study thus addresses the following questions:

- How do L2 French learners apologize in their target language?
- Which (realization) forms do they use to apologize in L2 French?
- Are there qualitative and quantitative differences or similarities between apology strategies used by L1 French speakers and L2 French learners?

The next section centers on the description of the methodology used to answer these questions. It presents the participants, the data collection instrument, the scenarios as well as aspects of data analysis.

### 3. Method

The research is based on material collected for a larger project on French interlanguage pragmatics in the Canadian context. The examples used here were provided by two groups of respondents. The first group consisted of 16 native speakers of French (**FL1 respondents**: 14 females and 2 males), aged between 20 and 45 years (the majority of them (12 out of 16) were aged between 20 and 24 years. The FL1 respondents were undergraduate students at the University of Montréal. The second population consisted of 16 L2 French (**FL2 participants**: 13 females and 3 males), aged between 20 and 25 years. The FL2 participants were undergraduate students at Cape Breton University (taking intermediate French courses) and native speakers of Canadian English. The main instrument used for data collection was a DCT questionnaire [19]. The questionnaire consisted of twelve tasks/situations, designed to elicit advice, thanks, responses to thanks, complaints, and apologies. The three scenarios designed to elicit apologies were described as follows:

1. Situation 1: Vous arrivez chez votre ami(e) et, en enlevant votre manteau, vous renversez son vase qui se brise en plusieurs morceaux. Qu'est-ce que vous lui dites ? [While taking off your jacket you accidentally break your friend's vase. What do you say to him/her?]
2. Situation 2. En entrant dans un restaurant, vous heurtez accidentellement le serveur/la serveuse et cela la pousse à renverser le plateau qu'il/qu'elle transportait. Qu'est-ce que vous lui dites ? [While entering a restaurant you inadvertently bump into a waiter/waitress, and she/he spills the content of the plates she/he was carrying to another client. What to you tell him/her?]
3. Situation 3. Vous avez accepté d'aider votre enseignant(e) dans le cadre de son projet de recherche. Vous avez une rencontre avec lui/elle à cet effet à 9: 00 le lendemain. Vous serez en retard au rendez-vous. Vous l'appellez. Qu'est-ce que vous lui dites ? [You were supposed to meet with your professor to help him/her in a research project. You will arrive late for the appointment. You call him/her. What do you tell him/her?]

In situation 1, the participant has broken a friend's vase. In situation 2, the respondent accidentally bumped into a waiter/waitress and caused her/him to throw the entire content of the tray he/she was carrying. In situation 3, the participant is late for an appointment with his/her professor. The first situation is symmetrical, that is the offender and the offended are equal in social status and the relationship is a close one (it involves two friends), while in the second situation the relationship is distant, that is the interactants do not know each other. The third situation is an asymmetrical one: the offended person has a higher power position (professor), and the offender and the offended know each other as acquaintances. The respondents were asked to imagine

themselves in each of the situations and to write down what they would say in order to apologize in the three situations. The 32 informants provided 95 answers for the three questionnaire tasks: 48 responses by the FL1 group and 47 responses by the FL2 group.

The apologies collected were analyzed based on the schemes used in previous studies in which apologies are examined with respect to the degree of the directness of utterances, the number of moves involved in the same utterance, use of additional speech acts or supportive acts, and mitigating or intensifying devices, etc. ([6], p. 373–409; [20], p. 143–168). The first step was to segment the apology utterances produced by the participants and to classify each occurrence or token as a strategy belonging to one of the following three pragmatic categories: direct apologies, indirect apologies, and supportive acts.

