

‘Excuse me but are you a blooming idiot’. The use of apologies in teenage talk.

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Background

- Anne: Please get to the back of the queue!
 - Robert: <mimicking girl's voice> Sorry </>!
 - Anne: I'm fed up with you!
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- Apologies are closely associated with politeness and face but they also have a potential for non-serious usage

Research questions

- Do teenagers use apologies frequently (more frequently than adults) and in that case why?
- How do teenagers use apologies for discursive and strategic functions?
- What can we conclude about the relationship between apologies and social factors such as age and gender?
- How does teenagers' use of apologies interact with factors such as social identity and forging interpersonal relations?

Structure

- data and methodology
- what do we mean by an apology
- the frequencies of apologies
- the variation in the use of apologies, how are apologies expressed by special forms and variations of these
- how teenagers' apologies deviate from norms for polite behaviour by being used for banter and mock politeness
- concluding discussion.

Data and methodology

- The material comes from the COLT Corpus (Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language) (Stenström et al. 2002).
- The corpus consists of informal conversations between 13-17-year-old boys and girls from different London Schools.
- The size of the corpus is 500, 000 words.
- The starting-point was to search for apology expressions defined as one of the forms *sorry*, *pardon*, *excuse me*, *forgive me*, *I apologize* and variations of these

What is an apology?

- The prototypical apology functions as a response to an offending action or event. The offender takes responsibility for the offence and displays regret, thus giving some form of redress to the victim (the 'offendee') and restoring 'a moral and ritual equilibrium' between offender and victim in the interaction (cf Goffman 1971: 138-48).
- However apologies are problematic because of their variability and fuzziness.
- Apologies can vary along different dimensions including form, how they are responded to and with regard to whether they are used sincerely or not.

Frequency of apologies in COLT

- Apologies in general were frequent in COLT: **462** examples
- The London Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC): **209** examples
- The BNC 2014early access **257** examples
- the high frequency of apologies in COLT reflects the strategies and norms of the speakers and the emotional and conflictive nature of teenage talk.

Frequencies of apology expressions

Sorry	288	62.34%
Pardon	95	20.56%
Excuse me	73	15.80%
Apologize	3	0.65%
Forgive me	3	0.65%
Total	462	100%

Sorry with variations

declarative <i>sorry</i>	<i>sorry</i>
exclamative <i>sorry</i>	<i>sorry!</i>
Interrogative <i>sorry</i>	<i>sorry? sorry what?</i>
<i>I'm sorry</i>	
<i>I am sorry</i>	
<i>oh (ah, oops, shit, well) + (I'm) sorry</i>	<i>oh sorry, oh sorry! oh + I'm sorry, oh well sorry, ah sorry</i>
hesitation + <i>sorry</i>	<i>er sorry, erm sorry, erm er sorry,</i>
<i>sorry</i> + name or epithet	<i>sorry bud, sorry man, sorry Alex</i>
<i>sorry</i> + repetition	<i>sorry sorry; excuse me sorry</i>
<i>sorry</i> and intensification	<i>(I'm) so sorry, really sorry, very sorry</i>

Sorry and formal variation

- Apologies in COLT are conventional but are flexible and can be varied in different ways
- The two most common formulaic expressions were *sorry* and *I'm sorry*.
- *I am sorry* is more emphatic and was found only once.
- *Oh+* apology with *sorry* (apology mixed with surprise) was the most frequent apology after the minimal *sorry*.
- *sorry* could be accompanied by an exclamation mark (the exclamatory *sorry!*) which suggests that it is emotional and pronounced with a special tone.
- *Sorry* as the 'simplest possible form' was used with a great deal of variation.
- Apologizing was achieved by means of strategies involving appeal (*please*, repetition), intensification (*I'm really sorry*), exaggeration (*ooh sorry*) for increasing speaker involvement.
- The apology could be followed by a name or an epithet (*sorry Chris, sorry bud, excuse me fellows*) addressing the hearer in a satirical or joking way.

