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Using a Spoken Corpus Compiled From Subtitles to Study Apologies

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Abstract

Apologies, like other speech acts, are difficult to study, and they are studied in a variety of ways, including Discourse Completion Tests, role plays, gathering of natural language, and using spoken corpora. Each method has advantages and disadvantages. One possibility for developing a spoken corpus is using subtitles downloaded from the DVDs of movies or television programs. In this study, I have used the first two seasons of a US television comedy called *Modern Family* to develop a corpus of spoken English. Using five keywords — sorry, excuse, apologize, forgive, and pardon — I identified the apologies found in the corpus and analyzed them, with particular attention to the types of apologies that would be difficult or impossible to elicit using a Discourse Completion Test.

Introduction

An apology is a "speech act that is required when the social norms of politeness demand the mending of a behavior or of a linguistic expression that has offended another person" (Trosborg, 1995, cited by Demeter, 2006). Apologies are important in maintaining human relationships. They help repair relationships when an offense has been committed, and they show that the apologizer recognizes that an offense has been committed and

takes responsibility for it (though in some cases, the apology may include a minimizing of the offense or self-justification).

Apology Strategies

Cohen and Olshtain (1981) were among the first to study apology strategies. Using a Discourse Completion Test, they elicited apologies and developed a typology, which has been adapted by Hitomi Abe (personal communication, March 5, 2012) (see the Appendix). This typology includes major apology strategies: expression of the apology, using a performative verb such as "sorry" or "forgive"; an explanation for how the offense happened or why the speaker committed the offense; a statement of the situation, that is, what the speaker is apologizing for; an acknowledgement of responsibility; an offer of repair; a suggestion of a repair; a statement of an alternative; a promise of non-reoccurrence; a suggestion for avoiding the situation in the future; and verbal avoidance. The categories of acknowledgement of responsibility, offer of repair, statement of alternative, and verbal avoidance are further divided into subcategories. The typology also includes adjuncts to apologies, such as using intensifiers, minimizing the offense, and expressing concern for the interlocutor.

Issues Related to Gathering Data

The gathering of data to study apologies, like other speech acts, has always been problematic. While naturally occurring data is considered best, as Demeter (2012) pointed out, the reality is that most research on speech acts uses other data-gathering techniques.

It is difficult to collect naturally occurring data while controlling variables, and it is often difficult to collect a large number of examples of a particular speech act. Therefore, the ability to gather large amounts of data and to control variables has been preferred over naturalness. There are advantages and disadvantages to each method of gathering data, and because of this, it is impossible to determine that one or the other is "best" (Demeter, 2007).

Discourse Completion Tests. The most common method for collecting data about speech acts is a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), in which participants are given situations and sometimes an utterance by an interlocutor and are asked to write down what they would say in each situation. For example, a DCT might give the participants a situation where they had borrowed a book from a friend and lost it. They write down the apology they would use. In a DCT, variables can be manipulated, for example, by using large and small offenses to elicit apologies. While large amounts of data can be gathered relatively easily using a DCT, responses are what participants believe they would say in a particular situation, and they are written rather than spoken. Also, because the apology is not interactive, there may be strategies that this method does not elicit.

Naturally occurring data. While naturally occurring data represents the way speech acts are used in real conversation, it is difficult to gather a large number of examples of a particular speech act and to manipulate the variables related to the speech act. Also, there are privacy issues with recording naturally

occurring data, so it is often written down after the fact, raising questions about its reliability.

Role plays. Role plays have also been used to gather data for speech acts, though they are less common. Role plays are a more difficult method of collecting data than DCTs, but they have the advantages of providing more context and allowing researchers to look at the effects of interaction. They elicit spoken language, though like DCTs, participants are being asked to imagine what they would say in a hypothetical situation. If the role plays are audio- or videotaped, researchers can also consider nonverbal aspects of speech acts.

Spoken corpora. Data to study speech acts can also be gathered from spoken corpora, which can be developed from actual conversations, transcripts of interviews, movie and television scripts, subtitles downloaded from DVDs, etc. Corpora provide naturally occurring speech acts (or in the case of scripts and subtitles, natural-sounding speech acts), they potentially provide a large amount of data, and they can demonstrate the effects of interaction on speech act strategies. In the cases of television programs and movies, it is also possible to look at the nonverbal aspects of the speech acts and to look at the influences of relationships among characters on speech acts. However, variables cannot be manipulated, and the speech acts that will be found by searching keywords are limited to those that use the keywords. In addition, spoken corpora are often primarily gathered from television interviews, speeches, etc., which may not have many examples of speech acts, particularly not examples of speech acts

as they are used in conversation.

