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ON GENDER AND APOLOGY: CASE OF ALGERIAN ARABIC

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Abstract: The present study explores the impact of gender on the use of apology strategies by Algerian speakers. Specifically, the research aims to identify the apology strategies utilized by male and female Algerian participants and to examine the potential influence of gender on such usage. The study employed a discourse completion task (DCT) as its methodological tool for data collection. The DCT included nine scenarios in which participants were required to provide an apology. Sixty participants, consisting of 30 males and 30 females, were recruited for the study. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were employed to examine the data collected. To facilitate the analysis, a modified version of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) framework was applied, given its widespread usage and convenience in similar studies. The findings of the study indicate that male and female Algerian participants employed seven primary apology strategies, and gender influenced the frequency of their usage. These findings provide new insights into the role of gender in the choice of apology strategies in Algerian Arabic.

Keywords: apology strategy, gender, male, female, Algerian Arabic, discourse completion task, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis, data analysis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language, as a means of human communication, is a complex system shared by billions of people worldwide, with over 6000 spoken languages in existence today. Linguistics, a discipline that employs scientific methods to study language, has evolved into an established field of inquiry with numerous subfields focused on understanding language's internal components, including syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. It's worth noting that the study of language cannot be undertaken in isolation from the societies in which communication takes place.

In this regard, sociolinguistics has emerged as a subfield of linguistics, aiming to explore the relationship between language and society. Scholars seek to examine how different social variables such as age, social status, and gender influence language. Gender, in particular, plays a significant role in sociolinguistic inquiry, with researchers investigating its impact on various aspects of language use, including verbal communication and social interaction.

Verbal communication is both a social activity and a fundamental mode of human interaction, requiring individuals to engage with each other in various ways. In these interactions, specific strategies are employed, such as the apology strategy, which is a social phenomenon that has links to both pragmatics and sociology. As a result, the apology strategy has been the subject of extensive research from different perspectives, including linguistic (syntax, semantics) and social (age, status, and gender) viewpoints. The aim of this work is to investigate whether these social variables have an impact on the production and comprehension of speech acts, such as apologies.

Research on apologies has been conducted globally, spanning diverse languages and cultures. However, when examining studies on gender and apology within the Arabic context, a noticeable lack of research is evident, particularly in the Maghreb region compared to other parts of the Middle East. Thus, the aim of this research paper is to shed light on gender and apology in the Algerian context.

To achieve this goal, the study seeks to answer two primary questions: first, to investigate the nature and types of apology strategies employed by individuals of both genders, and second, to examine the potential impact of gender on the type of apology used. Before delving into the subject matter of the research, the study will provide a comprehensive overview of significant apology definitions and different categorizations of apology strategies. Additionally, the literature review will highlight critical studies conducted on this topic to contextualize the study's significance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before we deal with the different definitions of the term “apology”, we must highlight the notion of a speech act. Searle [1969] refers to a speech act as an act performed when the speaker makes an utterance. In other words, they are acts executed just by saying or producing the utterance. Speech acts are chief components of communicative interaction and may include requests, warnings, invitations, promises, and apologies.

Fraser [1981] argues that apologizing is, at the least, taking responsibility for the infraction and expressing regret “for the offense committed, though not necessarily for the act itself” [Fraser, 1981, p. 262]. Olshtain and Cohen [1983] perceive apology as a social event performed when social norms are violated.

Meanwhile, Brown and Levinson [1987, p. 70] proposed the notion of the positive and negative face as the components of one's public self-image. Positive refers to the individual whose personality is appreciated by others. Negative face, on the other hand, focuses and specifies personal rights of personal freedom.

Holmes [1989], on the other hand, regarded apology as “a speech act addressed to **B**'s face needs and intended to remedy an offense for which **A** takes responsibility, and thus to restore equilibrium between **A** and **B**”; where **A** is the apologist, and **B** is the victim or person offended. Bergman and Kasper [1993] emphasize the view that such speech act is used to evoke forgiveness whereas they recognize that the purpose of an apology is to restore social relation conformity after the offense is committed.

2.1. Apology strategies

People often employ different types of expressions when performing an apology. To this extent, apology strategies were categorized to help study this phenomenon. Various scholars provided different classifications, and even though they contrast in scope and details (some are wide and detailed while others are narrow and less detailed), all of them fold over each other. Our discussion will mainly be limited to two major classifications: Fraser [1981] and Blum-Kulka & Olshtain [1984]. One of those models will be adopted during our research.