Apologies and im/politeness

- Teenagers apologise, on the surface, in similar ways as adults do.
- However teenagers may use apologies to carry out face-work which seems to involve face-threat and conflict rather than politeness and they use apologies when no genuine politeness is intended
- Teenagers' use apologies differently from adults because they have a different attitude to rudeness and politeness
- takes us into a discussion of apologies used for banter and sarcasm and how these are associated with young speakers

Apologies with mixed messages (mismatching interpersonal messages)

- The examples of apologies by teenagers are complex and can be analysed as cases of mixed messages
- The interpersonal function of apologies does not unproblematically imply politeness but can involve mixed messages, that is messages ‘which contain features that point towards a polite interpretation mixed with features that point towards an impolite interpretation’ (Culpeper et al 2017: 324).
- Mixed messages have been discussed mostly in relation to sarcasm and irony.
- Other phenomena involving mixed messages are banter and teasing.

Mock impoliteness or banter

- Mock impoliteness would be the opposite of genuine impoliteness (Culpeper 2011)
- Everyday terms to describe what is going on are banter, teasing and 'fighting'. According to Leech (2014: 100) 'banter is offensive on the surface but at a deeper level is intended to maintain comity.'
- Mock impolite apologies are not genuine apologies and they cannot be accounted for as examples of impoliteness either since the hearer does not interpret the speaker's behaviour as impolite but as establishing or maintaining politeness at a deeper level
- A distinction is made between ritual conflict, sociable rudeness, jocular fighting which all involve banter

Ritual conflict (banter)

- The apology is associated with confrontation and conflict. The purpose is banter (faked rudeness):
 - Annie: You just go back and think. Okay?
 - Josie: He will go back too.
 - Annie: Erm Yeah I know. [I'm sorry.]
 - Josie: [Oh just shut up!]
 - Annie: <laughing> Yeah </>.
- The use of the apology for banter illustrates the importance of the addressee, a person who has a creative role in the dialogue by the way he or she responds.
- the function of banter can be competitive or to entertain an audience

Ritual conflict (banter)

- Peter: <laughing> I'm sorry </>. Winston... tell me your life story.... (6) Sorry, what was you saying <unclear>.
- Josie: Oh fuck!
- Peter: <nv> laugh

- There is a mismatch between the polite *sorry* and its response marking it as banter rather than a serious apology
- Both the speaker and the hearer are involved
- Cf ritual insults associated with urban black adolescents (Labov 1972)

Sociable rudeness – combining rudeness and sociability

- Robert: You should have asked me you cock.
- Peter: <nv> laugh </nv> <laughing> Sorry! </> <shouting> Oi, you cunt! </> <nv> laugh </nv>
- John: <nv> laugh </nv>...
- The apology is understood as containing a component of rudeness as suggested by the following insult (*sorry! you cunt*).
- *Sorry* is pronounced with a sarcastic tone but the context is bantering
- The style represents 'sociable rudeness' (Kienpontner 1997)

Sociable rudeness – combining rudeness and sociability

- Peter: and then you get the black box to video it
- Grace: oh right?
- Peter: cos video pictures of a suspect IRA truck blowing up. Shit I'm sorry but you'd be bloody rich, wouldn't you
- The apology constitutes a mixed message combining components of politeness or impoliteness
- The function is to express group identity and sociability

Sociable rudeness – combining rudeness and sociability

- the apology is associated with sociable rudeness (Kienpontner 1997)
- Speakers use the ‘rude’ apology to achieve solidarity (camaraderie)
- Camaraderie ... is a relationship of rapport between people who feel themselves to be close in terms of both vertical and horizontal distance. ... The rationale behind this is that if two or more people find it possible to exchange insults and other impolite remarks, and at the same time to treat these as nonserious, or even amusing, they share a powerful way of signaling their solidarity. (Leech 2014)

Jocular fighting- apologies which have a challenging or contentious function

- Face-attacking apologies with the function of drawing attention to accusations, disapproval, reproaches, complaints etc, that constitute rudeness in competitive disputes.
- They can be regarded as banter since they are not intended to be taken seriously
- Josie:<unclear> Excuse me!
- ^?: Yes?
- Josie: It's my drink. You [deaf]
- Pam: [It's] my ear!
- Josie: <laughing> Oh sorry </>.
- Pam: Oh [sorry!]

