TEACHING APOLOGY FORMULAS AT THE DISCOURSE LEVEL: ARE INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTS MAINTAINED OVER TIME?

LA ENSEÑANZA DE FÓRMULAS DE DISCULPA A UN NIVEL DISCURSIVO: ¿SE MANTIENEN LOS EFECTOS DE LA INSTRUCCIÓN A LARGO PLAZO?

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This study explores the effects of teaching apologies at a discourse level on a group of Spanish learners of English as a foreign language both in the short and in the long-term. It adopts a one-group pre-, post- and delayed post-test design to particularly examine the effectiveness of a pedagogical model on learners' appropriate use of apology formulas not only after immediately receiving instruction, but also five months later. An interactive discourse completion test was used to analyse learners' performance when apologising in different contrasting scenarios. Results show that the types of apology formulas produced by learners in the pre-test differ significantly from those produced in the post-test, as well as in

the delayed post-test. After receiving instruction, learners produced more elaborated apologetic responses attending to the sociopragmatic aspects involved in the different situations, a performance that was maintained over time. These results seem to demonstrate the positive benefits of instruction to foster learners' pragmatic knowledge in terms of both frequency and variety of apology formulas not only in the short-term but also in the long-term.

*   **Key words:** teaching pragmatics, apologies, durability of pragmatic instruction, EFL context*

*   Este estudio explora el efecto de enseñar disculpas a un nivel discursivo a un grupo de estudiantes españoles que aprenden inglés como lengua extranjera tanto a corto como a largo plazo. Adopta pues un diseño de un grupo, pre- post- y post-test a largo plazo para examinar en concreto la eficacia de incorporar un modelo de enseñanza en el uso apropiado de fórmulas de disculpa no solo inmediatamente después de recibir la instrucción, sino también cinco meses más tarde. Se utilizó un test interactivo para completar el discurso y analizar el comportamiento de los estudiantes cuando pedían disculpas en diferentes situaciones. Los resultados indican que los tipos de fórmulas de disculpa que utilizan los estudiantes en el pre-test difieren significativamente de las utilizadas tanto en el post-test como en test distribuido a largo plazo. Después de recibir instrucción, los estudiantes usaron respuestas de disculpa más elaboradas prestando atención a los aspectos sociopragmáticos de cada situación, un comportamiento que se mantuvo a largo plazo. Estos resultados parecen demostrar los beneficios positivos de la enseñanza para fomentar el conocimiento pragmático de los estudiantes tanto en la frecuencia como en la variedad de fórmulas de disculpa no solo a corto sino también a largo plazo.*

*   **Palabras clave:** enseñanza de la pragmática, disculpas, durabilidad de la instrucción, contexto de inglés como lengua extranjera*

1. Introduction

The effect of instructional intervention in the development of learners' pragmatic competence in both second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) contexts has aroused the interest of an increasing number of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) researchers over the last decades (see Jeon and Kaya, 2006; Takahashi, 2010; Taguchi 2011, 2015 for a review of the research undertaken). Results from this investigation have demonstrated the positive role of engaging learners in an instructional period and the teachability of all pragmatic aspects being examined (i.e. various speech acts, pragmatic fluency, discourse markers, modal particles or hedging devices, among others). Among the different speech acts, apologies have been one of the target pragmatic features addressed in interventional ILP studies. However, most of the research focusing on teaching apologies has not investigated them from a discursive perspective and has not considered the retention of the knowledge acquired about this speech act over time. In order to address these issues, the present study aims to examine the effect of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' appropriate use of apology formulas at the discourse level and whether the pragmatic gains are maintained not only after immediately receiving instruction, but also five months later.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Apologies

Apologies fall into the category of expressive speech acts (Searle, 1969), whose goal is to provide a remedy for an offense and restore harmony between the speaker and the hearer (Leech, 1983). In Bergman and Kasper's (1993: 82) terms, apologies can be defined as "compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S (the speaker) was causally involved and which is costly to H (the hearer)". Thus, the speech act of apologising can be expected to appear post-event in a negotiated sequence between two interlocutors, where an offensive action created by the speaker has damaged the hearer. In this sense, apologies are politeness devices used in

a communicative situation where the apologiser needs to take into account the other interlocutor's face as an attempt to repair or restore damage to face (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

However, it is important to highlight that an apology involves different aspects of face depending on the perspective from which it is considered. For the hearer, an apology is a face-saving act because it provides support for the hearer's negative face as "it is made clear that he/she has been harmed by the speaker's actions" (Sabaté-Dalmau and Curell-Gotor, 2007: 291). In contrast, for the speaker, "an apology is a face-threatening act (FTA) as it damages the speaker's positive face" (Warga and Schölmberger, 2007: 223). Indeed, it implies the acceptance that something wrong has been done, whether on purpose or not. In this case, the apology can adopt a defensive orientation towards saving one's own face by justifying or explaining the reason for his/her failure (Trosborg, 1995).

Considering therefore the complexity involved in an apologetic exchange, the speaker needs to be aware of the existence of different formulas that may be used to appropriately communicate in a remedial exchange. The choice of these apology formulas, which range from more direct to indirect realisations used to mitigate the FTA, is based on three different parameters: i) the speaker's perception of the severity of the offense involved in the communicative act (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987), as well as ii) the degree of social distance and iii) social power between the two interlocutors (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The extent to which these factors may influence the speaker's assumption of responsibility will result in his/her choice of expressing an apology totally explicitly or just emphasising his/her innocence by using an indirect explanation or by simply not feeling the need to apologise.

In any case, the speaker needs to know how to appropriately perform apologies (if he/she chooses to do so) so that harmony can be restored and, consequently, avoid communication breakdowns between the two interlocutors. In fact, as Olshtain and Cohen (1983) point out, a more serious offense would require a more elaborated apologetic strategy,

whereas a less severe offense might only need a less intensified apology. In order to do so, and particularly in FL settings where there are limited opportunities to encounter authentic apologetic sequences, pedagogical intervention seems to be necessary.

2.2. Interventional Studies on Apologies

Apologies have been the focus of attention in a series of ILP studies that have highlighted the need for instructional intervention on this speech act. More specifically, all of them have targeted pedagogical instruction on Iranian EFL learners (Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004; Eslami-Rasekh and Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani, 2010; Birjandi and Derakhshan, 2013; Simin et al., 2014; Derakhshan and Eslami-Rasekh, 2015).