Direct apologies and indirect apologies are realized using many different strategies and forms. For example, direct apologies are realized through strategies such as expressions of regret, requests for forgiveness, or offers of apologies, and each of these strategies may be realized using different linguistic structures (cf. Section 4.2). Indirect apologies can be realized in the form of explanations, taking responsibilities, offering repairs, or promise of forbearance and these strategies can be framed in many different ways as well (cf. Section 4.3). Also, the data show that the apology acts occurred either in single moves, that is alone as in (1), or in association with other moves, that is as complex apologies. Complex apologies may result from the combination of two or more apologies or may be made up of apologies that are accompanied by supportive moves (cf. Section 4.1) as in (2) and (3). In (2), the speaker combines three moves to apologize, namely a preparatory act (*Oh mon dieu*, an interjection of surprise), an apology head act (*je suis tellement désolé*) and an offer of repair (*je peux vous aider à nettoyer le désastre*), which serves to reinforce the head act. In (3), the French L2 speaker uses a more complex move to apologize for being late: the example consists of seven moves. The head act (*je suis vraiment désolée*), the third move in the apology sequence, is preceded by two preparatory acts, namely a greeting (*Allo*) and a self-introduction act (*c'est X*). Both moves serve to introduce the apology properly. The head act is followed by apology upgrading moves, namely an explanation (*Je n'avais pas réglé mon cadran*), an indication of the time of the speaker's arrival for the appointment (*Je pourrais être là dans 30 minutes*), a question of whether it is worth showing up (*Est-ce que ça vaut la peine que je vienne ?*) and another apology act (*Encore désolée*). Also noteworthy is that head acts and supportive acts are modified by means of lexical and syntactical devices.

1. *Je suis tellement désolée !* (FL1-Waiter <sup>1</sup>)  
'I am so sorry.'
2. *Oh, mon dieu, je suis tellement désolée. Je peux vous aider à nettoyer le désastre.*  
(FL2-Waiter)  
'Oh my God, I am so sorry. I can help you to clean the mess.'
3. *Allo, c'est X. Je suis vraiment désolée, je n'avais pas réglé mon cadran. Je pourrais être là dans 30 mins. Est-ce que ça vaut la peine que je vienne ? Encore désolée.* (FL2-Professor)

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<sup>1</sup> The examples provided by the French L1 speakers are coded as FL1 and the examples produced by the French L2 group are coded as FL2. The three situations are coded as Friend (for the friend situation, S1), Waiter (for the waiter/waitress situation, S2), and Professor (for the professor situation, S3). For instance: (FL2-Waiter) stands for examples of apologies to waiters or waitresses in French L2.

‘Allo, this is X. I am so sorry. I did not set my alarm clock. I could be there in 30 minutes. Do I still need to come? Once again, sorry.’

In the next section, we will present the results of the analysis of the data.

## 4. Findings and discussion

### 4.1 Overall distribution

**Table 1** shows the overall distribution of strategies used by both the FL1 and the FL2 participants. It appears that the FL1 group used more strategies than the FL2 population (FL1: 116 vs. FL2: 106). The FL1 speakers mostly preferred direct apologies: this strategy accounted for 50% of the examples provided in the FL1 data set. The FL2 respondents most commonly used indirect apologies: this strategy accounted for 56.6% (60 examples) of their responses. While supportive acts had the lowest frequency in both data sets, **Table 1** shows that the FL1 informants used more supportive acts than the FL2 learners did.

We also compared the use of the three strategies mentioned above across the three situations. **Table 2** shows the situational distribution of these strategies in both data sets. In the FL1 corpus, direct apologies were much more employed with friends (36%), while the FL2 respondents used direct apologies much more towards waiters/waitresses (36%). Similarities emerged between the two groups regarding the use of indirect apologies. For instance, the majority of all indirect apologies occurred in the professor situation, with 48.8% in the FL1 examples and 45% in the FL2 data set. The supportive moves essentially appeared in the professor’s situation in both data sets.

	FL1	FL2
Direct apologies	58 (50%)	44 (41.5%)
Indirect apologies	43 (37%)	60 (56.6%)
Supportive acts	15 (13%)	2 (1.9%)
Total	116 (100%)	106 (100%)

**Table 1.**  
*The overall distribution of strategies used by the FL1 and the FL2 participants.*

	Direct apologies		Indirect apologies		Supportive acts	
	FL1	FL2	FL1	FL2	FL1	FL2
S1 – Friend	21 (36%)	14 (32%)	13 (30.2%)	20 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	0
S2 – Waiter	19 (32.7%)	16 (36%)	9 (21%)	13 (21.7%)	0	0
S3 – Professor	18 (31%)	14 (32%)	21 (48.8%)	27 (45%)	14 (93.4%)	2 (100%)
Total	58 (100%)	44 (100%)	43 (100%)	60 (100%)	15 (100%)	2 (100%)

**Table 2.**  
*Situational distribution of apology strategies in French L1 and French L2.*

## 4.2 Interactional structures of apology utterances

As already indicated above, apologies were realized by the participants of both groups either as unsupported head acts or single moves (simple apology utterances) or as combinations of multiple moves (complex apology utterances). **Table 3** shows the distribution of these two realization patterns in FL1 and FL2.

