

## Apologizing in Urdu: A Case of Female University Students in Azad Kashmir

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### Abstract

*This research paper is set out to explore basic apology semantic formulae used by female university students in Urdu language, in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) generally called Azad Kashmir. Urdu is national language of Pakistan which holds AJ&K as one of her constituents. The informants are 200 university students, doing MA in Urdu language. A modified version of Discourse Completion Test (DCT) proposed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) is used for data collection. The DCT, used in this study, consists of 15 apology situations. Analysis of data is made by using taxonomy proposed by Blum Kulka et al., (1989). Further, the data gathered through observations and interviews is used for endorsement / negation of arguments formulated based on DCT data. Findings of this study not only emphasise claimed universality of apology expressions (Blum Kulka & Olshtain (1984) but also underpin culture-specific aspect of language use by discovering some more expressions being frequently used by the population under study.*

**Keywords:** politeness; speech acts; apologies; language and culture; Urdu

### 1. Introduction

Speech acts are defined in multiple ways, but the most general and common view of speech acts is that of utterances that perform an action (Austin, 1975) when uttered. Austin (1975) was first to define speech acts in his book “*How to do things with words*”. Instead of using term speech act, he used expressions “performative sentence” or “performative utterance,” which pointed out that “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (p.6). Searle (1969: 22) was first to use this term claiming that “talking is performing act according to rules”. Wee (2004), claims that definitions of speech acts are more conversational in most of the recent studies which Capone (2005) calls socially and culturally oriented. Capone (2005) comprehensively studied interdependence and relation between social context, language and behaviour. He based his work on Mey’s

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(1993) assertion that speech acts must be viewed situationally and socially oriented and more suitably be termed a “pragmeme,” that is “a situated speech act in which the rules of language and of society synergize in determining meaning, intended as a socially recognized object, sensitive to social expectations about the situation in which the utterance to be interpreted is embedded” (Capone, 2005, p.1357). Geis (1995) proposed that speech acts should be defined as multiturn interactions that perform requests, invitations, apologies, and other such actions instead of uttering of single expressions or sentences.

The focus of the present study is speech act of apology. In general, apology is a speech act that becomes obligatory in case social norms of politeness require mending of a behaviour or a linguistic expression has offended somebody (Trosborg, 1995) or if a person is offended due to failure in fulfilment of personal expectations, says Fraser, 1981 (cited in Deutschmann 2003). Urdu language is being spoken in several countries around the globe. Encyclopaedia Britannica<sup>3</sup> reports over 60 to 70 million native speakers of this language in the world. Kashmir also has Urdu as her national language. This research work intends to explore application of speech act of apology in Kashmir. Being among pioneer works dealing with realization of speech act of apology in Urdu language by Kashmiri speakers, its scope is delimited to explore basic apologetic semantic formulae and their frequency among the population under study.

Literature, dealing with effects of gender on language articulates two opposing views: firstly, men and women speak different languages (Tannen 1991; Gray 1992; Johnson 2000), secondly, it is claimed that they speak similar language since they belong to the same culture (Aijmer (1995); Deutschmann (2003); Reiter (2000) etc.)). Maltz & Borker (1982: p202-203) claim that men and women perceive cultural norms regarding conversation and general behaviour differently. In this course of social learning females learn expressions to create and sustain relationships of closeness whereas males learn language as a tool to share information and get targets accomplished. Maltz & Borker's assertion is based on assumption that adults, when start social interaction follow different conversation rules taught by their society. Tannen (1991; 1994; 1995), also claims that men and women communicate very differently. She (1991: p18) believes that they belong to two different linguistic communities and labels their conversation as “cross-cultural communication”. Similarly, Johnson (2000: p112) also purports idea of “gender cultures”. Supporting the same-culture view, Mac George et al (2004:

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<sup>3</sup>[www.britannica.com/](http://www.britannica.com/)

p171) argue that though women and men have different language skills, they should not be viewed as members of different communication cultures. According to Thorne (1993: p96) different-culture approach exaggerates gender differences overlooking “within-gender variation”.