Eslami-Rasekh et al. (2004) conducted a pre-test/post-test design with a control group to examine the effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on learners' comprehension of apologies. The instruction took about 30 minutes of each two-hour class period over twelve weeks and consisted of teacher-fronted discussions, cooperative grouping, role plays and other pragmatically oriented tasks. Results indicated that learners' apology comprehension improved significantly, thus supporting the benefits of implementing explicit instruction in FL classrooms to facilitate interlanguage pragmatic development. Following the same design (pre-test/post-test with a control group), Eslami-Rasekh and Eslami-Rasekh (2008) analysed the effect of instruction on learners' awareness and production of apologies. The treatment lasted for fourteen weeks, and 30 minutes of each three-hour class time were devoted to pragmatic related activities. Those activities included a combination of teacher-fronted discussions, peer work, role plays, semi-structured interviews, small-group discussion, introspective feedback and metapragmatic assessment tasks. Findings showed that the interventional group recognised and performed apology speech act schemes significantly better than the control group. In another study, Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani (2010) focused on the

effects of explicit instruction on the frequency of apology intensifying devices adopting a pre-test/post-test design with a control group. The instructional treatment involved a series of activities including small data cards showing apology situations, a model dialogue for role play activities, a questionnaire for diagnostic assessment, feedback and discussion. The results supported the positive effect of pragmatic instruction to enhance the appropriateness of the use of intensifiers when apologising since learners from the experimental group outperformed those from the control group.

More recently, the use of audiovisual input or technology have been incorporated in the instructional treatments to ascertain the impact they may exert on learner's apology development. Birjandi and Derakhshan's (2013) study incorporated a pre-test/post-test design with a control group to investigate the effectiveness of consciousness-raising video-driven prompts on the comprehension of apologies. Learners were assigned to three instructional treatment groups (i.e. metapragmatic, form-search and role play) and exposed to vignettes extracted from different episodes of *Flash Forward* and *Stargate* TV series, and the film *Annie Hall* for nine 60-minute sessions of instruction twice a week. Results revealed the significant impact of using audiovisual input on the development of apology comprehension, since the three instructional treatment groups benefited from the instruction received and outperformed the control group. Similar results were obtained in the research carried out by Derakhshan and Eslami-Rasekh (2015), which made use of the same consciousness-raising video-driven prompts to examine their effectiveness with thee different types of instruction (i.e. discussion, role-play and interactive translation). Learners were also exposed to video extracts extracted from different episodes of *Flash Forward* and *Stargate* TV series, and the film *Annie Hall* for nine 90-minute sessions of instruction twice a week. Results indicated that learners' awareness of apologies benefited from all three types of instruction, ascertaining thus the potential of using audiovisual materials, particularly in FL contexts.

Finally, Simin et al. (2014) investigated the role of instruction in developing learners' pragmatic awareness on recognition and production of

apologies with the help of e-communication through exchange of e-mails. The study followed a pre-test/post-test design with two experimental groups (one receiving explicit instruction and the other receiving implicit instruction). The treatment, which lasted one semester of four months, was based on the provision of different hypothetical apology situations in which the learners had to write e-mail exchanges to their instructor. The explicit instruction group received feedback and discussion on each situation, whereas the implicit instruction group did not get corrective feedback of the e-mails being sent. The analysis of the e-mail exchanges revealed that the learners receiving explicit instruction gained significantly in terms of pragmatic proficiency required for strategies of apology. The authors thus support the positive benefits of incorporating this type of technological tool when teaching pragmatics.

The above review of the interventional pragmatic studies on apologies has overall demonstrated the positive effect of instruction. Nonetheless, all are set in the Iranian EFL context, so as Eslami-Rasekh and Eslami-Rasekh (2008) indicate, more research is needed to widen the range of the participants' first language (L1). Apart from this aspect, two more issues remain to be dealt with.

The first one refers to the fact that none of these studies has examined apologies at the discourse level. As Félix-Brasdefer (2006) and Kasper (2006) mention, speech acts need to be understood as part of an interactional exchange in which usually two or more interlocutors construct a communicative sequence over multiple turns. On this account, different studies have considered the interactive nature of conversation when teaching speech acts within the level of discourse. For instance, focusing on compliment responses, Huth (2006) investigated the effects of teaching American learners of German how to realise L2 compliment-response sequences in talk-in-interaction. To that end, the author developed a teaching unit of five different phases based on authentic compliment sequences in German. Results from this study showed that providing learners with opportunities for exposure and practice of the sequential organisation of compliment response sequences were positive as they were

able to appropriately engage in talk-in-interaction. Dealing with refusals, the studies by Alcón and Guzmán (2010) and Alcón (2012) examined the benefits of pragmatic instruction at the discourse level on learners' awareness of this speech act. Alcón and Guzmán (2010) implemented an instructional treatment based on Félix-Brasdefer's (2006) model to teach the negotiation of refusals by using conversational analysis (CA) tools. Results from their study showed that learners not only improved their awareness of the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic issues involved in performing appropriate refusals, but also paid attention to other conversational skills such as turn taking or negotiation strategies. As a follow-up study, Alcón (2012) examined the effect of bilingualism on learners' attention and comprehension of refusals. Findings from this study also illustrated the positive effect of teaching refusals at the discourse level since learners' awareness of this speech act increased.

In the light of these positive findings, it seems that empirical studies that address apology-based instruction within sequential exchanges at the level of discourse are needed. In fact, recently Limberg (2015) proposes a series of principles that should be considered when teaching apologies in the EFL context, being the last of them that of practising speech acts within sequential structures. Specifically, the interactive structure of apology situations should be emphasised by making learners understand the complexity of an apology interaction, as it does not occur in isolation in speech. As the author (2015: 283) highlights, apologies "are often initiated by a perceived form of offense (being late), sometimes followed by a complaint ("I've been waiting for a while now"), then an apology, which can be a sequence consisting of multiple turns itself, and finally a response, again possibly realised through another multi-turn sequence".