Research Questions

In this study, I will consider the following research questions:
1. Can corpus methods be used to study apologies?
2. What apology strategies are found in a corpus made up of subtitles from a television situation comedy?
3. What apology strategies and characteristics of apologies can be found that are not found in DCTs?

Methods

Overview

In order to study the occurrences of apologies in a spoken corpus, I compiled a corpus composed of the English subtitles from the American television comedy *Modern Family*. Using the search terms "sorry," "forgive," "excuse," "apologize," and "pardon," I separated the apologies from the non-apologies and analyzed the apology strategies based on a typology. I also looked at examples of apologies or uses of apology strategies that are not likely to come out in Discourse Completion Tests.

Materials

In order to develop a corpus of spoken English, I used subtitles from the first two seasons (2009 and 2010) of the US television program *Modern Family* (Levitan and Lloyd, 2009). I downloaded the subtitles from the Internet in srt files, which contain subtitles downloaded from DVDs using a program called SubRip. The two

seasons include a total of 48 30-minute episodes. I chose *Modern Family* because it has a great deal of dialogue with many examples of apologies. While most of the dialogue is among the members of an extended family, which limits the number of apologies directed at, for example, unfamiliar interlocutors, there are a large number of examples of apologies in response to a wide variety of offenses.

The plots of episodes of *Modern Family* revolve around the Pritchett family, Jay Pritchett and his adult children, Claire Dunphy and Mitchell Pritchett. Jay is divorced from DeeDee Pritchett, the mother of his children, and is re-married to Gloria Delgado-Pritchett, who is from Colombia and who has a young son, Manny Delgado, from her first marriage. Claire is married to Phil Dunphy and has three children, Haley, Alex, and Luke. Mitchell lives with his partner, Cameron Tucker, and their adopted daughter, Lily Tucker-Pritchett.

Procedures

I downloaded srt files for all 48 first-season episodes of *Modern Family* and combined them into one file, forming a spoken corpus of approximately 157,000 words. As search terms for the corpus, I used five performative verbs for apologies: "sorry," "forgive," "apologize," "excuse," and "pardon." In the case of apology, the actual search term I used was "apolog," so that both noun and verb forms would be identified in the search.

Analyses

I separated out the apologies from the corpus, including lines before and after the apology to provide a context. Using the typology of apology strategies developed by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) and updated by Hitomi Abe (personal communication, March 5, 2012), I identified the apologies and counted the strategies used, excluding uses of the keywords that were not in apologies. In addition to the strategies identified in the typology, I added additional categories. I counted the number of expressions of apology (performatives) and non-apologies recovered by the search. Where the performative was repeated as part of the same apology (e.g., "I'm sorry, I'm sorry"), it was counted as only one occurrence. I also counted the occurrences of the apology strategies identified by Cohen and Olshtain and Abe.

I adapted the typology based on the examples I found. I separated three types of apology from "Expressions of apology." They were:

1. "Conditional apologies" (which use "if," e.g., I'm sorry if things got a little out of hand back there.)
2. "Ironic apologies" (in which the apology form for something is used to make a point)
3. "Apologies in advance" (used to apologize before committing an offense)

In addition, I added found examples of self-justification, request for understanding, and introductions to apologies (such as "I need to apologize," which I categorized as an adjunct) as strategies, so I

added those to the typology. I also counted the number of examples of performatives being repeated more than once in the same apology, which I counted separately from those using intensification such as "so," "truly," etc.

As Demeter (2012) pointed out, an advantage of using spoken corpora to study speech acts is that certain speech act strategies do not come out in methods of gathering data that are not interactive. Demeter identified three such categories that he described as "previously unreported." They were co-constructed apologies, in which two or more participants are involved in making the apology; repair apologies, used when the speaker makes an error and corrects that error; and interruption apologies, which are used when interrupting another speaker. I found examples of co-constructed apologies and repair apologies, and I analyzed these in further detail. In addition, I found examples of apologies being used for rhetorical purposes other than apologizing, particularly in ironic ways, as well as examples of apologizing in advance of committing an offense and examples of interaction over the explanation/justification for an action, which would not tend to be found in non-interactive data, and I analyzed these further as well.