**Table 3** shows that both the FL1 and the FL2 respondents mostly used complex apology utterances. Of the 47 examples provided by the FL1 speakers, there were 6 (12.8%) simple apology utterances and 41 (87.2%) complex apology utterances. Of the 48 apology utterances provided by the FL2 learners, there were 5 (10.4%) simple apology utterances and 43 (89.6%) complex apology utterances. While simple apology utterances were distributed equally in S1 (Friend) and S2 (Waiter) and did not occur in S3 (Professor) in the FL1 examples, the vast majority (4 of 5, i.e., 80%) of simple apology utterances used by FL2 participants were found in S2 (Waiter). No simple apology utterance was used in S3 (professor), the more formal situation.

## 4.3 Apology realizations

This section presents results regarding the way in which the respondents of both groups realized their apologies, that is the various linguistic structures employed to apologize. In the first section (Section 4.3.1) the devices used to introduce apologies are discussed. The realization forms of direct apology strategies are presented in Section 4.3.2. Realization forms of indirect apology strategies are discussed in Section 4.3.3. The use of supportive moves is examined in Section 4.3.4.

### 4.3.1 Initiating apologies

The participants of both groups used specific interjections to introduce their apologies. These devices function as “emotional exclamations” ([21], p. 190) to express the speaker’s negative feelings about the offense (e.g., surprise, shame, regret, etc.), before issuing the apology. Overall, there were 31 tokens of interjections in both data sets. As can be seen in **Table 4**, the FL1 used five times more interjections than the FL2 informants. With respect to situational distribution, the findings show that the participants of both groups did not use interjections in apologies directed to professors. Also interesting are the types of interjections used.

The interjections found in the examples provided by the FL2 were “*zut, ohn non, oh mon Dieu*”, while those used by the FL1 were “*Oh merde, Oh shit, Oh shoot, Oh non, Oh là, Oh my god, Ayayaye, Oh mon dieu, Oops, Shit, Non, OMG*”. In both data sets, the interjections introduced single direct apologies and compound apologies, as can be seen in the following examples.

	FL1			FL2		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Simple apology utterances	3	3	0	1	4	0
Complex apology utterances	13	12	16	15	12	16
Total	16	15	16	16	16	16

**Table 3.**  
*Distribution of single and complex apology utterances.*

	FL1	FL2	Total
S1 – Friend	15 (57.7%)	2 (40%)	17 (54.8%)
S2 – Waiter	11 (42.3%)	3 (60%)	14 (45.2%)
S3 – Professor	0	0	0
Total	26 (100%)	5 (100%)	31 (100%)

**Table 4.**  
 Distribution of interjections to introduce apologies in FL1 and FL2.

4. **Oh, mon dieu !** Je suis très désolé ! Laissez-moi vous aider. (FL2-Waiter)  
 “Oh my God. I am very sorry. Let me help you.”
5. **Oh my god !** Je suis désolé. Pardonne-moi. (FL1-Friend)  
 “Oh my god. I am sorry. Forgive me.”
6. **Oh non, je suis vraiment désolée.** Excuse-moi. **Oh, là, désolée.** Je vais nettoyer et t’en racheter un neuf. (FL1-Friend)  
 “Oh no, I am so sorry. Forgive me. Oh lala, sorry. I will clean up (the mess) and buy you a new one.”

#### 4.3.2 Direct apology strategies

Three realization types of direct apologies were found in both data sets. These are “expression of regret”, “offer of apology”, and “request for forgiveness”. Their frequencies are summarized in **Table 5**.