The second issue that is worth mentioning is related to the fact that none of the previous interventional studies on apologies has made use of delayed post-tests to assess the long-term instructional effects. As Kasper and Rose (2002) highlight, the incorporation of measures that assess the outcomes of pragmatic instruction some time after the end of the treatment period has been considered as necessary in order to support the benefits of such instruction. However, using a delayed post-test, although desirable,

is sometimes not possible because of the lack of access to the original instructional group after the completion of the main study. In spite of this drawback, a number of studies have successfully included a delayed post-test addressing a variety of targeted pragmatic features. The studies by Lyster (1994) and Liddicoat and Crozet (2001), for instance, focused on particular aspects related to the sociopragmatic competence in French, namely the distinction between the use of French *tu/vous* in different informal and formal contexts, and responding appropriately to a question about the weekend in French. Other studies have examined different speech acts, such as giving and responding to compliments (Ishihara, 2004), refusals (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008) or requests and request modifiers (Codina, 2008; Li, 2012; Martínez-Flor, 2012). Finally, research conducted by Nguyen et al. (2012) and Fordyce (2014) has dealt with other pragmatic aspects rarely being examined in interventional pragmatics research, namely the speech act set of constructive criticism and epistemic stance, respectively.

Results from all these studies reveal that instruction on pragmatics tends to be durable, with the only exception of some of the formal aspects of the language in Liddicoat and Crozet's (2001) and Fordyce's (2014) studies that were just partially sustained over time. However, none of them has focused on apologies as the targeted pragmatic feature. Additionally, with the exception of the studies by Liddicoat and Crozet (2001) and Ishihara (2004), whose delayed post-test was one year later, and Martínez-Flor's (2012) and Fordyce's (2014) research, whose delayed post-test was five months later, the delayed post-test in the rest of the other studies took place between two and six weeks after the treatment. It could be argued then that this is not enough time to strictly confirm the durability of instructional effects. Therefore, research that sheds light on whether the effect of apology-based instruction is retained over a substantial period of time is needed.

2.3. Purpose of the Study

Considering i) the lack of research on the instructional effects of English apologies on learners from less studied L1 backgrounds (Eslami-Rasekh

and Eslami-Rasekh, 2008), ii) the need to further analyse the effectiveness of speech-act instruction within the level of discourse (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Kasper, 2016), and iii) the need to shed more light on the durability of pragmatic instruction (Kasper and Rose, 2002), the present study aims to examine the effect of teaching Spanish EFL learners' use of apology formulas from a discursive perspective both in the short and in the long-term. More specifically, it poses the following research questions:

1. Is the teaching of apologies at the discourse level effective as regards the amount and type of apology formulas produced by learners in a variety of contrasting situations?
2. Are the instructional effects (if any) maintained over time?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The study involved 20 Spanish students who were in the third-year course of the degree of English Studies at the University. However, since learners were paired and required each to perform the role of a complainer or an apologiser for the tasks distributed as pre-, post- and delayed post-test, just data from 10 students were considered in the present study since its main aim is to analyse learners' use of apology formulas in response to a given complaint. The 10 learners (4 males and 6 females; age range, 20-26) had all learned English in classroom settings and did not differ to any significant extent with regard to ethnicity or academic background. As for their level of proficiency in English, they all had upper-intermediate level (or B2 according to the Council of Europe level), as illustrated by the *Quick Placement Test* (2001) distributed among them prior to the beginning of the study.

3.2. Instructional Treatment

The instructional treatment employed in the present study was an adaptation of the pedagogical model proposed by Alcón and Guzmán

(2010), and further extended by Alcón (2012), who elaborated a model to teach refusals using scenes from a TV series. As the authors (2010: 68) mention, their pedagogical model "can be used with different audiovisual sources and adapted to the teaching of different speech acts". On this assumption, our approach used scenes from three different films (*Maid in Manhattan*, 2002, *The Breakup*, 2006 and *The Social Network*, 2010) to provide learners with contextualised situations in which apologies can be taught at the discourse level. It was implemented during two-hour sessions held every week for four weeks and included an additional stage. This is based on the following five stages: 1) *Identifying apologies in interaction*, 2) *Explaining the speech act set*, 3) *Noticing and understanding apology sequences*, 4) *Negotiating and exploring learners' use of apologies*, and 5) *Providing feedback on learners' apology performance*. By engaging learners in this pedagogical model, they were provided with the three necessary conditions to develop their pragmatic competence in the English language, namely exposure to appropriate input, opportunities for output and provision of feedback (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010). Table 1 shows a schematic representation of the five main stages followed in this approach.

Weeks	Stages	Focus of each stage
1st week	Stage 1	Identifying apologies in interaction
2nd week	Stage 2	Explaining the speech act set
3rd week	Stage 3	Noticing and understanding apology sequences
4th week	Stage 4	Negotiating and exploring learners' use of apologies
	Stage 5	Providing feedback on learners' apology performance

Table 1. Outline of the approach to teach apologies at the discourse level

In the first stage, *Identifying apologies in interaction*, learners were introduced to what an apology involves by providing them with authentic-like input in which this particular speech act appeared in contextualised situations. More specifically, the teacher made them aware of the fact that an apology needs to be understood as part of an interaction that is co-constructed over multiple turns. To that end, learners first watched different scenes from the selected films and then were provided with the

transcripts so that they could identify the beginning and end of apology sequences. analysing the transcripts, the teacher asked learners different questions to make them focus on the structure of the negotiation sequence. Those questions included: In how many turns is the apology realised? Is it done directly or indirectly? How is it initiated? Who initiates it? How do the interlocutors react to the initiating act? Who finishes it?

In the second stage, that of *Explaining the speech act set*, learners were provided with metapragmatic explanations about what pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics are in general (Leech, 1983), as well as about the speech act of apologies in particular (i.e. the fact that it typically occurs post-event after an offensive action and it can be more or less elaborated depending on the severity of the offense). To that end, the teacher explained learners the variety of apology formulas that can be employed when apologising in different situations by examining them in contextualised scenes from the three films selected. Additionally, learners were also explained to the importance of the sociopragmatic variables involved in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, namely those of social distance and power, as well as the severity of offense, and how these influence the appropriate choice of the particular apologetic formula to be used in each of the scenes selected. Finally, learners were introduced to some basic concepts related to CA, such as the parts of a sequence or the turn-taking system of an interaction (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Kasper, 2006).