Results

The results of the search of the corpus for keywords are summarized in Table 1. There were a total of 383 occurrences of the keywords (excluding reoccurrences of performative verbs within the same apology). Among those occurrences, 251 were apologies.

Table 1   Summary of the search for keywords in the corpus

	Sorry	Forgive	Excuse	Apologize	Pardon
Expression of apology	227	1			3
*Conditional	6				
*Ironic apologies	7	3		1	
*Apology in Advance	3	3			
Explanation	75	1			
Statement of the Situation	69	6		1	3
*Repetition	28				
Acknowledgement of responsibility 1. implicit	7				
2. explicit	8				
3. reluctance	1				
4. lack of intent	12				
5. self-deficiency	3				
6. embarrassment	3				
7. acceptance of Blame	6				
Offer of repair 1. non-specific	2				
2. specific	6				
Promise of non-reoccurrence	1				
Verbal avoidance 1. topic switch	1				
3. silver lining	2				

Adjuncts 1. intensity	35				
2. minimizing Offense	8				
3. emotional	5				
4. gratitude	1	1			
6. concern for interlocutor	3				
*9. Introduction	3				
*Self-justification	11				
*Request for understanding	1				
Non-apologies	43	22	34	29	2

* Additions to the typology based on the results of the searches

Results of Keyword Searches

Sorry. By far the most common performative verb used for apologies was "sorry." There were 241 apologies using "sorry," including conditionals, ironic apologies, and apologies in advance.

Apologies using "sorry" were sometimes repeated or intensified using "so," "really," or "truly." In a few cases, the intensifier was repeated ("We are so, so sorry," when Cameron and Mitchell stained an expensive rug with strawberry juice when visiting an acquaintance). None of the other performatives were used with intensifiers or repeated.

"Sorry" was used 43 times in non-apologies. It was used in a variety of ways, including discussing the concept of an apology, expressing sympathy, indicating that the speaker did not

understand what the previous speaker had said, and as an expression of disbelief in what the previous speaker had said.

Forgive. Of the 29 occurrences of "forgive," only 7 were apologies. Three were ironic apologies, and 3 were apologies in advance. Only one was a straight performative. This is used in a situation where inadvertently Manny has overheard his mother criticizing his poetry when speaking to Claire, something she knows has hurt him deeply. She becomes very emotional.

Gloria: Ay, Manny, I didn't mean any of it. Please, forgive me.
Manny: I don't think I can.

It appears that "forgive" is not often used in straight performative apologies. The only example is a very emotional one.

Among the non-apologies, "forgive" is often used to discuss the concepts of apology or forgiveness (e.g., "I don't expect you to forgive me," or "I can forgive the smoking, but I can't forgive the lie.") or in response to an apology ("I forgive you") but rarely in apologies themselves.

Excuse. None of the search results for "excuse" were apologies. "Excuse me" was used for such purposes as attracting attention or expressing disbelief in response to a statement by the interlocutor.

Apologize. There was only one example of a form of "apologize" being used as a performative for an apology ("Phil, I apologize for breaking the world's worst remote that you bought, stupidly"), and it was ironic. The word was used in a variety of other ways, including eliciting an apology ("Seriously, Claire, you owe me an

apology for breaking that."), telling the interlocutor not to apologize, introducing an apology ("By the way, I need to apologize to you"), or discussing whether there is a need for an apology. It was sometimes used in response to an apology ("There's no need to apologize.").

Pardon. "Pardon" was only used three times as an apology, all three times in informal situations and for minor infractions - twice to apologize for having said something that suggested a taboo word ("Pardon the language") and once to apologize for the way a character was dressed ("Pardon the get-up."). It was also twice used to get attention.

Aspects of Interaction in Apologies

As discussed above, there are aspects of apologies that are difficult, if not impossible, to elicit using a Discourse Completion Test.

Co-Constructed Apologies. In this corpus, I found examples of what Demeter (2012) called co-constructed apologies, where more than one participant was involved in making the apology.

In the following scene from an episode entitled "Mother's Day," Manny, who is a pre-teenager, has accidently overheard his mother Gloria criticizing him when speaking to Claire, her adult stepdaughter, while out on a hike. Manny is a serious child who writes poetry and doesn't participate in sports or physical activities very much. Gloria complains about this and also says that she does not like his poetry. When she realizes that Manny overheard, she tries to apologize.