First, **Table 5** shows that the participants of both groups mostly used expressions of regrets when apologizing directly, albeit with different frequencies; This type accounted for 72.4% of all direct apologies produced by the FL1 participants and 84% of direct apologies used by the FL2 group. The FL1 speakers expressed regret are by means of constructions like “désolé”, “je suis désolé”, “je suis désolé de mon retard” « je suis désolé pour le RDV (rendez-vous) », “je suis désolé de ne pas être au rendez-vous”, “je me sens mal”. The FL2 participants expressed regret using constructions like “désolé”, “je suis désolé”. Overall, the FL1 respondents used more elaborate or expanded structures than the FL2 learners did to express regret. Also interesting is the way in which the participants of both groups intensified their expressions of regrets. The FL1 informants employed adverbs such as “tellement, vraiment, sincèrement, profusément”, “extrêmement” to intensify expressions of regret, while the FL2 group used adverbs such as “très, vraiment, tellement” to boost their expressions of regret. Second, the other direct apology strategy, offer of apology, was more frequently used by the FL1 population (FL1: 22.4% vs. FL2: 16%). In the FL1 data, this type was realized as “je

	FL1	FL2
Expression of regret	42 (72.4%)	37 (84%)
Offer of apology	13 (22.4%)	7 (16%)
Request for forgiveness	3 (5.2%)	0
Total	58 (100%)	44 (100%)

**Table 5.**  
 Distribution of direct apologies used by FL1 and FL2 respondents.



*m'excuse*”, “*je m'excuse pour ce retard*”, while it was realized in the FL2 examples as ‘*je m'excuse*’, *je m'excuse comme cinquante fois*’, *je m'excuse tellement*’. Furthermore, **Table 5** indicates that the third realization type, namely requests for forgiveness, occurred only in the FL1 data. It was realized as “*excuse-moi*”, “*excusez-moi*”, “*scuse-moi*”, “*pardonne-moi*”, “*pardon*”, “*milles pardons*”.

With respect to their situational distribution, the results show that the FL1 group mostly used expressions of regret in the professor situation and their offers of apology were equally distributed in situations 1 (friend) and 2 (waiter). By contrast, expressions of regret used by the FL2 participants appeared much more in the waiter situation, while offers of apology were equally distributed across the three situations in FL2 examples (**Table 6**).

We also analyzed the way in which the respondents of both groups used adverbs to reinforce direct apologies. **Table 7** presents the frequencies of intensified direct apologies.

Overall, the FL1 speakers used more intensifiers than the FL2 participants. Of the 61 intensified direct apologies identified in our corpus, there were 38 (62.3%) tokens used by the FL1 group and 23 tokens (37.7%) produced by the FL2 informants. As shown in **Table 7**, while intensified direct apologies in the FL1 data set mostly appeared in the professor situation, the FL2 population mostly boosted their direct apologies in the waiter situation.

The choices of adverbial intensifiers in the direct apologies made by the participants of both groups were different to some extent. The results show that of the 38 intensifiers used by the FL1 participants, there were 23 tokens of “*vraiment*”, 11 instances of “*tellement*” and 4 other intensifiers (“*profusément*”, “*extrêmement*”,

		S1 – Friend	S2 – Waiter	S3 - Professor
FL1	Expression of regret	14	11	17
	Offer of apology	6	6	1
	Request for forgiveness	1	2	0
Total		21	19	18
FL2	Expression of regret	12	14	11
	Offer of apology	2	2	3
	Request for forgiveness	0	0	0
Total		14	16	14

**Table 6.**  
Situational distribution of direct apologies in FL1 and FL2.

	FL1	FL2
S1 – Friend	13 (34.2%)	8 (34.8%)
S2 – Waiter	11 (30%)	10 (43.5%)
S3 – Professor	14 (36.8%)	5 (21.7%)
Total	38 (100%)	23 (100%)

**Table 7.**  
Frequency of intensified direct apologies in FL1 and FL2.

*sincèrement, mille*”). In the FL2 data, there were 14 tokens of “*très*”, 6 instances of “*tellement*” and 3 examples of “*vraiment*”. The results show that the adverb “*très*”, the most common intensifier in the FL2 data set, did not occur in the FL1 examples. In most cases, the participants of both groups used the construction “*je suis + adverb + désolé*”. Also noteworthy is the fact that the FL2 group employed intensifiers much more in situation 2 (Waiter), while adverbial intensifiers were predominantly used by the FL1 speakers in situations 3 (professor) and 1 (friend). Let us now look at the realization forms of indirect apology strategies, in the next section.