Fraser [1981] maintains a lengthy list of strategies, including announcing an apology, stating an obligation to apologize, offering to apologize, requesting the hearer to accept the apology, expressing regret, requesting forgiveness, acknowledging responsibility, and promising forbearance and offering redress. Fraser noted that interactants often utilize or combine more than one strategy in a single offense.

On the other hand, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain [1984] proposed a less detailed framework that highlighted only the main strategies. Their main categories include implicit or explicit expressions of apology, acknowledgment of responsibility, explanation of the situation, the offer of repair, and promise of forbearance. This particular model is widely used in research for being concise and precise and it has proven convenient in multiple studies.

2.2. Studies on apology in different Arabic dialects

Despite the lack of literature on this subject, a few studies on apologies in Arabic are worth mentioning. Sinan [2004] studied the use of apology among native speakers of Arabic learning English in India. The researcher found that Arab learners of English differ in their use of apology mainly due to their religion and values. It is essential to mention that most participants saw the use of 'sorry' alone as insufficient. Therefore, Arab learners of English were reported to use multiple apology strategies, which were seen as sincerer and serious.

Another essential inquiry was that of Bataineh and Bataineh [2008]. The researchers used a Discourse Completion Task to examine some specific apology strategies among Jordanian males and females. Methods used include compensation, lack of intent to harm, accepting responsibility, and promise of refraining from doing similar acts in the future. Following the analysis of the data gathered, the researchers found that males and females exhibited differences in their use of apology strategies. Females were reported to apologize more than males, and frequently used statements of remorse, while male respondents employed non-apology strategies more often than female participants.

Bataineh [2008] studied the same topic concerning Jordanian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) University students. The research used a questionnaire composed of 10 items based on Sugimoto's study [1997]. The researchers organized and compared the strategies used by male and female respondents to explore whether there is any gender influence on the strategy used. Findings revealed that male and female respondents used the primary strategies of statement of remorse, accounts, compensation, promise not to repeat the offense, and reparation. They also resorted to using non-apology strategies such as blaming the victim and brushing off the incident as unimportant to exonerate themselves from blame. The findings further revealed that male and female respondents differed in the order of the primary strategies they used.

Furthermore, Nureddeen [2008] highlighted the strategy type and extent to which apology strategies are used in Sudanese Arabic. The researcher used a discourse completion task (DCT) composed of 10 items handed over to 110 college-educated adults in the capital city of Khartoum. She found that Sudanese speakers of Arabic prefer to apologize indirectly, mainly through the use of explicit/implicit strategies as well as explanations. The author also notes that the results of her study confirm earlier studies regarding the universality of certain apology strategies.

Among the recent studies on gender and apology, Abu Humeid's work [2013] is focused on exploring the roles gender and status might have in using apology strategies by Iraqi EFL students. The researcher compared the strategies used by Iraqi EFL students and native speakers of American English through an online discourse completion task. Having analyzed the data, he found that Iraqi females apologized more often than their Iraqi male counterparts, but American males and females exhibited no differences. Regarding status, Iraqi males used more apology strategies with people of higher status (e.g., parents, officials, etc.), while their American male peers used fewer strategies with people of higher status and more strategies with those of lower status position.

To sum up, most of the research cited above seems to go in parallel with the universality of apology. As a modest contribution to this debate, this paper explores whether gender influences (or not) the type of apology strategies employed by native speakers of Algerian Arabic.

3. METHODOLOGY

The overall number of respondents in this study was sixty (60) Algerian students randomly selected: thirty (30) males and thirty (30) females. All participants were international students at the University of Jordan (JU) at the time of the study. The participants were native speakers of Algerian Arabic, studying and preparing for their Ph.D. in various fields, mainly English, Mathematics, and Food Science. Their age ranged between 24 and 27 years old. Data required for this inquiry were collected using a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire.

The DCT questionnaire comprises two sections. Section one is demographic, where the participants were required to indicate their age and gender. The second part of the DCT questionnaire consists of 9 Algerian Arabic statements, each representing a social situation (see Appendix A). The English version of the DCT is provided in Appendix B.

The DCT was piloted with five students. The main purpose of this phase was to find out if the students found the situations acceptable, suitable, and similar to real-life situations. Based on the students' feedback, the items were revised before being used with a larger group of respondents. The students' remarks showed that some situations needed further explanations and others were rather unrealistic. Therefore, they were replaced with other daily situations that people are most likely to encounter.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Data collected for this study were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. As far as the former is concerned, statistics and percentage calculations were used to highlight the frequency of resorting to various kinds of the strategy of apology by both genders. On the other hand, qualitative analysis was used to describe and explain the different strategies used in each situation and provide the reasons behind such use.