Gloria: Manny, I didn't mean any of it. Please, forgive me.

Manny: I don't think I can. Let's just get in the van. Oh. Sorry for the rhyme. I know how you hate my poetry.

Gloria: Please, stop my suffering. Say something terrible about me so that we can be even like a Steven.

Manny: Why would I say something terrible to someone I love?

Gloria: I curse my tongue!

Claire: I'm gonna intervene here. Manny, let's talk about what really happened. Your mom said you should go out and throw a ball around. That can't be the first time you've heard that.

Manny: No. But there was some hurtful stuff said about my poetry.

Claire: Which your mom regrets.

Gloria: I do.

Claire: So, that's what parents are for. Sometimes they criticize because it helps make you stronger. Kids these days get trophies just for showing up. What's that gonna lead to? A bunch of 30-year-olds living at home. Manny, your mother loves you very much. She's a human being. So she let off a little steam. Honestly, it's probably a great thing for your relationship.

Manny: I guess I can…

In this scene, Gloria is trying to apologize to Manny, offering a specific repair and using self-denigration, but Manny does not seem willing to forgive her. Claire intervenes, trying to explain the context of Gloria's criticism, finding a silver lining, which Manny

is more willing to accept. In this case, two interlocutors take different approaches to the apology, with Gloria reacting emotionally and Claire logically.

Another example of a collaborative apology occurs in an episode entitled "The One That Got Away." Thanks to various demands on his time from his family, who were preparing for his birthday celebration in the evening, Jay had not been able to do what he most wanted to do on his birthday, go fishing on a lake.

Claire: Okay, Dad…we all owe you an apology. We were so worried about giving you a great night that we ruined your day, and we're really sorry we didn't let you go fishing.
Mitchell: Sorry, Dad.
Cameron: Sorry, Jay.
Children: Sorry.
Phil: Sorry, Jay.

In this case, Claire speaks up for the group and offers an explanation and a statement of the situation, and then the other members of the family chime in and apologize.

Repair apologies. I also found examples of what Demeter (2012) described as repair apologies. In two cases, these were used to apologize for a neglected introduction. For example, in the episode "Fifteen Percent," Jay is talking with a group of friends on the sidewalk and Cameron sees them and joins them. After talking for a few minutes, Cameron introduces himself, and then Jay says, "Oh, geez, I'm sorry. Guys, this is Cameron. He's a…friend of my

son's." In this case, Jay is repairing his neglect of an introduction.

Also, in the episode "Bixby's Back," Phil recounts to the camera a previous incident (in "My Funky Valentine") when Claire lost her underwear, using the word "panties."

Claire: You know I can't stand it when you use that word.
Phil: Panties?
Claire: Ye…That…Yes. That word.
Phil: Sorry. She lost her underpanties.

Here, Phil uses a repair apology to correct the terminology he used (although he does not recognize that the correction is no better than the original word).

Interruption apologies. I did not find any examples in this corpus of the interruption apologies that Demeter (2012) found in the corpus he used.

Ironic Apologies. In some cases, the form of an apology was used for some other purpose. A speaker might use an apology form, for example, when being criticized for an offense, but might use the apology to make the point that the criticism is unfair, that the standards are too high or impossible to meet, and so on. I have labeled this use of apology forms "ironic apologies," since they use apology forms to make the opposite point. There are several examples of ironic apologies in the corpus.

In "Not in My House," in response to a criticism of one of his possessions, Jay attacks the pillows that Gloria uses to decorate their bed.

Jay: You know what else I think is ridiculous? That mountain of pillows you have on our bed. I feel like I'm working on a loading dock just trying to get under the covers.

Gloria: They're pretty.

Jay: They're a damn nuisance.

Gloria: Okay, forgive me for trying to make our home beautiful.

In this case, Gloria uses an apology form, even though she does not believe she has committed an offense. She is using that apology form to make the point that she does not believe that Jay should be criticizing her for decorating their home and trying to make it more attractive.

In the episode "Two Monkeys and a Panda," Phil is talking to some women he has met during a spa day.

Phil: But if she lets me help her, I can make her problem go away.

Woman: Oh! That is such a male thing to say.

Phil: Well, forgive me for being a man.

Here, Phil uses the form of an apology, but he is making the point that being male is something that he cannot change.