In the third stage, *Noticing and understanding apology sequences*, the teacher prepared a series of awareness-raising questions so that learners could further acknowledge the importance of understanding the performance of apologies from a discursive approach. To do so, they were asked to analyse more in detail the transcripts of the previously watched film scenes by revising the issues addressed in stages 1 and 2, and asked to answer the following:

- Identify the sequence of the apology
- How many turns can you identify in the apologetic sequence?
- What particular apology formulas are used?
- Why do interlocutors use these formulas?

- Who initiates the sequence?
- How does the other interlocutor react to the initiating act?
- Who finishes the sequence?
- Based on the interactional sequence, how would you describe the
  interlocutors' relationship?

After finishing this awareness-raising activity, the answers to these questions were discussed. Then, since learners were already familiarised with the different formulas that can be used when apologising and how social variables can affect an appropriate apologetic language use, they were ready to be engaged in the fourth stage of the approach, *Negotiating and exploring learners' use of apologies*. Here, learners were provided with opportunities to produce apologies in a series of role-plays similar to the interactions included in the previously watched film scenes. While interacting in the different role-plays, their performance was recorded. Then, they watched the film scenes again and compared this audiovisual input with their oral production by answering the same questions from the third stage.

In the fifth and last stage, *Providing feedback on learners' apology performance*, learners were provided with both peer and teacher feedback on their apologetic performance in the role-play activities practiced in the previous stage. Such feedback made them reflect again about the need to understand apologies as a speech act that is co-constructed by the interlocutors in a particular interaction over a series of turns, as well as gave them further practice in metapragmatic reflection. Finally, this feedback was followed up by teacher's class discussion about any other possible doubts concerning the selection of pragmalinguistic apology formulas depending on the particular sociopragmatic features involved in a given communicative interaction.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The study followed a pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test design in order to ascertain not only the immediate instructional effects, but also the

effectiveness of the instruction over time. At the beginning of the academic semester[1], and three weeks prior to the start of the instructional treatment, the pre-test was distributed. Given the need to assess learners' performance considering their interaction and negotiation through different turns, the test implemented in the present study was the written interactive discourse completion test (IDCT) elaborated by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2014). It consisted of a discursive type of instrument that included eight tasks, each with scenario for a complaint and an apology[2].

The eight tasks were designed as a dialogue in written form that required two different learners negotiating complaint-apology sequences from their inception to their conclusion in as many turns as needed. The situational descriptions of all scenarios were classified as occurring in the workplace environment of the Tourism industry[3], either at a hotel location or at a travel and tourism agency. In terms of input, all scenarios were considered for the status of apologiser over the other interactant, the social distance between interlocutors (Brown and Levinson, 1987) and the severity of offense in the realisation of the apology (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987). As for status, apology situations were classified as high (tasks 1, 2, 3 and 4) or low (tasks 5, 6, 7 and 8). Regarding the social distance between the interactants, apology situations were planned to be close (tasks 1, 3, 5 and 7) or distant (tasks 2, 4, 6 and 8). Finally, the severity of offense in the realisation of apologies was conceptualised as more (tasks 3, 4, 7 and 8) or less severe (tasks 1, 2, 5 and 6). Table 2 shows a summary of the apology scenarios.

Sit.	Topic	Interlocutors	Status	Distance	Offense
1	cigarette breaks	student vs site supervisor	high	close	less
2	recommendation letter	receptionist vs general manager	high	distant	less
3	business meeting	travel agent vs agency manager	high	close	more
4	a lost hotel reservation	group leader vs hotel manager	high	distant	more

5	misspelled business documents	general manager vs. personal assistant	low	close	less
6	casual conversations at front office	reception manager vs receptionist	low	distant	less
7	late at work	manager vs travel agent	low	close	more
8	false educational credentials	chief executive hotel group vs receptionist	low	distant	more

Note. Sit = situation

Table 2. Explanation of the eight IDCT apology scenarios (adopted from Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2014: 124)

The purpose of this pre-test was to find out whether the learners used apology formulas before the instructional period and, if so, which type. One week after the instructional treatment had finished, learners completed the post-test, which included the same situations employed in the pre-test although they were arranged in a different order. The researcher, who was also the teacher of this group of students, made sure students were sitting in exactly the same pairs in the pre-and post-test and each one was performing the same role (i.e. complainer or apologiser). Students were given ample time to plan and execute the responses. Finally, five months later, a delayed post-test, which was exactly the same as the pre-test, was administered. At this stage, the same pairs of students performed the tasks as before.

3.4. Data Analysis and Statistical Procedure

The collected data were analysed by amount and type of apology strategies used in the eight scenarios from the three tests distributed throughout the study. For this analysis, apology formulas were classified considering the typology presented in Table 3 which has been based on Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) and Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) taxonomies. The five major response types of apology formulas are: 1) *an explicit expression of apology, 2*) *an explanation, 3*) *an acknowledgement of responsibility,*

4) *an offer of repair, 5*) *a promise of forbearance.* These five options are presented on a scale that ranges from the most (expression 1) to the least direct way of apologising (expression 5). They can be used either by themselves or by combining them. Additionally, the first two formulas can be used across all apology situations, whereas the latter three formulas are situation-specific and vary depending on the damage caused (Kondo, 2010).

Formulas	Examples
1. Expression of apology	
a. regret	*Sorry*
b. offer of apology	*I apologise*
c. request for forgiveness	*Pardon me*
2. Explanation or account	*The traffic was terrible*
3. Acknowledgement of responsibility	
a. Accepting the blame	*It's my fault*
b. Expressing self-deficiency	*I didn't see you*
c. Showing embarrassment	*I feel awful about it*
d. Justifying the hearer	*You are right*
e. Expressing lack of intent	*I didn't mean to*
f. Refusing to acknowledge	*It wasn't my fault*
4. Offer of repair	*I'll pay for the broken vase*
5. Promise of forbearance	*It won't happen again*

Table 3. Apology formulas (adapted from Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989)

The conventional *expression of apology*, which is the most direct way of apologising, involves the use of performative verbs that express regret for having violated a particular social norm. This expression involves three subtypes, which are i) an expression of regret (e.g. "I'm sorry"), ii) an offer of apology (e.g. "I apologise"); and iii) a request of forgiveness (e.g. "Excuse me"). These semantic formulas are not language specific so that each language may have different ways of expressing directness by

either using a performative or a combination of them. When giving an *explanation*of the situation, which is seen as an indirect form of apology, the speaker justifies him/herself by explaining that the cause of the offense was beyond his/her control (e.g. "The bus was late").