Based on the notion that this study deals with apology strategies in the Algerian context, with no previous works conducted on such topics, the researcher used an updated version of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain’s theory [1984]. Khaled Jebahi [2011] used a modified version in his study of Tunisian university students’ choice of apology strategies. It proved convenient in our study too mainly because Jebahi’s work is among the recent studies conducted on apologies in the region of North Africa, namely in Tunisia. Our study will add the variable of gender against the backdrop of the Algerian context.

To this extent, our modified version of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain’s [1984] framework contains other forms of apology strategies absent in western communities: invoking Allah’s name and using kinship terms. Hence, the framework used in the current research comprises seven strategies: remorse, kinship, explanation, an offer of repair, intensification, and minimization, blaming the victim, and invoking Allah’s name.

The data collected is shown in bar graphs representing the nine DCT situations and the apology strategies employed. Percentage calculation was used to depict the frequency of strategies employed in every situation. Participants did not settle for one strategy but combined several of them. Later on, a qualitative analysis will be used, in which different situations are interpreted.

Figure 1: Responses of Male Subjects

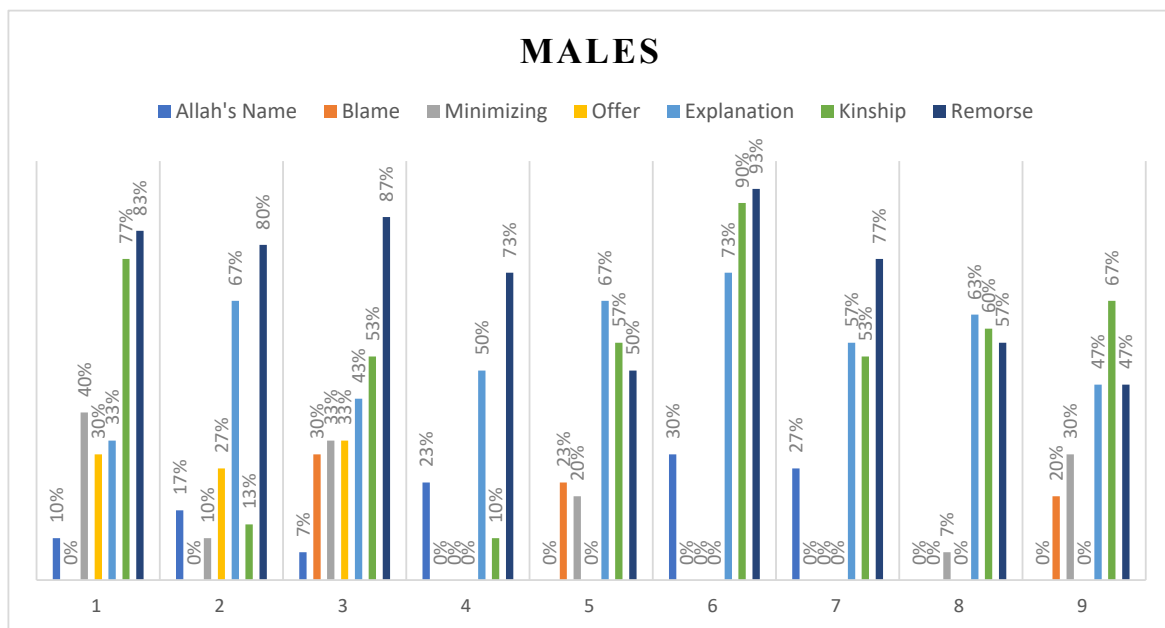
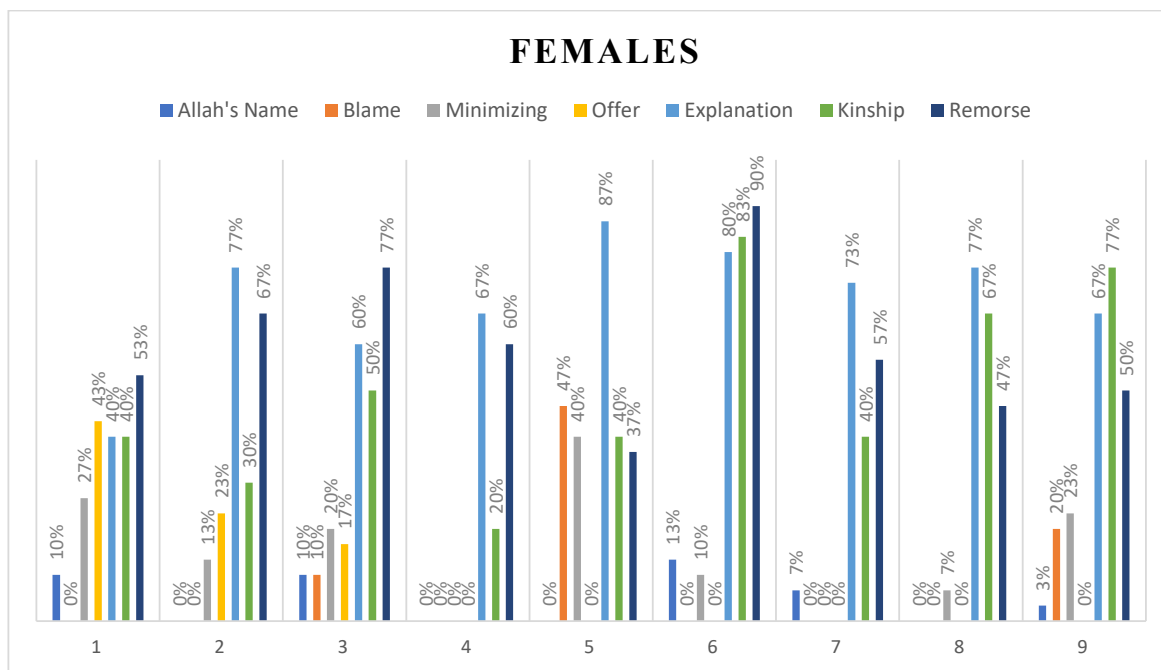


