



**Making *Sorry* more meaningful –
Learning how to apologize and
respond in different ways**

Holger Limberg

Why should we teach (German) learners of English how to apologize?

- they are linguistically “easy”
- they are an everyday phenomenon
- cultural differences can go unnoticed

„Sorry“ in der deutschen Sprache

Wortart: Interjektion

Gebrauch: umgangssprachlich

Häufigkeit: durchschnittlich mehr als ein Mal in einer Million Wortformen des Dudenkorpus (Stufe 2 von 5)

Bedeutung: freundschaftliche Höflichkeitsformel zur Entschuldigung

Herkunft: englisch sorry

Quelle: [duden.de](https://www.duden.de)

What kind of events result in an apology?

1. being late
2. sticking your foot in your mouth
3. interrupting
4. having hurt someone
5. making a mistake
6. forgetting things
7. being (too) direct
8. burping
9. having offended someone
10. misunderstandings
11. jumping the queue
12. not catching sth.
13. hearing bad news
14. requesting
15. expressing disbelief
16. having to refuse
17. answering too late or not at all (e-mail)
18. upon hearing bad news
19. feeling sorry
20. generally behaving in an inappropriate way

collection of chat results

Reasons for an apology

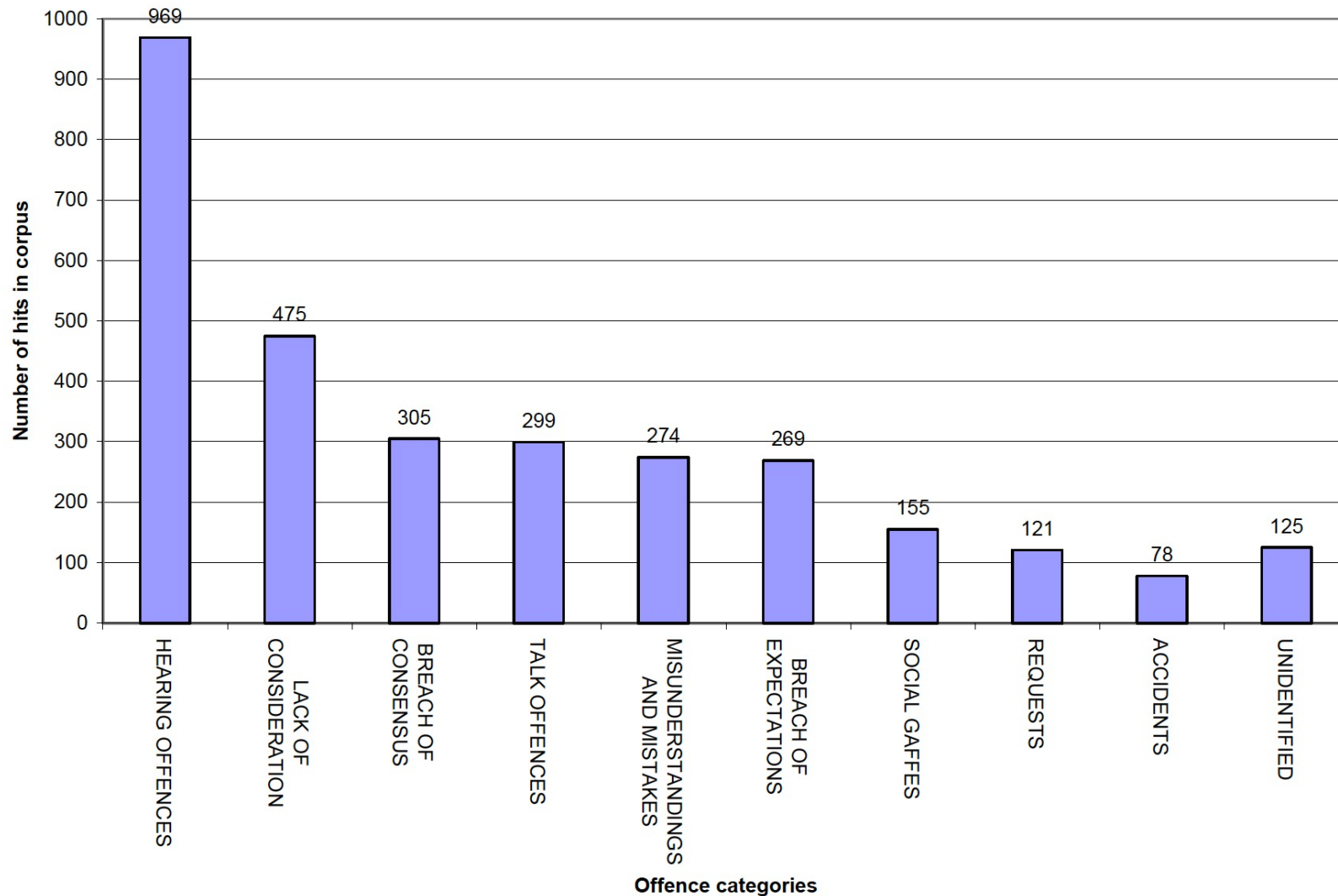


Figure 3.4. *Overall distribution of offence categories in the corpus*

(Deutschmann 2003: 65)

Reasons for an apology

Categories of Offence	Examples
Hearing offences	32% Not hearing, not understanding, not believing one's ears