Acknowledgement of responsibility involves that the speaker assumes his/her fault and provides an apology for the damage caused. The various subtypes that are included within this main expression are displayed by forming a continuum which ranges from explicitly assuming the responsibility of the complaint for the offense, whereby the speaker recognises fault in causing the offense, to refusing to acknowledge the guilt. This formula involves six sub-types, namely i) *accepting the blame* (e.g. "My mistake"); ii) *expressing self-deficiency*(e.g. "I was confused"); iii) showing embarrassment (e.g. "I feel awful about it"); iv) *justifying the hearer*(e.g. "You're right to be angry"); v) *expressing lack of intent*(e.g. "I didn't mean to upset you"); and vi) *refusing toacknowledge (e.g. "It wasn't my fault").*

An *offer of repair*is used when the speaker tries to offer a repair because either a physical offense or damage is done (e.g. "I'll help you to get up"). Finally, *a promise of forbearance*is employed when the apologiser promises that the offense will not be repeated (e.g. "This won't happen again").

After classifying each apology formula on this taxonomy, a statistical analysis of the data was conducted using a version 14.0 of the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). To discern whether the differences in the two measures of pre-test and post-test, as well as pre-test and delayed post-test were significant or not, a *t*-test for related samples was used.

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of teaching EFL learners' use of apology formulas from a discursive perspective both in the short and in the long-term. The first research question focused on the instructional effects regards the amount and type of apology formulas produced by learners. In relation to the amount, the analysis of the 240

apology samples (10 participants x 8 situations x 3 tests) yielded a total of 1162 apology formulas. Of these, 298 were identified in the pre-test data and 448 in the post-test data. Results from applying the statistical procedure show that the mean of apology formulas used per learner in the pre-test was much lower (*M*=32.60) than in the post-test (*M*=48.60) (see Table 4), and the difference in both cases statistically significant (p=.05).

	N	Mean	Sig.
Pre-test	10	29.80	.042
Post-test	10	44.80	

Table 4. Differences as regards the overall use of apology formulas in the pre-test and post-test. Sig. at p<0.05 level

Additionally, a difference was also observed regarding the type of general formulas (i.e. expression of apology, explanation or account, acknowledgment of responsibility, offer of repair and promise of forbearance) being used prior to instruction (pre-test) and immediately after it (post-test). As presented in Table 5, the results from applying the statistical procedure show that direct expressions of apology were more frequent in the pre-test (*M*=26.50) than in the post-test (*M*=22.20). In contrast, the other four types of apology formulas displayed a higher frequency in the post-test (*M*=5.20, *M*=6.70, *M*=4.90 and *M*=5.80 respectively) than in the pre-test (*M*=1.80, *M*=0.50, *M*=1.00 and 0 occurrences respectively), all differences being statistically significant (p=.000).

	N	Pre-test	Post-test	Sig.
Expressions of apology	10	26.50	22.20	.042
Explanation or account	10	1.80	5.20	.031
Acknowledgement of responsibility	10	0.50	6.70	.041
Offer of repair	10	1.00	4.90	.032
Promise of forbearance	10	0	5.80	-*

Table 5. Differences as regards the type of formulas for apologies in the pre-test and post-test. Sig. at p<0.05 level
* *t* cannot be calculated because the standard deviation is 0

From the above results we can claim that implementing pedagogical intervention in the EFL classroom had a positive effect on both the amount and type of apology formulas used by learners immediately after being engaged in the instructional treatment. These findings therefore confirm previous ILP research supporting the fact that instruction does make a difference in the pragmatic realm (see Jeon and Kaya 2006; Takahashi 2010; Taguchi 2011, 2015 for a review), and are in line with previous studies that have particularly examined the teachability of the speech act of apologies in FL settings (Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004; Eslami-Rasekh and Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Eslami-Rasekh and Mardani, 2010; Birjandi and Derakhshan, 2013; Simin et al., 2014; Derakhshan and Eslami-Rasekh, 2015).

More specifically, the present study has showed that teaching apologies following a discursive approach helped learners' pragmatic knowledge in terms of both frequency and variety of apology formulas being used. Thus, in line with previous research that has focused on teaching refusals at the discourse level (Alcón and Guzmán, 2010; Alcón, 2012), this study has also incorporated the use of audiovisual material to offer contextually rich input that presents apologies in interaction (i.e. as in a conversation in which they need to be co-constructed over a series of turns). Additionally, the study has also included awareness-raising activities to make learners attend to this input, as well as production tasks so that learners had an opportunity to try out the newly acquired apology formulas in contextualised communicative situations. Finally, they received corrective feedback from both their peers and the teacher to provide them with an opportunity for gap noticing regarding their output. In short, the study included the three necessary conditions (i.e. appropriate input presentation, meaningful output engagement and feedback provision) for pragmatic learning to take place (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2010).

To further explore the positive benefits of teaching apologies at a discourse level, the second research question examined whether the instructional effects were maintained in the long-term, more specifically five months after the instruction had finished. Regarding the amount of apology formulas, from the total of 1162 apology formulas found in the 240

apology samples, 416 were identified in the delayed post-test data. Results from applying the statistical procedure show that the mean of apology formulas used per learner in the pre-test was much lower (*M*=32.60) than in the delayed post-test (*M*=45.90) (see Table 6), the difference in both cases being statistically significant (p=.000).

	N	Mean	Sig.
Pre-test	10	29.80	.049
Delayed post-test	10	41.60	

Table 6. Differences as regards the overall use of apology formulas in the pre-test and delayed post-test. Sig. at p<0.05 level

The type of general apology formulas being used prior to instruction (pre-test) and five months later (delayed post-test) was also examined. As illustrated in Table 7, the results from applying the statistical procedure show that direct expressions of apology were more frequent in the pre-test (*M*=26.50) than in the delayed post-test (*M*=21.90). In contrast, the other four types of apology formulas displayed a higher frequency in the delayed post-test (*M*=4.80, *M*=5.30, *M*=4.40 and *M*=5.20 respectively) than in the pre-test (*M*=1.80, *M*=0.50, *M*=1.00 and 0 occurrences respectively), all differences being statistically significant (p=.000).