Figure 2: Responses of Female Subjects



4.1. Statement of Remorse

The respondents expressed remorse using explicit apology expressions in all nine situations. Female participants showed slightly less frequency of remorse than their male counterparts. Despite this minor difference, male and female subjects revealed high usage of the remorse strategy, as shown in Figure 1. The highest frequency of remorse was recorded in situations like the lost package (1), coming late to meet the supervisor (4), and the elderly woman crossing the street (6).

We previously highlighted that remorse was the dominant strategy used by both males and females. As shown in Figure 1 above, male participants displayed remorse more frequently; out of 270 responses, a total of 198 responses were calculated in all nine situations. For instance, (25) subjects reflected on their guilt towards the offended person in Situation 1, which means 83% of the male subjects. On the other hand, females also exhibited a high rate though the frequency is slightly lower; a total of 167 responses demonstrating remorse were detected, out of 270 answers. This minor difference does not conceal that remorse was the most common strategy adopted by both genders during our study.

A variety of reasons drive the employment of such strategy. Status, for instance, is essential in Situation 4, where a student committed an offense toward his teacher and had to show he was genuinely sorry. The offense could be punished with severe consequences under the teacher’s high status in such a situation. Another reason behind remorse is the type of relationship people have with each other, such as the relationship among colleagues, friends, and neighbors. Participants expressed their guilt explicitly and mainly by repeating the words “please” and “I am so sorry”.

4.2. Kinship

Before analyzing the kinship strategy, it is important to note that this is one form of an update to the framework used in our study. This strategy is common in Arab countries, typically North African ones. The term kinship refers to family relations and is used as an apology strategy in order to smoothen the situation. In our study, data in Figures 1 and 2 revealed that both genders employ kinship terms to varying extents.

The two figures above show the percentage of kinship terms used by female and male subjects. Males use kinship terms more often than females do. A total of 144 responses exhibited kinship terms as used by male participants, whereas for females that number was 137. Employing this strategy was seen in situations where the offended person was an old neighbor (6), a close friend (1), and even a taxi driver (8).

Participants believe that using kinship terms could be more suitable to make their apology effective and sincere. The subjects used terms such as: *'brother'*, *'aunt'*, and *'mom'* to bridge the social gap with their interlocutors. One important remark is that females use such terms when the victim is from the other gender, they use the term *'brother'* for example. Furthermore, kinship terms are not used alone. Instead, other apology expressions often accompany them, *"please forgive me, brother"*. To this extent, using kinship terms is seen as a strategy to make the offended person feel like part of the family and is used to show that the offender did not intentionally commit the offense.