Tracing impact of gender on apology responses yields controversial results. Few research studies support the claim that women apologise more than men do. Mattson & Johnstone (1994), however, find out that in their data men apologise more than women. Examining apology exchanges in young Israeli peers, Kampf & Blum-Kulka (2007: p34) find that Israeli children, with respect to their gender, display different reactions to different offences that cause them to apologize. According to them, boys apologize more for violent conflicts whereas girls apologize more frequently to “talk and lack of consideration” offences. Exploring the effect of gender on apology responses, Holmes (1989,1995) and Tannen (1994) assert that women apologise more than men. Based on Maltz &orker (1982), Holmes claims that men are more concerned with referential functions of language while women concentrate more on its affective purposes. In the earlier, language is seen as a vehicle to convey information, while in the later language is used to express feelings and maintain intimacy. Holmes’ work has accumulated wide criticism. For example, Christie (2000: p161-168), contradicts her findings saying that they deny universality of politeness phenomenon. Mills (2003: p222-225) also declares Holmes’ analysis as not convincing as it does not prove women politer than men. Mills claims that although women may appear politer than men, they also sometimes behave impolitely as men do according to situation. Further, Mills (2003: p222) argues that more apologies being offered by women might be a result of their lower social status than their gender.

Like Holmes and Tannen, Gonzales et al (1990) and Rothman & Gandossy (1982) also purport that women apologize more than men and their apologies are marked with more explicit apology expressions e.g., "I'm sorry". Such findings have resulted in the conclusion that women are politer than men. Rothman & Gandossy (1982), investigating court cases, argue that women apologize more frequently than men. This claim is also supported by the fact that they express remorse more often than men do.

Opposing the above discussion, some studies negate any effect of gender on apologetic behaviour of the speakers. Fraser (1990), for example, while investigating apologies in American English claims that frequency of apologies is not influenced by gender. Aijmer (1995), too, finds no noteworthy differences in

apologies made by men and women. Likewise, Reiter (2000) and Wouk (2006) claim that gender of speakers has no effect on the way they apologize.

Investigating relationship between gender and apologies, Majeed & Janjua (2014) assert that females, while apologizing remain more conscious for their face wants than the males. They (females) prefer less “dangerous strategies” even to apologize from their friends and relatives. However, they add, in formal situations both use similar apology strategies. They took data from 25 University students with the help of a DCT containing 10 apology eliciting situations. Saleem et al., (2014) also conducted a research to investigate difference in application of apology strategies by both the genders. Data of their study was collected from 106 university students and for analysis Holmes’ (1990) and Blum-Kulka’s (1989) taxonomies were used. Their study claims no significant differences in application of apologies by respondents from both the genders. Sultana & Khan (2014) made comparative study between Urdu and Pashtu speaking students with respect to gender effect on apologies. Sample of their study was 32 students (16 male and 16 female). DCT containing ten situations was used for data collection and analysis was made by using CCSARP taxonomy (Blum-Kulka et al., (1989)). The findings revealed that respondents were less different when apologizing towards same gender while differences were noted high in their apologies towards opposite gender.

In the light of above literature, it seems interesting to investigate speech act of apology in Kashmir with respect to gender. As both, Urdu language and Kashmiri speakers, are rarely explored areas in the domain of socio linguistics, so this research work focuses on application of apology semantic formulae among female speakers only.

## **2. Population and Sample: Participants**

This paper aims to investigate realization patterns of speech act of apology by female Kashmiri speakers. Students of MA Urdu are selected as sample of study because they are believed to have not only the best knowledge and application skills of this language but are also accessible and manageable in terms of data collection. Data is collected from five different study centres where MA Urdu degree programme is being offered. Sample of study consists of 200 respondents.