	N	Pre-test	Delayed Post-test	Sig.
Expressions of apology	10	26.50	21.90	.049
Explanation or account	10	1.80	4.80	.038
Acknowledgement of responsibility	10	0.50	5.30	.049
Offer of repair	10	1.00	4.40	.035
Promise of forbearance	10	0	5.20	-*

Table 7. Differences as regards the type of formulas for apologies in the pre-test and delayed post-test. Sig. at p<0.05 level
* t cannot be calculated because the standard deviation is 0

These results seem to indicate that the learning and use of a variety of apology formulas was retained in the longer term. Previous ILP research has found that the immediate gains on different targeted pragmatic features, such as sociolinguistic competence (Lyster, 1994), compliments (Ishihara, 2004), refusals (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008), requests (Codina, 2008; Li, 2012; Martínez-Flor, 2012) or the speech act set of constructive criticism (Nguyen et al., 2012) were maintained in the delayed post-test. The present study thus supports this previous research and adds new insights by addressing a different instructional aspect, that of apologies, that was taught at a discourse level. It does, however, partly contrast with the study by Fordyce (2014) which showed that some of the initial learning of forms dealing with epistemic stance were not retained over time. It should be mentioned that the focus of instruction was a morphosyntactic aspect, which is probably less amenable to instruction, and the instructional treatment did not include practice. Additionally, the instructional treatment only lasted three 45-minute sessions based on analysing a set of four written texts. The quality of input presented to learners as well as the duration of the instructional sessions could have also exerted an influence in the partial loss of gains. Therefore, it appears that the choice of contextualised enriched input and the inclusion of production activities integrated in a well-designed pedagogical model following a discursive approach that lasts several sessions was decisive in retaining learners' knowledge of a variety of apology strategies five months after having participated in the treatment.

In order to shed more light on these findings, a more detailed and qualitative analysis of the different subtypes of apology formulas employed within each general strategy was conducted. By examining Table 8, that shows the frequency (*f*) and percentage (%) of apology formulas used by learners on pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test, it appears that the distribution of use was different across the three measures.

Formula	Subtype	Pre-test		Post-test		Delayed post-test	
		f	*%*	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*
Expression of apology							
	regret	262	87.92	198	44.20	195	46.88
	offer of apology	3	1.00	16	3.57	16	3.85
	request for forgiveness	0	0.00	8	1.78	8	1.92
Sub-total		*265*	*88.92*	*222*	*49.55*	*219*	*52.65*
Explanation or account		18	6.04	52	11.61	48	11.53
Sub-total		*18*	*6.04*	*52*	*11.61*	*48*	*11.53*
Acknowled-gement of responsibility							
	accepting the blame	5	1.68	13	2.90	9	2.16
	expressing self-deficiency	0	0.00	9	2.00	6	1.43
	showing embarrassment	0	0.00	15	3.34	11	2.63
	justifying the hearer	0	0.00	7	1.55	8	1.92
	expressing lack of intent	0	0.00	14	3.11	12	2.88
	refusing to acknowledge	0	0.00	9	2.00	7	1.68
Sub-total		*5*	*1.68*	*67*	*14.96*	*53*	*12.74*
Offer of repair		10	3.36	49	10.94	44	10.58
Sub-total		*10*	*3.36*	*49*	*10.94*	*44*	*10.58*
Promise of forbearance		0	0.00	58	12.94	52	12.50
Sub-total		*0*	*0.00*	*58*	*12.94*	*52*	*12.50*
TOTAL		*298*	*100.0*	*448*	*100.0*	*416*	*100.0*

Table 8. Frequency of apology formulas used by learners in the pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test (n=1162).

Starting with learners' use of particular apology formulas in the pre-test, it can be observed in Table 8 that the variety of formulas employed by learners was very limited. The most frequent type of formula was the direct *expression of apology* amounting to 88.92%. Within this formula, learners widely used the subtype of *regret* (87.92%), whereas the sub-type of *offer of apology* was scarcely used (1.00%) and no instances of *request for forgiveness* were found. The remaining types of apology formulas were utilised to a much a lesser extent (in the case of *explanation or account* (6.04%), *acknowledgement of responsibility* (1.68%) and *offer of repair* (3.36 %) or not used at all regarding the formula of *promise of forbearance*. It is also worth mentioning that among the different subtypes within the formula of *acknowledgment of responsibility*, only that of *accepting the blame*was used with no instances of the rest of the five subtypes, namely those of *expressing self-deficiency*, *showing embarrassment*, *justifying the hearer*, *expressing lack of intent*and *refusing to acknowledge*.

This seems to indicate that prior to instruction learners mainly resorted to the isolated use of the formula *I'm sorry* (direct expression of regret) when apologising in different situations, independently of the politeness and sociopragmatic aspects involved in each of them. Similar findings were found in the studies by Félix-Brasdefer (2008) and Martínez-Flor (2012) on refusals and request modifiers respectively, since learners' performance when refusing or requesting in a variety of contrasting scenarios was highly direct. The authors indicated that since learners had not been made aware of the face-threatening nature involved in those speech acts, very few instances of downgraders or mitigators that would have served to soften their responses were used.

Moving on to learners' responses in the post-test, Table 8 clearly shows a substantial increase in learners' use of other types apology formulas. In fact, they employed all subtypes of formulas relying, therefore, not only on the explicit expression of apology. Within their use of this formula, which in total amounted to 49.55%, learners also employed the three subtypes, namely those of *regret* (44.20%), *offer of apology* (3.57%) and *request for forgiveness* (1.78%). Similarly, within the formula of *acknowledgment of responsibility*, which in total amounted to 14.96%,

the six different subtypes were used, namely those of *accepting the blame* (2.90%), *expressing self-deficiency* (2.00%), *showing embarrassment* (3.34%), *justifying the hearer* (1.55%), *expressing lack of intent* (3.11%) and *refusing to acknowledge* (2.00%). The remaining three main types of apology formulas were also all used in the following order of frequency: *promise of forbearance* (12.94%), *explanation or account* (11.61%) and *offer of repair* (10.94%).