In the episode entitled "The Kiss," Claire has been criticizing Alex's behavior, and Alex responds, "Well, I'm sorry I'm not the perfect little good girl like you were." Again, Alex is using the apology form, not to apologize but to make a point of the

impossibly high standard that she believes her mother is setting for her behavior.

Apologies in Advance. In the corpus, there were also examples of speakers apologizing for an offense that they were about to commit, another type of apology that is not used in DCTs. These apologies are used when the speaker is about to commit an offense which he/she does not want to commit but which is unavoidable, or when the speaker wants to commit the offense and will do so in spite of the hearer.

After a rather disappointing birthday, while his family is still at his home for his party, Jay decides to go to bed early. He says, "You know what? Great party. Thank you all for coming. And I hope you forgive me. I'm gonna go upstairs, curl up with a Ludlum and call it a day." He is going to commit the offense of leaving his own birthday party early, but he apologizes first.

In the episode "Caught in the Act," there are two examples of apologies in advance. Mitchell and Cameron, along with Lily, are visiting an acquaintance, Amelia, and her son, Jackson. Amelia, who owns a restaurant, receives a call from the restaurant about an emergency there and has to leave.

Amelia: I'm so sorry. I have to run down to the restaurant for a
    minute. I really feel terrible asking, but would you guys mind?
Mitchell: It's not a problem. We'll watch the kids.

While Amelia is gone, Cameron spills strawberry juice on an expensive rug, but they tell Amelia that Jackson spilled it when

trying to drink it. She says that Jackson will have to have an injection because he is allergic to strawberries. As she prepares to give him the injection, she says, "Jackson, Mommy's so sorry to have to do this, but it's only gonna hurt for a second." In both cases, Amelia has to commit the offense, but she apologizes in advance.

  Additional Explanation. An example of interaction in explanation/ self-justification occurred in "Travels with Scout," when, without consulting Claire, Phil agrees to take his father's large dog.

Claire: I cannot believe you got a dog without consulting me. This
    was a major family decision.
Phil: It was wrong.
Clair: Yeah.
Phil: And I'm sorry.
Claire: Mmm.
Phil: But we have talked about getting a dog for years, and you're
    the only one who wasn't into it.
Claire: Because I knew that I would be the one taking care of it.
Phil: That's not true.
Claire: Uh-
Phil: No, we will all help.
Claire: Mm-hmm?
Phil: This is a great chance to teach the kids responsibility.

  In this exchange, Phil expresses his apology and admits that what he did was wrong but still justifies his actions on the

grounds that it is only Claire who does not want a dog and that it will teach the children responsibility. This exchange demonstrates interaction in relation to the explanation/justification for the defense which cannot be observed in a DCT. When Claire responds to Phil's justification by explaining why she was opposed to getting a dog, it gives him an opportunity to further defend his actions and to bring up another justification.

Hesitation to accept the apology. In some cases, the interlocutor will not accept the apology, or will not accept the apology until there has been some form of repair. This may require some interaction to negotiate the repair.

In the episode "Coal Digger," Gloria learns that Jay's daughter Claire had once referred to her as a gold digger. Gloria goes to her room, and Clair later follows her to apologize.

Claire: I don't know what to say except for that I am really, really sorry.

Gloria: Just tell me one thing. How do you really feel that I'm with your father?

Claire: Uh, well…Honestly, at first, it was hard. I mean, you don't expect to wake up one morning with a new mom who looks like she fell off a mud flap. But I'm getting used to it. And the important thing is you make him happy, which you do in so many ways, so many colors. Are we okay?

Gloria: No.

Claire: No?

Gloria: You embarrassed me in front of everyone downstairs.

What, I'm supposed just to forget about it?

Claire: What do you want me to do—just embarrass myself so we're even?

Gloria: Go jump in the pool.

Claire: Oh, you mean go jump in a lake.

Gloria: Right. Go jump in the pool with your clothes on. Then I know you're sorry.

Claire: I'm not gonna do that, Gloria.

Gloria: Okay. Then I won't forgive you.

[Claire does jump into the pool with her clothes on, and Gloria accepts the apology.]

Again, interaction is necessary, in this case, following the apology to negotiate an acceptable repair.

Other Apology Strategies

Justifying/minimizing/lack of intent. One type of strategy is, as part of the apology, to make the offense seem less serious. Sometimes speakers either justify their actions, minimize the offense, or claim a lack of intent to commit an offense, in spite of the apology.