### **2.1 Data Collection**

In the current research, both, quantitative and qualitative paradigms are used to ensure objectivity and authenticity research findings. Discourse Completion Test

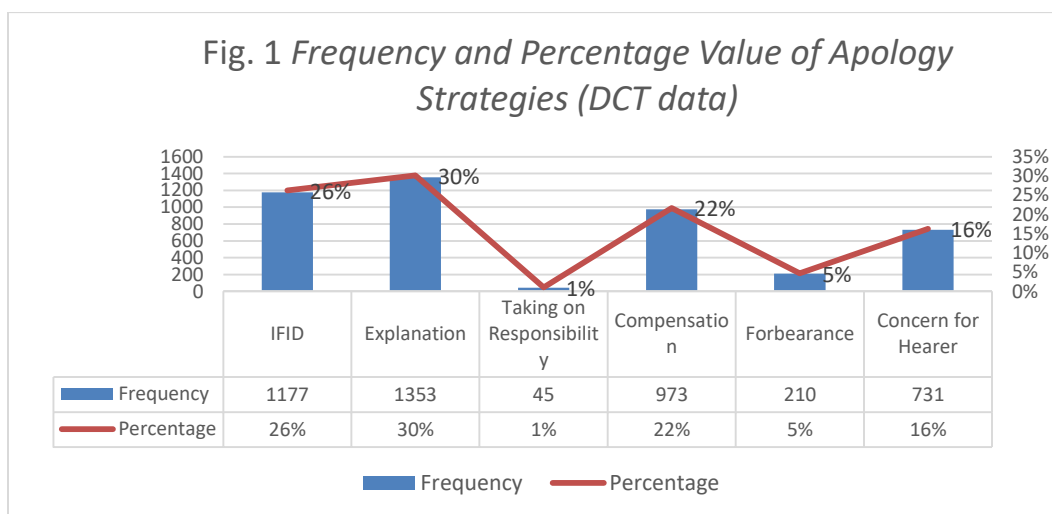
(DCT) containing 15 apology eliciting situations is used for data collection. Further, observations and interviews are also used for collection of data which is used either to support or refute the data collected from DCT. Data collected through DCT is analysed with the help of Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) taxonomy.

### 3. Presentation and Analysis of Data

It is assumed that the respondents behave in real life precisely in the similar way as they have claimed in the responses they provided in the current data collected through DCT. The responses forwarded by the participants are tabulated and classified based on CCSARP model (Blum Kulka et al:1989) to trace out frequency of different strategies. It is worth stating that the respondents have used combination of different apology strategies however the researchers have dealt with each strategy individually as scope of this paper is merely to discover main apology strategies used by female Kashmiri speakers. The strategies proposed by CCSARP model are: *Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID)*; *explanation or account*; *taking on responsibility*; *concern for the hearer*; *offer of repair / restitution*; and *promise of forbearance*.

#### 3.1 Presentation of Data –Different Apology Strategies in the Current Data

Frequency and percentage of different apology strategies are listed in figure 01 to get a complete picture of their application. Data presented in this figure is collected through DCT.



In total, 3000 apology exchanges have taken place in response to the DCTs comprising fifteen apology deserving situations distributed to 200 respondents. This overall value of apologies extended by the respondents has been of great help for the researchers to discover apologetic attitude of female university students in AJ&K. For an all-inclusive analysis, after calculating total application of apologies an attempt is made to trace out most frequently used apology strategies. Total number of apologies forwarded i.e., 4489 (table, 1) clearly demonstrates that the respondents have more often used multiple strategies while responding to different situations. A detailed analysis is given below:

Figure 01 highlights overall attitude of the female respondents of the study towards application of different apology strategies while apologizing in Urdu language. In the data ‘*explanation*’ is the highest applied apology strategy (30%) while, ‘*IFID*’ is second most favoured strategy (26%) and, ‘*offer of compensation*’ (22%) is third frequently used strategy. Whereas ‘*Concern for Hearer*’ has got 16% value; and ‘*taking on responsibility*’ is least or almost negligibly applied strategy (1%) in the current data. Negligible application of this strategy, according to interviewees is a result of its face threatening nature as is perceived in the society under study.