Jocular fighting- apologies which have a challenging or contentious function

- The apologies involve differences of opinions or wants expressed and were generally insincere or jocular and used for ridicule or banter in the material
- Peter: I'd like to have one of these.
- Josie: Yeah.
- Peter: I'm gonna buy them.
- Eddie: Girls, I beg your pardon.
- ^? <laughing> Don't really </>
- Eddie: Don't say that again.
- ^many: <nv> laugh </nv>
- *I beg your pardon* is difficult to analyse in politeness theory since it is used in an aggressive or contentious way
- However it is not used for impoliteness either
- A case of mock impoliteness or jocular mockery

Sarcasm or irony

- Apology expressions are not in themselves sarcastic or ironic.
- However they can be interpreted as ironic if this is indicated by the context that it cannot be interpreted in a polite way. Leech (2014) refers to the irony principle ‘which allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive part of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature’.
- Sarcasm or irony in teenager speech is above all associated with a special voice (the exclamatory *sorry*, modifications of the apology *ooh sorry*),
- The interpretation is helped by the juxtaposition with laughing, shouting, singing, mimicking another person’s voice, repetition for exaggeration
- Cues enabling a shortcircuiting of the inferential process.

Sarcasm or irony

- The speaker apologises ironically for making a mistake:
- Grace: When do they come here?
- Sarah: I don't know.
- Grace: Dad said, they won't have long here, will they?
- Sarah: No, ooh pardon me, Mum... (6), where's mummy?
- Grace: In the bathroom.

Sarcasm or irony

- an ironic or sarcastic interpretation of the apology expression seems to be preferable to the 'polite' one if *sorry* is used in an exaggerated way.
- By using a voice which is not his own the speaker presents him/herself as as sarcastic or joking.
- Robert: Please get to the back of the queue!
- Robin: <mimicking girl's voice> Sorry </>!
- Robert: I'm fed up with you!
- The fact that the speaker is not genuinely 'polite' but joking suggests that in teenager language, irony or sarcasm can be difficult to distinguish from banter.
- That the apology is non-serious is also indicated by the response

Sarcasm or irony

- the apology (with variations) is repeated in a sarcastic and exaggerated way expressing the speakers' attitudes and reinforcing the relationship between the participants:
- Peter: [If you shout too loud]
- Josie: [Come on, come on]
- Peter: in the microphone it cuts out on me.
- Josie: Oh sorry.
- Peter: I can't hear now.
- Josie: Ooh sorry!
- Peter: I'll have to turn it up again. Oh it's [alright now.]
- Josie: [I'm sorry!]

Sarcasm or irony

- The apology is intended to be ironic or humorous rather than deeply felt.
- This is indicated by the co-occurrence of *sorry* with the epithet *bud* with the social function to emphasise the social relationship between the speakers
 - Alex: Sorry bud. But I had to stay home.
 - Robert: I left my rehearsal for you.
 - Alex: Don't give us that shit.
 - Robert: I was sit there for twenty five minutes for

Summing up the sarcastic apology

- The sarcastic apology was generally emphatic or exaggerated
- It can combine with (pretended)
- surprise (ooh sorry, sorry!)
- The apology is taken as sarcastic if the apologiser is not the 'offender' but only mimicks that person

“Awfully polite is rude” - overpoliteness

- There is a close relationship between overpoliteness and sarcastic or ironic apologies
- The speaker expresses his or her feelings in an exaggerated manner triggering the interpretation that the apology is not intended seriously
- the non-seriousness of the apology is indicated by the choice of the formal ‘humbly apologize’ and what the speaker is apologizing for:
- Jules: I apologize for my,
- Craig: Sadness.
- Jules: my erm, my immaturity, lack of responsibility, and general, outrageousness. I must humbly apologize.

“Awfully polite is rude” - overpoliteness

- Jock: Well I mean fucking hell you're just, not grateful are you? You're [<unclear>]
John: [Ah!] Ah Jock! [I'm really sorry.]
 - Jock: [Shut up <unclear>]
 - John: <nv> laugh </nv> Sorry Jock. <laughing> Forgive me </>? Please forgive me! <crying+laughing> It's not worth dying for, please forgive me </>.
 - Jock: Now you're being sad.
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- A polite interpretation is not intended because of the exaggeration and what the speaker is apologising for
 - The ironic effect associated with the apology may be mild and humorous rather than threatening or aggressive