In the episode "Starry, Starry Night," Mitchell takes a great deal of teasing from Jay and Manny while the three of them are out stargazing when he encounters a skunk and then has to change into a dress. Later, Jay apologizes, but still justifies their behavior.

Jay: I'm sorry if things got a little out of hand back there, but in

our defense, look at you. (chuckling) I mean, smell you.
Mitchell: (mock laughing) This is a fantastic apology.

As Mitchell's response implies, the self-justification undermines the apology, making it almost meaningless.

In the episode "See You Next Fall," Alex is planning to make a speech at her commencement ceremony criticizing her classmates. Haley doesn't want her to give the speech and grabs the notes for the speech, saying, "Sorry, Alex, but you'll thank me one day." Here, although Haley apologizes, she justifies the offense by claiming that she is doing it for Alex's own good.

Characters also minimize the offense. They make the offense seem less serious than it is, or than the interlocutor believes it to be.

In the episode "The Kiss," Gloria has been cooking traditional Colombian food for Jay's family. Jay has been making fun of the food and of Gloria's belief that her ancestors are all around her.

Gloria: Enough, Jay! My culture is very important to me. I've been working all day to share it with your family tonight and all you do is mock me. Just go.
Jay: Honey, I'm sorry. I'm just teasing you.
Gloria: Instead of being the comedian, why don't you help me?

Gloria had described what Jay was doing as "mocking," but although Jay apologizes, he characterizes what he has been doing as "just teasing."

Speakers making an apology also sometimes express a lack of intent to commit an offense. Characters used such expressions such as "It was an accident," "I didn't mean to…," "I couldn't help it," "I never meant to/didn't mean to…," and "I just made a mistake" to indicate that they did not intend to commit the offense. However, in spite of a lack of intent, in many cases, the characters apologize for the offense.

In "The Musical Man," Jay's brother tells Jay in confidence that he had had cancer, but Jay tells Gloria. When the brother finds out, Jap apologizes, saying "Sorry about what I said to Gloria, okay? It just slipped out." Here, Jay denies that he had intentionally broken the confidence.

In the episode entitled "Not in My House," Gloria damages Barkley, a life-sized statue of a dog butler that Jay likes, and then apologizes.

Gloria: Sorry, Jay. It was an accident.
Jay: You know, I'm beginning to think you don't like Barkley that much. I mean, first you hide him in the guest room, and now this.
Gloria: It's ridiculous. I didn't mean to hurt it.
Jay: First of all, let's cut the "it"s. He is a he. And you can pretend to be innocent all you want, but action speaks louder than words.

In this case, Gloria expresses her lack of intent using the expressions "It was an accident" and "I didn't mean to hurt it,"

indicating that she lacked the intent to damage Jay's possession.

Apologies Without Performative Verbs

As mentioned above, one of the weaknesses of using corpora to study speech acts is that apologies that do not include the search terms will not be found. Since apologies often include a performative verb ("sorry," "excuse," "forgive," "pardon, and forms of "apologize"), they are relatively easy to find through searches, and it is likely that the majority of apologies were found.

Because this was a relatively small corpus, I decided to find out what percentage of apologies was missed by reading through the entire corpus to find apologies without performative verbs. If a character indicated that he/she regretted having committed an offense or took responsibility for it, even without using one of the five performative verbs, I counted that as an apology. I identified six cases of apologies that could not be identified through searching because they did not have a performative verb, meaning that the search terms identified 98% of the apologies. Since searching the corpus resulted in missing only 2% of the apologies, this is another indication of the usefulness of searching a spoken corpora using the five performative verbs search terms to study apologies.

In one example, in the pilot episode, Cameron and Mitchell have Mitchell's family over to tell them that they have adopted a baby. Before he realizes that that is what they are going to announce, Jay expresses strong opposition to the idea of such an adoption. When Cameron brings out the new baby, Jay says, "Okay, I know

that I said this was a bad idea. But what do I know? I mean, it's not like I wrote a book on fatherhood. I'm trying whole my life to get it right, I'm still screwing up." Although he does not actually say that he is sorry, it is obvious from the combination of his words and his facial and vocal expression that he is sorry for what he had said.