### 3.2 Application of Apology Strategies in Different Situations Provided in DCT

Frequency of apology strategies in given situations (15) in DCT (appendix1) is as bellow:

Strategies situations	Situatio n 1	Situatio n 2	Situatio n 3	Situatio n 4	Situatio n 5	Situatio n 6	Situatio n 7
IFID							
a- offer	35	201	180	95	20	120	0
b- regret	0			0	0	0	0
c- forgiveness	0		0	0	0	0	0
d- embarrassment	0	75	0	0	0	0	0
<b>sub-total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>0</b>
2- Explanation	85	147	189	69	2	97	193
3- <b>responsibility</b>							
a- accepting blame	0	0	0	45	0	0	0
b- self-deficiency	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
c- H deserving apology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>sub- total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
3_ Concern for hearer	0	0	0	0	0	150	120
4- compensation	112	0	0	0	189	222	0
5- forbearance	0	117	93	0	0	0	0

Total	232	540	462	209	211	589	313		
Strategies	Situat ion 8	Situat ion 9	Situat ion 10	Situat ion 11	Situat ion 12	Situatio n 13	Situa tion 14	Situati on 15	Total
Situations									
IFID									
a- offer	33	52	50	41	25	41	35	103	1020
b- regret	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
c- forgiveness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
d- embarrassm ent	65	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	157
<b>sub-total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>1177</b>
2- Explanation	100	42	68	19	64	166	64	48	1353
3- responsibility									
a- accepting blame	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45
b- self-deficiency	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
c- H deserving apology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>sub- total</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>45</b>
3_ Concern for hearer	64	41	162	99	14	0	46	35	731
4- compensation	119	101	143	3		0	64	20	973
5- forbearance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	210
Total	381	236	423	162	103	207	209	212	4489

**Table 1. Frequency of apology semantic formulas in each of the given situations (15) in DCT**

According to table (1), ‘*explanation or account of reason*’ has got highest application rate in the current data. 30% of the overall apologies forwarded by female university students comprise of this strategy. According to table 01, it has appeared in almost all the given situations. The interviewees count it as the most desired strategy without which no apology could achieve its objective. Frequent use of this strategy is in line with (Thijittang (2010) and Intachakra (2001) in case of Thai speakers of English and; Majeed & Janjua (2014) who count it as the most favoured strategy among Pakistani speakers. It also endorses finding of Saleem et al., (2014) who state that almost all of their respondents applied “*explanation or account*” in their data. The two situations (4 & 5) with minimum application of this strategy in the current study are informal in nature and the addressees are low in status. It suggests that respondents avoid using this strategy in the situation having recipients with low social status. This strategy does not appear situation specific as it has been used in almost all the situations given in DCT (Appendix 1) with different ratio.

*IFIDs* (Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices) according to the data presented in table (01) are second highest favoured apology strategy by the female university student at AJ&K. Data presented in that table displays that *IFIDs* have also been used across all the situations except situation number 7 in which younger sister forgets to give food and medicine to her elder sister. According to many researchers like Holmes (1990), Sultana & Khan (2014) and Ahangar et al., (2015), this (*IFID*) is the most regularly used apology semantic formula but in the current data, though used in almost all the situations by the respondents, it stand out as second most preferred apology strategy (n=1177) ranging from highest value (n=276) in situation no 2 to the lowest value (n=20) in situation no 5 (mother forgets to take her son for shopping). The three situations which have attracted maximum application of *IFIDs* are situation two (276), situation three (180) & situation six (120). All these three situations are marked with either high formality level, or apologizee with higher social status or with high level of severity of offence. In contrast, the lowest usage of *IFIDs* has occurred in situation no 05, which imparts disapproval for using this apology semantic formula in such situation (apologizee is lower is status, setting is informal, and offence is not severe in nature). Many instances of similar nature are noticed during observations<sup>4</sup> too: in case an elder commits offence towards a younger or kid, s/he prefers rendering love and care either by kissing, hugging, or offering something to eat etc., instead of apologizing explicitly and vividly. The data suggests common application of this strategy in official setting or in very severe incidents where they have been mostly used with other strategies like ‘*explanation*’ or ‘*offer of repair*’ etc.