#### 4.3.3 Indirect apology strategies

Overall, the FL1 speakers produced 43 indirect apologies, while the FL2 learners provided 60 indirect apologies. The results further show that the attested realization types of indirect apologies, that is the speech acts used to apologize, were distributed differently in both data sets (Table 8).

As seen in Table 8, the FL1 group used four different speech acts (*taking responsibility, explanation, the offer of repair, and concern for the addressee*), while the FL2 participants employed five different speech acts (*taking responsibility, explanation, the offer of repair, promise of forbearance, and concern for the addressee*) to apologize indirectly. The participants of both groups mostly preferred the realization type *offer of repair* when apologizing indirectly. However, the FL2 group chose this type much more frequently than the FL1 respondents (FL2: 38 instances (63.3%) vs. FL1: 21 tokens (48.8%)). The results also reveal that the two most frequently used types (*offer of repair* and *explanation* in the FL1 examples and *offer of repair* and *taking responsibility* in the FL2 corpus), represented more than 75% of all tokens of indirect apologies in each data set. Differences were also found regarding the order of preference of the other realization types. For instance, while *explanation* was the second most common type of indirect apology in the FL1 data (27.9%), this strategy was the third most frequent type (15%) in the FL2 data set, where *taking responsibility* was, with 16.7%, the second most common realization type of indirect apology. A further result is that the realization type *concern for the addressee* was by far much more preferred by the FL1 population (13.9%) than by the FL2 group (1.7%).

Let us now turn to the individual speech acts used as indirect apologies, focusing on their realizations and pragmatic functions.

We will begin with *taking/acknowledging responsibility*. As the name suggests this strategy was employed to admit responsibility for the offense ([20], p. 153). Taking

	FL1	FL2
Taking responsibility	4 (9.4%)	10 (16.7%)
Explanation / Justification	12 (27.9%)	9 (15%)
Offer of repair	21 (48.8%)	38 (63.3%)
Promise of forbearance	0	2 (3.3%)
Concern for addressee	6 (13.9%)	1 (1.7%)
Total	43 (100%)	60 (100%)

**Table 8.**  
 Realization types of indirect apologies in FL1 and FL2.

responsibility was realized by expressing self-blame, expressing self-deficiency, expressing lack of intent, and expressing embarrassment or surprise. In the FL1 data, this strategy occurred in the form of offense announcement (e.g., *Je serai un peu en retard à la reunion* “I will be a bit late for the meeting”, *J’arriverai un peu plus tard* “I will arrive later (than expected).”) and in the form of denigrating oneself (e.g., *C’est bête* “It’s stupid”). The FL2 informants took responsibility by expressing lack of intent (e.g., *C’était un accident* “It was an accident”), self-deficiency or embarrassment (e.g., *Je dois regarder où je marche* “I have to watch where/how to walk”), announcing offense (e.g., *je vais être un peu en retard* “I will be a little late”, *je ne suis pas capable de rencontrer à 9 heures* “I am not able to meet at 9 o’clock.”) or expressing self-blame (e.g., *J’ai un petit contretemps de ma propre faute* “I have a little delay of my own fault.”) In both data sets, the taking responsibility strategy was generally associated with other strategies as in (7–9).

7. *Je suis vraiment désolée, je me suis levée en retard, je vais arriver plus tard que prévu.* (FL1-Professor)

“I am so sorry, I got up late, I will arrive later than expected.”

8. *Je m’excuse mais je vais être un peu en retard au cause que j’ai dormi trop longtemps.* (FL2-Professor)

“I am sorry, but I am going to be late because I overslept.”

9. *Je suis très désolé. C’était un accident. Je t’offre d’aider à payer pour le remplacer ou pour le réparer.* (FL2-Friend)

“I am very sorry. It was an accident. I offer to help pay in order to replace or repair it.”

*Explanation/Justification*, another type of indirect apology, was used to express “the reasons which (in)directly brought about the offense” ([20], p. 157). Explanations were used to transfer the responsibility of the offense to another source, and thus protect the speaker’s positive face. They appeared, in very few cases alone, that is in lieu of direct or indirect apologies. In most examples, explanations were accompanied by direct apologies and/or other types of indirect apologies as in (10–12).