Mock politeness and quotation

- Apology expressions are frequently used in direct speech mirroring the fact that quotation is generally common in teenager language and that it is used for other purposes than to report literally what has been said.
- The speech reporting can range from simply quoting someone to mimicking and parody.
- Jock: and he'll say that this is, <mimicking> ooh this is James, James is a really happy person. </ Explain the song Shiny Happy People.Yeah shiny happy people who are... <unclear>
- Craig: <nv> giggle </nv>
- Jock: <mimicking> Sorry I've just been a right sad bastard alright and my name's James. </>
- Carla: Yeah I've just been telling [them about]

Mock politeness and quotation

- Teenagers employ attitude clashes for humour. In addition *please* contributes to the ironic interpretation
- Danny: Well they sold me an air rifle on my own. <nv> laugh
</nv> <unclear>
- Caroline: What d'ya do [if they get <unclear>]
- Danny: [Excuse me] can I have a erm two two air rifle please? And he's gone, How old are you? And I've gone, Fifteen.

Mock politeness and quotation

- Josie: three vams, a vampire walks into a pub and goes erm
- Skoney: Oh yeah. I know.
- Josie: excuse me, <mimicking Romanian accent> I want a pint of blood </>.
- Skoney: Yeah.
- Josie: And the man goes sorry mate we don't do blood. And he goes, I want a pint of blood! So the man goes... ah, chops the dog's head off.
- Skoney:<nv> laugh </nv>
- Josie: Sticks it in the cup, goes and gives it to him, he goes, <mimicking Romanian accent> thank you </>

Summing up mock politeness and quotation

- Speakers play with language often in a competitive way in the presence of an audience of social peers.
- By means of caricature, stereotyping , exaggeration and quotation (voicing) the performer reproduces a joke for the purposes of entertainment and evaluation by the other participants in the conversation (including the silent participants).
- The quotations produced by the teenagers are creative, ‘that is a creative reconstruction of what the original speaker said and involves reports with varying degrees of dramatization’ (Carter 2004)

Sociopragmatic aspects

- The speakers in COLT are young
- Besides age, gender is important
- In Holmes (1989) women were responsible for 74.5% of the apologies
- In COLT male speakers apologized more (190 males vs 123 females)
- What is most interesting here is the relationship between banter, mock politeness and gender.

Sociopragmatic aspects-Relating banter and sarcasm to the gender of speakers

- Criteria for regarding an apology as non-serious (banter or sarcasm):
- The apology is syntactically complex (it co-occurs with a discourse marker, epithet or personal name, *please*)
- The speaker uses an emphatic or exclamative form of *sorry* or *excuse me*
- The apology has the function of face-attack
- The apology is used in quotation or co-occurs with mimicking
- The speaker uses an unusual degree of politeness
- The apology co-occurs with laughing, shouting, indicating that it is non-serious
- The apology is responded to by laughing, crying or an impolite 'shut up'
- The contents suggest that the speaker apologises for something which cannot be true

Sociopragmatic aspects

	Female	Male
Banter or sarcasm	67 (44.67%)	83 (55.33%)

Conclusion

- The traditional apology has a remedial function implying that the offender feels regret.
- We also need to account for the non-prototypical uses of the apology where politeness and impoliteness are difficult to tease apart.
- The apology expressions *sorry*, *excuse me*, *pardon* are used both for potentially mock impolite and mock polite purposes.

Conclusion

- Banter is a way of achieving in-group solidarity by implying that the speakers do not need to be polite to each other- It is a way of saying ‘We do not need to be polite to one another: I can insult you, and you will respond to it as a joke. This proves what good buddies we are’ (Leech 2014: 101).
- The apology can be taken as banter if this is indicated by its response
- Irony or sarcasm is above all associated with a special tone of voice,
- Irony can also be conventionally associated with the formal variation of the apology and the type or degree of emotion expressed by prosody or combination with other elements.
- An example of a non- minimal apology may be *oh sorry (ooh sorry)* where the apology has the meaning ‘pretended surprise’. The exclamative or emotive *sorry!* may be another example.

Conclusion

- Young people do not always use apologies differently from adults and adults can use the same strategies as adolescents.
- Young people may choose to 'play up' their identity as teenagers by displaying rudeness when they apologise
- They use apologies for exaggeration (apologizing profusely in order to express sarcasm)
- Teenagers are performers and use apologies to caricature a certain social type to make their narratives more amusing and to show their creative abilities.

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