The table (01) also shows that only two sub strategies (offer of an apology and embarrassment) of this apology expression i.e. *IFID* have been used by the respondents of the study. ‘*Offer of apology*’ is the most common sub-strategy (n=1020) along with “*expression of embarrassment*”, (n=157). A very interesting finding in this regard is that though DCT was in Urdu language majority of the respondents used ‘sorry’ instead of its Urdu equivalents. Thus, in the current data ‘*offer of an apology*’ is the most used *IFID* expression which corresponds to the findings of Thijittang (2010) who asserts that native English speakers favour using *sorry*, *excuse me* and *pardon me*; and Shariati and Chamani (2010) who also finds it the most frequent apology strategy in Persian. Analysis of data further demonstrates that there is no application of *IFID* as standalone strategy, but it

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<sup>4</sup> - Data collected through observations is incorporated in analysis as and when required to support the claims. However, these observations are not numbered as they are incorporated



comes in combination with other apology strategies which echoes Owen (1983: p.<sup>86</sup>) who denies application of ‘sorry’ for a sincere and genuine apology and Olshtain & Cohen’s (1989: p.<sup>53</sup>) saying that “I’m sorry’ might be less sufficient to express apology”.

Leaving aside rest of the *IFID* sub formulae, the respondents of the present study have used another expression ‘*expressing embarrassment*’ – an expression which not only embraces confession of offence but also seems less likely to yield face loss for apologizer. In most of the cases it is used in combination with either gestures or swearing to God. According to Shariati and Chamani (2010: p.<sup>22</sup>) swearing in Persian society is “used as a device to intensify apology... it has a genuine power to confirm the truth among interlocutors”.

According to figure (01) ‘*Offer of Repair / compensation*’ is third most frequently applied apology strategy by the female university students in AJ&K., making 22% of the total apologies forwarded. In another research paper (in press) of the author<sup>1</sup> it was second highest applied apology strategy, this difference might be a result of difference in the sample of these research works. In the current paper, sample consists of only female respondents whereas in the other paper respondents were both female and male. This discrepancy may be a result of weak financial position and social standing of the females, as in the society under study they are neither financially strong nor independent enough to practically manage compensations. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) assert this apology expression as “situation specific and is often resorted to in a situation when physical damage is involved” (p.149), but in the current data it has been used beyond any such limitation which implies nonexistence of any relationship between physical harm and application of this strategy.

Fourth most recurrently used semantic formula in the current study, according to figure (01) is ‘*concern for hearer*’. It has been used in most of the situations provided in DCT (Appendix 1). Top three situations which have accumulated highest number of this strategy, according to table (01) are: 6, 7 & 10 owing the frequency of 150, 120 and 162 respectively. The variety of the situations in which it has been used frequently (6, 7, 8,9,10,11,12,14 & 15) demonstrate its application in various contexts without any reference to formality, severity or social status unlike “a situation-specific strategy that is resorted to only when a space offence is involved” as says Deutschmann (2003: p195).

*Taking on Responsibility* stands for vividly accepting responsibility for the committed mistake or offence. The offender admits charge by using any of its sub-formulae: “*accepting the blame, expressing self-deficiency or justifying the hearer*”. Its application in the current data is very rare as it has appeared in only one of the given situations (situation 4) in DCT and comprises merely 1% of the total apologies (figure, 01). An overview of this situation demonstrates that it is not only informal in nature, but the offence happened there is also very trivial having interlocutors enjoying close intimacy (friends). Only one sub formula i.e., *accepting the blame* is used by the respondents. When asked about rare application of this strategy, the interviewees marked it a big threat to their public face.

*Promise of Forbearance* is second least applied apology strategy by the respondents of the study (figure, 1). It offers no remedy to the apologizee but helps in settling down his / her messy feelings. It is used in just two situations (2 & 3) making just 5% of the total apologies. Its low application in the present research parallels Afghari (2007), who reports it rare in Persian data, and Thijittang (2010) who claims the same for Thai speakers. In the current study, both the situation (2 & 3) in which it has been used are formal in nature which delineates that among the respondents of the present study its application is largely confined to formal conversational settings.