10. *Je suis très désolé mais quand j’enlevais mon manteau j’ai renversé votre vase.* (FL2-Friend)

“I am very sorry but when I was taking off my coat, I knocked over your vase.”

11. *Je suis vraiment désolé, mon cadran n’a pas sonné. Je m’excuse pour ce retard.* (FL1-Professor)

“I am so sorry, my alarm clock did not ring. I apologize for the late-coming/delay.”

12. *Bonjour Monsieur/Madame, je suis très désolée, je vais venir en retard pour notre rencontre. Mon alarme n’a pas sonné aujourd’hui alors j’ai levé tard.* (FL2-Professor)

“Good morning sir/ma’am, I am very sorry, I will be late for our meeting. My alarm clock did not ring today, so I got up late.”

*Offer of repair*, as already indicated, was the most frequently used realization type of indirect apology by the participants of both groups. It appeared in association with other moves and the most attested combination was that of an offer of repair and a direct apology as in (13–14).

13. *Oh non! Je suis vraiment désolé ! Je vais t'en acheter un autre !* (FL1-Friend)  
“Oh no ! I am so sorry. I will buy another one for you.”
14. *Je suis désolé. Est-ce que nous pouvons le fixer<sup>2</sup> ?* (FL2-Friend)  
“I am sorry. Can we repair it?”

It is worth mentioning that two different types of offers to repair the damage caused appeared in the data. The first type occurred predominantly in situations 1 (friend) and 2 (waiter), where the offender offered to help clean up the mess caused by the incident, using constructions like *Je vais t'aider/vous aider à ramasser* (FL1) “I will help you pick up the (pieces).” ; *Je vais ramasser les morceaux pour toi* “I will pick up the pieces for you.” *Je peux nettoyer tous les morceaux* “I can clean up all the pieces” *Je peux vous aider à nettoyer le désastre* “I can help clean up the mess” (FL2). The second type was the offer to pay for the damage. Constructions used to this effect by the FL2 participants include *Je peux remplacer si vous voulez* “I can replace it if you want”, *Est-ce que tu veux que je t'achète un nouveau vase ?* “Can I buy you a new vase ?”; *Je vais payer pour ce repas gâté* “I will pay for the squandered meal.” Constructions found in the FL1 data include *Je vais t'en acheter un autre* “I will buy another one for you” ; *Je peux le payer* “I can pay for it.”; *Je peux en acheter un autre ou te dédommager* “I can buy another one or compensate you.”. Some respondents from both groups combined the two types of repair offers in an attempt to further reinforce their apologies (e.g. FL1: *Je vais t'en racheter un autre et je vais ramasser* “I will buy another one for you and clean it up”; FL2: *Je vais le nettoyer et je peux acheter un autre vase pour le remplacer* “I will clean it up and I can buy another vase to replace it.” In the professor situation, offers of repair occurred in the form of a promise of the student to meet with the professor as soon as possible in order to make up for the late-coming. Overall, the constructions used in situations 1 (friend) and 2 (waiter) were intended to offer repair for a material damage while the constructions attested in situation 3 (professor) served to make up for the delay.

*The promise of forbearance*, another strategy used to apologize indirectly, occurred only in the FL2 data set. It was realized as a promise to do the right thing next time as in (15) or as a promise that the offense won't happen again as in (16).

15. *Je suis tellement désolée que je suis en retard pour notre rendez-vous, j'ai oublier (sic) de régler mon réveil. Je serai à l'heure la prochaine fois.* (FL2-Professor)  
“I am so sorry to be late for our appointment. I forgot to set my alarm clock. I will be on time next time.”
16. *Désolé. Est-ce-qu'il y a quelque chose je peux faire pour vous rende content ? Ce ne va pas passer encore.* (FL2-Professor)  
“Sorry. Is there anything I can do to make you happy? It will not happen again.”

Finally, *concern for the addressee*, the other type found in the data, was employed six times by the FL1 participants and just once in the FL2 examples. It was used to express the hope that the offense did not cause the interlocutor any inconveniences. The strategy occurred in combination with other moves as in (17). In this example, the student begins with a direct apology and goes on to explain what happens. In the third move, he shows that he has a genuine concern for the professor by indirectly asking

<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that the verb “fixer” in this example is anglicism, deriving from the English verb “to fix”, and used here in lieu of the verb *réparer*.

about the impact of the late coming on the latter. The manifested concern serves to boost the previous apologetic utterances. The student goes on to indicate that he is ready to meet with the professor if he/she is available.