Lack of consideration	15% Interruptions, overlooking a person, not paying attention, forgetting a name, being late, leaving inappropriately, causing inconvenience, taking sth. without permission, taboo offences, hurting s.o. feelings unintentionally
Breach of consensus	10% Disagreeing, contradicting, reprimanding, refusing, denying, retaliating, insisting, challenging
Talk offenses	9.7% Slips of the tongue, digressions, hesitations, corrections, being unclear, forgetting to mention sth.
Mistakes and misunderstandings	8.9% Misunderstanding s.o., mistakes
Breach of expectations	8.7% Declining offers, requests, forgetting agreements, inability to fulfil expectations, personal shortcomings
Social gaffes	5% Coughing, burping, sneezing, clearing the throat
Requests	3.9% Requests for attention, asking s.o. to do sth.
Accidents	2.5% Damage to property, hurting s.o. unintentionally, bumping into a person, unintentionally being in the way

Types of apologies

Real apologies:

a range of transgressions where the apologizer somehow feels that s/he has offended the person addressed and therefore expresses regret for having done so

Formulaic apologies:

uttered in situations where the offence is minimal, almost non-existent, and where apologizing is more a matter of routine

Face attack apologies:

uttered in situations where the remedial nature of the apology is questionable; apology is sarcastic or introduces a challenge

Formulaic apologies with added function:

uttered in situations where the 'offence' is minimal and the apology has other functions in addition to that of repair work