These results provide useful insights with regard to the immediate instructional effects on apology formulas, since the high levels of directness decreased and learners' preference of more indirect and elaborated apologies increased. Thus, it appears that the instruction implemented following a discursive approach positively affected learners' apology performance, as they had the opportunity to learn how sociopragmatic and politeness aspects influence the co-construction of an apology sequence. The study by Simin et al. (2014), which focused on the development of learners' awareness and production of apologies with the help of e-communication through exchange of e-mails, also showed that after instruction, learners' e-mails were more elaborated and involved a combination of strategies to apologise appropriately and effectively.

Finally, it was also interesting to explore whether the instructional gains were maintained in the longer term. The results from the delayed post-test (see Table 8 above) show that learners kept using the full range of apology formulas being taught, since instances from all subtypes were found. Starting with the *expression of apology*, which in total amounted to 52.65%, learners maintained the use of the other three subtypes, namely those of *regret* (46.88%), *offer of apology* (3.85%) and *request for forgiveness* (1.92%). Similarly, within the formula of *acknowledgment of responsibility*, which in total amounted to 12.74%, the six different subtypes were also still used, namely those of *accepting the blame* (2.16%), *expressing self-deficiency* (1.43%), *showing embarrassment* (2.63%), *justifying the hearer* (1.92%), *expressing lack of intent* (2.88%) and *refusing to acknowledge* (1.68%). The remaining three main types of apology formulas were also maintained, since all of them were still used in the following order of frequency: *promise of forbearance* (12.50%),

explanation or account (11.53%) and *offer of repair* (10.58%).

These findings show therefore not only immediate effects of instruction on learners' variety of strategies when apologising, but also delayed effects on their performance as measured five months after instruction. Previous research on compliments (Ishihara, 2004) and request modifiers (Codina, 2008) also indicated that learners maintained the use of a variety of downgraders and mitigators when giving and responding to compliments as well as requesting in different communicative situations by the time of a delayed post-test.

In order to illustrate the results displayed in Table 8 above, Example 1 presents learners' performance in scenario 8 from the IDCT (Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2014) on the three different occasions:

Scenario 8

A. You are the chief executive of a Hotel Group. Your group is seeking for a general manager in a recently opened hotel in London. A prerequisite to get this job is to have a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA). You found that an applicant for the job, who is currently working as a receptionist in one of your hotels, has lied about having an MBA. You don't know this person but, as one of your workers, you want to talk to him/her about this fact. *You explain:*

B. You work as a receptionist in a worldwide hotel chain. The hotel group is seeking for a general manager in a recently opened hotel in London. Candidates are required to have a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) and although you don't have it, you decide to lie about having this Master's degree. The interview committee has discovered you used false educational credentials and now the chief executive of the Hotel Group, who you don't know, wants to talk to you about this fact. *You listen and respond*:

Example 1
-*Pre-test* (A=complainer; B=apologiser)

1.   A. Good morning.
2.   B. Good morning.
3.   A. I am the chief executive of this Hotel Group. I asked you to come today to my office because I need to ask you a few questions about your credentials.
4.   B. Yes sir.
5.   A. Well, we found out that you don't really have an MBA, and to work here, you must have that degree. Why did you lie about it?
6.   → B. I am very sorry. Oh, I'm very sorry.
7.   A. Well, we are a very serious group and this is unacceptable. I am going to let you go.
8.   B. Ok. Ok.

-*Post-test* (A=complainer; B=apologiser)

1.   A. Mr. Koning?
2.   B. Yes, sir. That's me.
3.   A. Hello, Mr. Koning. I am Tom Crystal, chief executive of the Hotel Group. I would like to speak with you about your application for general manager on our new hotel in London.
4.   B. Great sir. What is it?
5.   A. Well, as you know, the committee has to check all the documents our applicants send to us to verify those credentials and check that everything is alright. Unfortunately, we have spotted an irregularity in your application and found that you don't have an MBA.
6.   → B. Oh, sir. You are right. I didn't think it was going to be a problem since I have experience working in Hotels and I know everything an MBA knows.
7.   A. Well, we have a very strict policy on our Hotel Group and we cannot tolerate having a dishonest person.
8.   → B. Oh, I totally understand your position, but is there anything else I could do? This post is really important to me, so I could register to take MBA classes on-line or anything you may suggest.

9.   A. I am sorry, but our rules are very strict and we cannot make
                exceptions.
10.   →   B. Ok sir. I'm deeply sorry about this situation and the problems it
                may have caused you.

-Delayed post-test (A=complainer; B=apologiser)

1.   A. Mr. Jones?
2.   B. Yes, sir. That's me.
3.   A. Good morning Mr. Jones. I am the chief executive of this Hotel
                Group and I would like to ask you a few questions about your
                application.
4.   B. Yes, sir. Is there any problem?
5.   A. Well, we have been checking all the documents you have
                presented and there is a problem with your credentials. We have
                found you don't have an MBA.
6.   →   B. Oh, sir. You are right. I didn't mean to lie about it because I'm
                actually taking the final courses of the degree and have previous
                experience in the field to complement my unfinished studies.
7.   A. Well, I don't doubt you have the experience and knowledge.
                However, the prerequisite for this job is an MBA and you don't
                have it.
8.   →   B. Oh, I know it's my fault and should have specified that I was in
                the last course. This job means a lot to me and I'm very pleased
                to work in your company. Is there anything I could do? I could
                follow working without a salary after I finish my MBA.
9.   A. I am sorry, but I am afraid we cannot accept such behaviours in
                our company, so I hope you can find another job.
10.   →   B. Ok. I feel awful about this situation and I apologise for all the
                inconveniences.