4.3. Explanation

The explanation strategy of apology ranked third in our study of Algerian subjects. Both female and male participants used this strategy, with females opting for explanations more often than males. If we consider Figure 2, we can notice the high rate of description being used by females. The explanation strategy was used in 193 female answers in counter to 150 male responses. One reason can be simply the fact that women tend to be more talkative than males. It is important to note that a combination of strategies was detected in each situation. This means that participants employ more than one strategy in each situation regardless of gender.

The explanation strategy often comprises expressions that state the causes of why the offense occurred. In Situation 1, participants used sentences like: "I forgot where I put it" and "I might have forgotten it in the taxi on my way home". Generally, this strategy sets the stage for another one to take place. Offering repair is another strategy in which the offender tries to fix his/her mistake.

4.4. Offer of Repair

This type of strategy can be defined as the act of providing material compensation to the offended person. Participants opt for this strategy when they recognize the offense was significant and they have the material ability to redeem their offense. In this study, both males and females integrated this strategy into their answers, but to varying degrees and frequencies.

Starting with the male participants, they opted to offer repair in the first three situations of the DCT. The greatest percentage was observed in Situation 3, where the offense committed caused tangible damage, such as breaking a plate. A total of 12 male subjects expressed their intention to repair the financial damages incurred. Conversely, female participants exhibited a low preference for this strategy. Nonetheless, they also deemed the same situations suitable for employing such a strategy. These findings reveal another strategy that is exemplified in the preceding figures, namely the minimization of the offense committed.

4.5. Minimization

Another apology strategy detected after analyzing the data collected is minimization. As the name implies, it involves offenders toning down the offense's impact. This means that offenders say that the offense committed is not really serious. It is important to note that such strategy is deployed in instances where both the offended person and the offender are intimate friends or belong to the same social class. This generalization is derived from the results interpreted in the figures above.

Male participants used minimization in six situations, but the highest percentage was recorded in Situation 1, which is that of a friend losing a package. The common feature in all situations where minimization was introduced has to do with close-knit relations, i.e., the closer people are the more often such strategy can be seen. Female participants also used this strategy but showed a low percentage.

4.6. Blaming the Victim

This strategy was among the least utilized by participants. In fact, it is usually considered impolite and is often disregarded by most people. Male participants tend to use this strategy slightly more often than females. Male informants blamed the offended person in situations like bumping into the waiter (3), studying with a friend (5), and paying rent (9). Subjects used expressions such as “watch where you are going” and “are you blind”.

Female informants, on the other hand, blamed victims to a lower extent. The highest frequency was recorded in situations like studying with friends (5). This is mainly because close friends tend to be less formal with each other. The respondents used expressions like “Why did you call me?”, “I was waiting for you all day?” and “Why didn't you remind me?”.

4.7. Invoking Allah's Name

The strategy under discussion involves updating the framework that forms the basis of the speech act of apologizing. One notable tendency among Muslims is to invoke Allah's name in their everyday conversations, which can be attributed to various reasons, such as the need to convince others (by means of swearing). In most situations, both genders resorted to invoking Allah's name, albeit with males employing it more frequently. This strategy is implemented to implore the offended party for forgiveness, to express a wish for compensation for the loss, and to indicate that the offense was divinely ordained. The fundamental rationale behind this strategy lies in religious culture, as Muslims believe that Allah is behind all events and that whatever happens is predetermined. In the offenders' view, this belief can absolve them of blame. For instance, the expression “inshallah” conveys the idea that nothing happens unless it is the will of Allah.

Our research revealed that female participants tended to accompany their apology with an invocation of Allah's name more frequently than their male counterparts. For instance, they might say "if you love Allah, forgive me." This strategy is employed to evoke a sense of compassion in the receiver and persuade them to accept the apology.

5. CONCLUSION

Apologizing is a ubiquitous social phenomenon that has been extensively researched in various contexts and cultures. However, despite the vast literature on apologies, there remains a dearth of research on this topic in the Arabic language, particularly in North African countries such as Algeria, Morocco, and Libya. Therefore, the present study aimed to fill this gap by examining the apology strategies employed by Algerian males and females and exploring whether gender plays a role in their usage.

Using an updated version of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's framework, we analyzed the data collected through the discourse completion task (DCT) and identified seven primary apology strategies used by the two genders: statement of remorse, kinship, explanation, an offer of repair, minimizing the offense, blaming the victim, and invoking Allah's name. Our analysis revealed that gender had a significant impact on the strategy used, with male participants more likely to employ confrontational strategies like kinship, minimizing the offense, and blaming the victim, while female participants opted for compassionate strategies like explanation and invoking Allah's name.