#### **4. Findings**

Based on the above discussion it can be concluded that female university students in AJ&K, while apologizing in Urdu language, prefer using ‘*explanation*’, the most. While *IFID* is second highly favoured apology semantic formula which according to many researchers is the most frequent apology formula (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, Deutschmann 2003, Holmes 1990; Olshtain, 1989).

‘*Offer of compensation*’ is third most frequently used strategy. This finding resembles to Afghari (2007) who reports ‘*accounts*’ and ‘*reparation*’ the most common apology expressions among Persian speakers and Suszczyńska (1999) who ascertains the same for Hungarian speakers. Another significant finding is that ‘*taking on responsibility*’ has rarely (1%) been used in DCT data which contradicts Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), Thijittang (2010) and Olshtain and Cohen (1983) who claim for universality of this strategy.

After analysing overall data, it is found that apology strategies except *explanation* and *concern for hearer* are primarily used in formal situations. Out of top three

apology securing situations (2, 3 & 6) two (2 & 3) are formal in nature having apologizee of higher social status. Whereas the third one i.e., situation no 6 includes a severe offence (damage of property i.e., car). Thus, it can be concluded that Kashmiri female university students apologize less in informal situations except when addressee is senior or elder. Muhammad (2014: p.<sup>10</sup>) also reports similar attitude in Saudi speakers stating, “they do not like to apologize outright; consequently, they avoid using terms such as apologize”. Application of “*offer of repair*” as third most frequent strategy in the current data also suggests high sensitivity level of the respondents towards face saving of both- the apologizee and the apologizer which might be a reflection of unstated socio- cultural scripts.

#### 4.1 Further Insights

Analysis of data is made on the basis of model proposed by Bloom Kulka et al., (1989). This is the most trusted and frequently used model in the research conducted with respect to speech acts. But, the data used in the current study goes beyond this model as some other strategies like, *smile, laughter, religious references, interjections, hedges and showing intimacy* have also been used for what Bergman and Kasper (1993: p.<sup>82</sup>) “compensatory action” called apology. Another notable observation is use of non-verbal communication (gestures, laughter, smile etc.) to enhance power of apology and accomplish desired purpose. A sub strategy called ‘*expressing embarrassment*’ is also added under the umbrella of *IFIDs* based on its considerable existence in the data.

#### 5. Conclusion

This research work being very first attempt to find out realization patterns of speech act of apology by female university students in AJ&K is primarily focused on nature and types of apology semantic formulae being used by them. Following are the main apology strategies found in the concerned data:

- *Explanation* is the most preferred apology strategy (26%) which parallels findings of Janjua (2011) and Sultana& Khan (2014) who claim frequent use of *statements and explanations* by Pakistani speakers in their apologies. While, *Concern for the hearer* has been second least applied strategy (13%) in the current data.
- The strategy called “*taking on responsibility*” is rarely used by the respondents of the present study making merely 1% of total apologies made. Saleem et al., (2014) report no application of this apology strategy in his study on Pakistani EFL students.

- *IFIDs* are not found as standalone strategy but are applied along with other strategies.
- Out of sub-categories of *IFIDs* the respondents used only *offer of an apology* along with another newly added strategy '*expression of embarrassment*' in the taxonomy because of its considerable use in the current data. Another interesting finding about application of *IFIDs* is use of English expression "sorry" instead of its Urdu equivalent. None of the respondents has used its Urdu equivalent, which might be taken as a sign of domination of English Language in the society under study.
- '*offer of compensation*' strategy is applied in multiple situations irrespective of physical harm which denies assertion made by Blum Kulka et al., (1989) that it is a situation specific strategy involving physical harm.
- Kids are rarely apologized; rather they are loved, given sweets and hugs instead.
- Application of large number of strategies in the data confirms that the respondents of the current study have frequently made use of more than one strategy in their apologies.
- Apologies in Urdu language are non-formulaic. This finding goes in line with the findings of Majeed & Janjua (2014).

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