        As can be observed in Example 1 above, before receiving
instruction (the pre-test), the apologetic response was performed in one-
single turn (see line 6) which included the repetition of the same formula
of an intensifier *regret* (e.g. "I am very sorry"). In contrast, immediately
after the instructional period (the post-test), the same learner used a higher
number of apology formulas distributed in three turns. The first turn (see

line 6) included two subtypes of *acknowledgment of responsibility*, namely those of *justifying the hearer* (e.g. "you are right") and *expressing self-deficiency* (e.g. "I didn't think it was …") followed by an *explanation* (e.g. "since I have experience …"). The second turn (see line 8) also included the subtype of *justifying the hearer* (e.g. "I totally understand your position") followed by an *offer of repair* (e.g. "I could register to take MBA classes on-line or anything you may suggest"). The third turn (see line 10) included a final *expression of regret*intensified with a modifier (e.g. "I'm deeply sorry"). , the learner's response in this situation five months after having received the instruction (the delayed post-test) also included a high use and variety of apology formulas in three turns. The first turn (see line 6) included two subtypes of *acknowledgment of responsibility*, namely those of *justifying the hearer* (e.g. "you are right") and *expressing lack of intent* (e.g. "I didn't mean to …") followed by an *explanation* (e.g. "because I'm actually …"). The second turn (see line 8) included the subtype of *accepting the blame* (e.g. "I know it's my fault") followed by an *offer of repair* (e.g. "I could follow working without a salary …"). The third turn (see line 10) included the subtype of showing embarrassment (e.g. "I feel awful about this situation") and a final *offer of apology* (e.g. "I apologise for …").

The analysis of learners' performance in both the post-test and delayed post-test provides evidence of the learner's improved ability to use apology formulas appropriately. In fact, the longer and more elaborated responses included a higher use of apology formulas than those found before receiving instruction. Such a high use of formulas on the part of a person of low status (i.e. a receptionist) mitigated, to a great extent, the serious offense implied in the situation (i.e. using false educational credentials) to the offended person, that is an unknown person with a higher status (i.e. the chief executive of a hotel group). Additionally, since learners were taught apologies following a discursive approach (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Huth, 2006; Kasper, 2006), they were provided with not only opportunities to examine the pragmalinguistic formulas used when apologising or the sociopragmatic factors affecting their appropriate use, but also to conversational skills such as sequencing or turn-taking. As

seen in Example 1, the apology interactions from both the post-test and delayed post-test consisted of a more elaborated sequence of different turns in which interactional features were used by learners to maintain an appropriate apology communicative exchange. Thus, teaching apologies at the discourse level had also helped learners to understand the complexity of an apology interaction and accordingly, how to be able to appropriately practise apologies within their sequential structure (Limberg, 2015).

5. Conclusion

This study was set up to investigate the effects of instruction on English apologies among Spanish EFL learners from a discursive perspective both in the short and in the long-term. In particular, the present study examined the effectiveness of a pedagogical model on learners' appropriate use of apology formulas not only after immediately receiving instruction, but also five months later. Results showed that the types of apology formulas (i.e. expression of apology, explanation or account, acknowledgment of responsibility, offer of repair and promise of forbearance) produced by learners in the pre-test differed significantly from those produced in the post-test, as well as in the delayed post-test. In fact, findings from this study illustrated that the high use of the direct *expression of apology* found before instruction decreased after the treatment, allowing thus for an increase in the rest of the different types of apology formulas. This trend indicated that learners produced more elaborated apologetic responses depending on the sociopragmatic aspects involved in the different situations, denoting therefore a politeness orientation. Additionally, they appropriately engaged in apology communicative exchanges which were co-constructed over a series of turns. Consequently, the results obtained in the study seem to demonstrate the positive benefits of teaching the speech act of apologies at the discourse level in order to foster learners' pragmatic knowledge in terms of both frequency and variety of apology formulas not only in the short but also in the long-term.

The current study is subject to some limitations that need to be addressed in future research. One limitation concerns the particular

population of learners involved in this study. It consisted of a small sample of 10 male and female university students with an upper intermediate level of proficiency in English. Thus, the number of participants taking part in the study and their specific individual variables may have influenced the results. In fact, the issue of bilingualism was not taken into consideration although the study took place in a bilingual community (see for instance the study by Alcón, 2012 on how the degree of bilingualism influences pragmatic instructional gains). Therefore, paying attention to whether the teachability effects could be maintained over time among both monolingual and bilingual learners is an issue that deserves future research. Similarly, gender and proficiency should also be considered, since it is not known if research with just male or female participants, or with beginner or advanced learners would have provided different results. In fact, Martí (2012) and Codina (2008) have reported differences regarding Spanish EFL learners' use of request modifiers depending on their gender and proficiency level of English. Consequently, the extent to which these individual attributes influence learners' apology performance should be further investigated.

Another limitation related to the research methodology adopted in the present study refers to the fact that the findings obtained could have been enhanced if retrospective verbal reports had been used with the IDCT. In this way, the analysis of the interactive sequences in which learners' apology performance was done through different turns could have been complemented with information about their cognitive processes when carrying out the tasks. Indeed, Woodfield (2012) has highlighted the potential benefits of using this instrument to triangulate data, since details about the planning and execution of speech act production, as well as the attended aspects when uttering the particular act could be analysed. Therefore, future research is needed to investigate if learners' planning and thought processes when performing apologies are different before, after immediately receiving instruction, and some time after the instruction has finished.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the present study did not include a control group. It would have been desirable to have access to another group of learners with similar characteristics. In this way, the results

indicating the positive instructional effects (both in the short and long-term) could have been strengthened by comparing learners' performance from both groups. Unfortunately, as this study was implemented in a regular language-learning setting, adding a control group was not possible. This study thus deals with the teachability of apology formulas to a particular group of learners by adopting a pre-, post- and delayed post-test design to examine whether the instructional effects on this speech act are maintained in the longer term (Kasper and Rose, 2002).

This particular aspect, as well as all the above-mentioned issues, deserves attention in future research. In the meantime and to sum up, it is our belief that the present study has contributed to increase the growing body of ILP research on the positive role of instruction in FL contexts by adopting a discursive perspective and examining its effectiveness over time.

Notes

[1] The second semester in the Spanish University in which the study was carried out starts at the end of January and finishes at the end of May. Then, students have to take the final exams in June and in July. The order in which the tests were distributed is as follows: i) the pre-test was distributed the first week of February; ii) the instructional treatment was implemented in March; iii) the post-test was distributed the first week of April; and iv) the delayed post-test was distributed the first week of September (when students came back to University to start the new academic course).

[2] The scenarios have been designed considering the speech act set of complaint-apology as an adjacency pair. However, for the purposes of the present study, we focus only on apologies.

[3] The course in which this study was conducted was *Advanced English: Professional Contexts*. Thus, the first professional context which was covered was the one related to the tourism section. The situations from the test were integrated in relation to this particular workplace setting.

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