17. *Je suis vraiment désolé, cela ne m'arrive presque jamais, mais j'ai oublié de régler mon réveil alors j'ai dormi tard ce matin. J'espère que cela ne vous avait pas causé trop d'inconvénience. Si vous êtes encore libre, je peux venir tout de suite et on peut encore avoir notre rendez-vous.* (FL2-Professor)

"I am so sorry, this generally does not happen to me but I forgot to set my alarm clock so I overslept this morning. I hope that this did not inconvenience you that much. If you are still available, I can come right now and we can still have our meeting."

The expression of concern in the FL1 corpus took many different forms. In the friend situation, the speakers showed concern by asking if the vase meant a lot to the addressee as in (18). In situation 2, the speaker wanted to know if the waiter was okay as in (19). In situation 3, a speaker wanted to know more about the professor's feelings regarding the late coming. More precisely, the speaker wanted to know whether the meeting would be postponed or if the professor still wanted to meet the student as in (20).

18. *Oh merde, Scuse-moi ! Oh shit, ça valait-tu beaucoup ? Il y a-tu moyen de la réparer ? Je peux m'en occuper.* (FL1-Friend)

"Oh shit, excuse me. Oh shit, **did it mean a lot to you?** Are there any means to repair it? I can take care of that."

19. *Oh mon dieu, je suis vraiment désolée. Est-ce que ça va ?* (FL1-Waiter)

"Oh my God, I am so sorry. **Are you okay?**"

20. *Bonjour, je suis vraiment désolée, j'ai oublié de régler mon réveil. Est-ce que je peux venir maintenant ou à un autre moment pour participer au projet quand même ? Je suis vraiment désolée.* (FL1-Professor)

"Good morning, I am really sorry, I forgot to set my alarm clock. Can I come now or another time to participate in the project anyway? I am so sorry."

#### 4.3.4 Supportive acts

Supportive acts are different kinds of speech acts, which may come before or after direct and indirect apologies. Supportive acts alone cannot be used to apologize. Rather, they are external modification devices used to soften or reinforce apologies. The speech acts used to support the apologies focused on many different face-wants of the speaker or the addressee. In the data used, 17 supportive moves were found and the FL1 participants used more supportive acts than the FL2 group (FL1: 15 tokens vs. FL2: 2 tokens). The two supportive acts attested in the FL2 data set were greetings and they appeared in the professor situation, where they served to initiate contact with the interlocutor prior to the apology proper (21).

21. *Bonjour Monsieur/Madame, je suis très désolé, je vais rentrer en retard pour notre rencontre. Mon alarme n'a pas sonné aujourd'hui alors j'ai levé tard.* (FL2-Professor)

"Good morning sir/ma'am, I am very sorry, I will be late for our meeting. My alarm clock did not ring today, so I got up late."

Of the 15 supportive acts found in the FL2 data set, there was one example in situation 1 and 14 examples in situation 3. The supportive act attested in the friend situation was a question of whether the broken vase could be repaired. This question served to introduce the forthcoming offer to take care of the repair as in (22).

22. *Oh merde, Scuse-moi ! Oh shit, ça valait-tu beaucoup ? Il y a- tu moyen de la réparer ? Je peux m'en occuper.* (FL1-Friend)

“Oh shit, excuse me. Oh shit, did it mean a lot to you? Are there any means to repair it? I can take care of that.”

The 14 supportive acts used by the FL1 respondents in the professor situation include greetings and self-introductions, which were used to introduce the apologetic utterances as in (23). Other supportive acts attested were comments by which the speaker attempted to protect his/her positive face by indicating the offense was not a result of a bad habit: it was an incident that would not repeat itself as in (24).

23. *Allo, c'est X. Je suis vraiment désolée, je n'avais pas réglé mon cadran. Je pourrais être là dans 30 mins. Est-ce que ça vaut la peine quelle vienne ? Encore désolée.* (FL1-professor)

24. *Je suis vraiment désolée, mon alarme n'a pas sonné, ce n'est vraiment pas dans mes habitudes.* (FL1-professor)

“I am so sorry, my alarm clock did not ring, it is really not in my habit (to be this late).”