Interestingly, the data also showed that both genders used a combination of strategies, with a stereotype that offenders typically used more than one strategy in their apologies. In terms of frequency, males employed invoking Allah's name more often than females, while the usage of remorse was similar between the two genders.

It is worth noting that the DCT was the only tool used in this study, as some female participants were unwilling to participate in the oral version. Moreover, due to the limited number of Algerian participants, a cross-cultural study could not be conducted, which could have provided additional insights.

Conflict of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest

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Appendix A

استبيان

نشكر حسن تعاونكم في هذا الاستطلاع المهم الذي يهدف لمعرفة اساليب الاعتذار وسط المجتمع الجزائري المستعملة من كلا الجنسين. نحيطكم علما أن جميع الإجابات المقدمة ستؤخذ بعين الاعتبار وسيتم الحفاظ عليها بمرية تامة.

الجنس: ذكر انا العمر

1 صاحبك انتيم عطاك امانة و وصالك تمدها لواحد ونا صيحتها ومبعدا تلاقيت صاحبك موراها بشويا:
صاحبك: واش يادرا ؟ وصلت الأمانة ؟
انت:

2 سلفت كتاب من المكتبة وكي جيت راح ترجعو روماركيت بلي خوك الصخير قطع الباجا لولا:
مسؤول المكتبة: واش صرا للكتاب ؟
نتا:

3 ونا داخل لروستورون عترت وضريت السارفور وطاح البلا لي كان رافدو:
السارفور: شوق قدامك ا صاحبني
نتا:

4 تقاهمت مع لونكادور نتاعك على مغابلة و جيت روطار بساعة:
لونكادور: وعلاش جيت روطار ؟
نتا:

5 وعدت طالب بش تفهمو في ليكور ونا في بيريود تح امتحانات ومالقيتش وقت بش تفهمو وراح تخلف وعدك
الطالب: علاش ماعاونتنيش ؟
نتا:

6 جارتك عجوزة كبيرة قالتلك عاوني تقطع الطريق. ونا كنت مزروب ومادرتش عليها، كي رجعت للدار لغيتها تهدر مع يمالك على هداك الجاست:

جارتك: علاش ماعونتنيش بش نقطع الطريق؟

نتا:

7 والد صاحبك توفي ونا مارحتلو ماعيطتلو، فاتو يامات ورجع للخدمة:

صاحبك: السلام عليكم.

نتا:

8 حكمت طاكسي من سونتر فيل وراجع للدار ونسيت ماخلصتس الطاكسيور وهو دار في بالو بلي راك حسيتهالو

الطاكسيور: اسي محمد؟ خلصني.

نتا:

9 نتا وصاحبك بقرا معاك كاريين ستوديو، الشهر كامل ونا مازال مدقعتس لاصوم نتاعك

الكراي: راك مازال مخلصتس الكرا.

نتا:

Appendix B

*Read the following situations and complete the dialogues using Algerian Arabic.
Your responses need to be as realistic as possible:*

Gender: **Male** **Female**

1. A close friend gave you a package that you were supposed to give to someone else, but you found out that you have lost it. Now, you met this close friend.

- **Your close friend:** Did you deliver the package?

- **You:**
.....

2. You borrowed a textbook from the library, but before you gave it back your little brother tore the front page.

- **The librarian:** What happened to the book?

- **You:**
.....

3. As you were entering a restaurant, you bumped into the waiter who dropped the platter.

- **The waiter:** Watch out!!

- **You:**
.....

4. You had an appointment with your supervisor. You came one hour late.

- **Your supervisor:** Why are you so late?

- **You:**
.....

5. You promised to help another student with his lessons. The exam period was upon you but you could not find time to keep to your promise.

- **The student:** Why did you not help me?

- **You:**
.....

6. An elderly woman asked you to help her cross the street. You were in a hurry so you ignored her. When you were back home you found your old neighbor talking about it with your mother.

- The elderly woman: Why didn't you help me cross the street?

- You:
.....

7. Your colleague's father passed away, but you neither visited nor gave him a call to. A few days later your colleague was back to work.

- Your colleague: Hi!

- You:
.....

8. You took a taxi back from down town to home. You forgot to pay for the driver and he thought you tried to fraud him.

- The taxi driver: Hey! You did not pay me!!

- You:
.....

9. You are renting a house with fellow student, the month is over and you could not pay your share.

- The landlord: You have not yet paid the rent!!

- You:
.....