Conclusion

The results of this research indicate that a corpus developed from the subtitles of a television program can be useful in studying apologies. Apologies were identified in a wide variety of situations, using most of the apology strategies that were identified in the typology. These apologies also demonstrate how apologies are used in interaction, including co-constructed apologies, repair apologies, ironic apologies, apologies in advance, and additional explanation of the offense. Although all the apologies in the corpus had not been identified, a great many were found, making use of a wide variety of strategies.

Limitations of the Study

This study makes use of a relatively small corpus with a limited number of types of conversations. The vast majority of conversations were among members of an extended family, and therefore, they were among people who knew each other well, and in informal situations. Though there were some conversations between the family members and various other people (friends or acquaintances, employers or employees, etc.), these were in the

minority and produced few apologies. (On the other hand working with a relatively small corpus had the advantage that I was able to be familiar with the episodes to remember the context of the apologies as I was analyzing them.) Also, the study only includes apologies that can be identified through the five performative verbs. Apologies that didn't include the performative verbs were not be included in the analyses.

Suggestions for Future Research

A larger corpus could be compiled using a variety of television programs or movies. This would allow analysis of a wider variety of situations and conversations among people with a wider variety of relationships. In addition, comparisons could be done between apologies performed by males and females or older and younger speakers, in response to larger or smaller offenses, and so on. Responses to apologies could also be studied. It may also be possible to explore the use of other speech acts, if search terms could be identified, or if tagged corpora were used. This type of research could also be done with a corpus of naturally occurring spoken language, such as the spoken section of the British National Corpus (BNC) or the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which are available at http://http://view.byu.edu/.

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Appendix

This apology strategies typology was developed by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) and adapted by Hitomi Abe (personal communication, March 5, 2012).

-Expression of apology: Use of an expression which contains a relevant performative verb. e.g., "I'm sorry"; "I apologize"; "Excuse me"; "Forgive me"; "Pardon me."

-Explanation: An explanation or an account of situations which caused the apologizer to commit the offense

-Statement of the situation: A description of the situation that led to the need for apology, e.g., "I dropped your camera and broke it."

-Acknowledgment of responsibility: A recognition by the apologizer of his or her fault in causing the offense. This semantic formula can be subcategorized into:

　　1. Implicit acknowledgment
　　　　e.g., "I should have called you before."

　　2. Explicit acknowledgment
　　　　e.g., "It completely slipped my mind."

　　3. Expression of reluctance
　　　　e.g., "I hesitate to say this, but it is true."

　　4. Expression of lack of intent
　　　　e.g., "I didn't mean to."

    5. Expression of self-deficiency

       e.g., "You know I am bad at remembering things."

    6. Expression of embarrassment

       e.g., "I feel so bad about it."

    7. Explicit acceptance of the blame

       e.g., "It was my fault."

-Offer of repair: An offer made by the apologizer to provide payment for some kind of damage caused by his or her infraction, which can be specific or non-specific.

    1. Non-specific offer of repair

       e.g., "I'll see what I can do."

    2. Specific offer of repair

       e.g., "I will do extra work over the weekend."

-Suggesting a repair: Suggesting something that the interlocutor rather than the apologizer could do. e.g., "Do you want to come with me?"

-Statement of alternative

    1. I can do X instead of Y

       e.g., "I'd rather…"

    2. Why don't we X instead of Y

       e.g., "Let's do…instead"

-Promise of Non-recurrence: A commitment made by the apologizer not to have the offense happen again. e.g., "It won't happen again."

-Suggestion for avoiding the situation: e.g., "Let's put it in writing next time."

-Verbal avoidance

    1. Topic switch

    2. Joke

    3. Finding a silver lining: Referring to something good that came out of the apologizer's mistake. e.g., "You have a lead on a new job."

    4. Laugh

Adjuncts to apologies

1. Intensity of apology: "really," "very," "so," "terribly," "awfully," "truly," "please"; combinations and repetitions.
2. Minimizing offense: e.g., "It's O.K. No harm done."

3. Emotionals: "Oh!" "Oops!" "God!"
4. Gratitude: e.g., "Thank you.", "I appreciate it."
5. Wishing the best after apologizing: e.g., "I hope you enjoy yourselves."
6. Concern for the interlocutor: e. g., "Are you okay?", "Have you been waiting long?"
7. Feedback: e.g., "This book was interesting."
8. Adjunct to the offer of repair: e.g., "Please wait." "Just a moment."

Other
1. utterances related to apology: e.g., "Believe me." "What's wrong?"
2. utterances not related to apology: e.g., "Let's go."