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to compare strategies used by a group of Canadian university students to apologize in L2 French with those employed by L1 French speakers and to contribute to research in L2 French pragmatics in the Canadian context. Differences and similarities emerged between both groups in the use of various apology strategies.

With respect to the overall use of strategies, the results reveal that the FL1 participants produced more strategies than the FL2 group (FL1: 116 tokens vs. FL2: 106 instances). It was also found that most of the strategies used by the FL1 speakers were direct apologies, while the FL2 learners mostly used indirect apologies. Both groups used emotional exclamations or interjections to introduce and boost their apologies, albeit with a different distribution across the three situations and different types of interjections. Regarding the use of direct apologies, the FL1 speakers were found to use three different types, namely “expression of regret”, “offer of apology”, and “request for forgiveness”, while the FL2 informants made use of only two types, namely, namely “expression of regret” and “offer of apology”. This result seems to suggest that the teaching of apologetic behavior to such a group of FL2 group should endeavor to also draw their attention to requests for forgiveness like *Pardon, Pardonne/Pardonnez-moi, Excuse/Excusez-moi, Veuillez m'excuser/me pardonner, Je vous demande pardon, Je vous prie de bien vouloir m'excuser/me pardonner/d'accepter toutes mes excuses, etc.* Also noteworthy is the fact that both groups were found to boost their direct apologies by means of adverbs. But this internal intensification occurred more frequently in the FL1 data than in the FL2 examples and the types of adverbs employed were different to some extent.

Differences and similarities were documented in the area of indirect apologies. The FL1 group used four different speech acts, namely *taking responsibility*, *explanation*, *the offer of repair*, and *concern for the addressee*, while the FL2 participants used five different speech acts, namely *taking responsibility*, *explanation*, *the offer of repair*, *promise of forbearance*, and *concern for the addressee*, to apologize indirectly. While the *offer of repair* was the most preferred type of indirect apology by both groups, many differences regarding use of the other realization types. For instance, we found that, while *explanation/justification* was the second most common type of indirect apology in the FL1 data (27.9%), it was the third most frequently used type (15%) in the FL2 data set (where *taking responsibility* was, with 16.7%, the second most common realization type of indirect apology).

On the level of external modification, it was found that the FL1 speaking participants produced more supportive acts than the FL2 speakers (FL1: 15 tokens vs. FL2: 2 tokens).

Overall, the study reveals that while many aspects of apologetic behavior of the L2 French learners approximate that of the FL1 French speakers, some linguistic realization of apology strategies by the L2 French group remained problematic. The grammatical and lexical errors found in their apologies, which are partly due to the influence of the source language (English), represent an aspect that should be taken into account in the teaching and learning of apologetic behavior in L2 French. Also, learners' attention should be directed to the possibility of using different types of supportive moves to mitigate or intensify aspects of their apologies.

This study has a number of limitations. First, the small-scale nature of the study, based on a corpus of only 16 L2 French learners, does not yield results that could be generalized to a larger group of L2 French learners. This means that a larger-scale investigation is required to establish the strategies L2 French learners choose and the problems they are confronted with when apologizing in the target language. Second, the study focused on apologies in only three situations. It is important to include more situations highlighting various levels of social distance and power distance as well as many different types of offenses in order to have a better picture of apologetic behavior in L2 French. Third: since the study carried out here is based on written data, it would be necessary to employ other types of data (e.g., role-play data) in forthcoming studies in order to establish how negotiations of complaints-apologies exchanges are enacted by L2 French learners. Fourth, in order to understand the motivations behind the use of certain strategies in the target languages, it would also be necessary to tap into the perceptions and cultural representations or cultural schemas underlying apologies in Anglo-Canadian contexts and the way in which they influence the production of apologies in L2 French. It would be also important to look at the way in which apologies are realized in Canadian English (L1), in order to indicate whether some of the "uncommon" apology strategies and realizations found in the FL2 data represent traces of the impact of L1 (English) or pragmatic transfers in the apologies of the FL2 learners in question.

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