Types of apologies

67

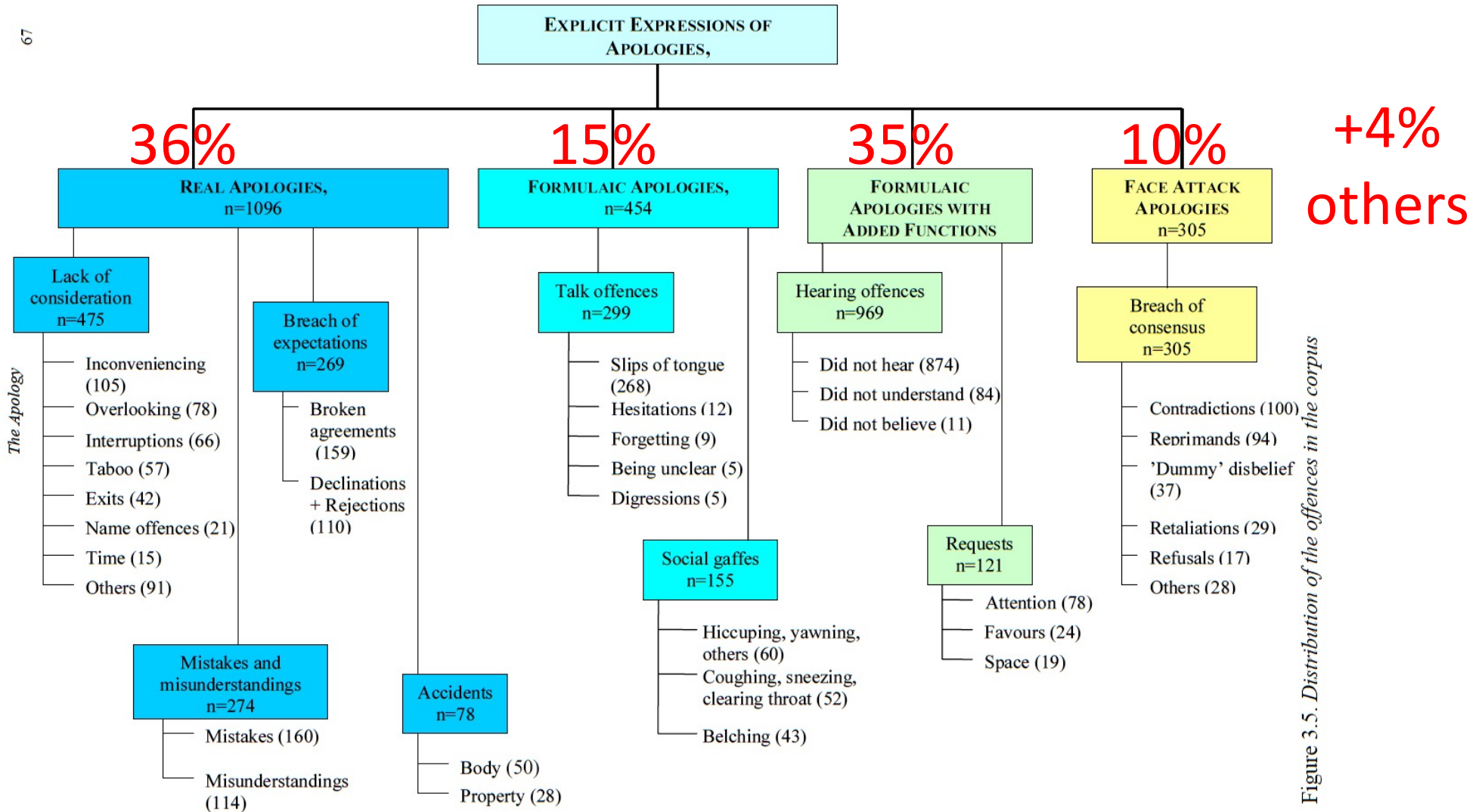


Figure 3.5. Distribution of the offences in the corpus

(Deutschmann 2003: 67)

Activity for the EFL classroom: Keeping a journal

Task: Collect apologies in your everyday life for one week. Use the table below. How could you say it in English?

No.	Situation/ Offence	By/To whom?	<i>Entschuldigung</i>	Apology
1	Losing an item	Me to a good friend	„...“	
2	Forgetting to take out the trash	Me to my father		
3	Copy & paste homework	Me to my teacher		

What is an apology?

- a reactive and remedial move to a past conduct
- a means of compensation for doing something wrong or behaving in an inappropriate manner (real or perceived offence)
- apologizer holds him-/herself (partly) responsible for the conduct (e.g. violating a social rule)
- often associated with politeness
- *not all apologies are uttered sincerely*

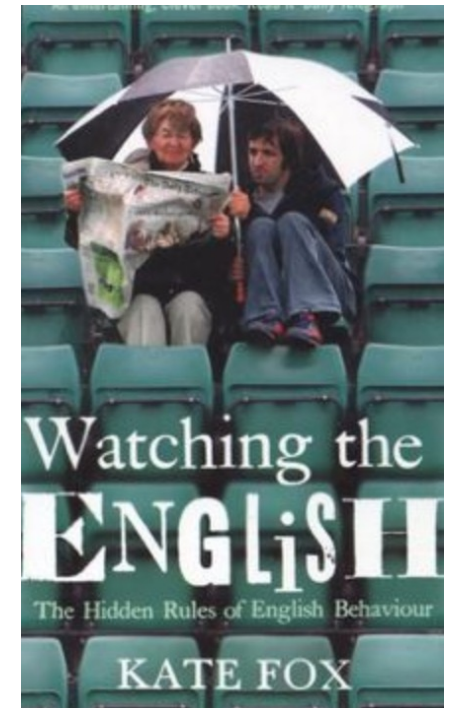


Photograph: Loungepark/Getty Images (The Guardian.com)

“Reflex Apology”

“I found out that I could not bump into someone, however gently, without automatically saying ‘sorry’” (p. 148)

“The automatic ‘sorry’ did seem to be a peculiar English response.”
(p. 149)



Excursion: Gender differences in apologizing

Link to YouTube clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hS11Yj8Keal>

Identify the apology

Rob: Hey.

Neil: Hi Rob, sorry I'm late.

The train was supposed to get here 30 minutes ago. But you know how it is... horrible delays, I'm afraid. I'll make sure next time I take an earlier train.

Rob: That's ok. Don't worry.

Let's go directly to the cinema. The movie starts in 15 minutes.

Neil: Okay.

Speech Act Set “Apology”

1. Expression of apology

“Sorry”

“Excuse me”

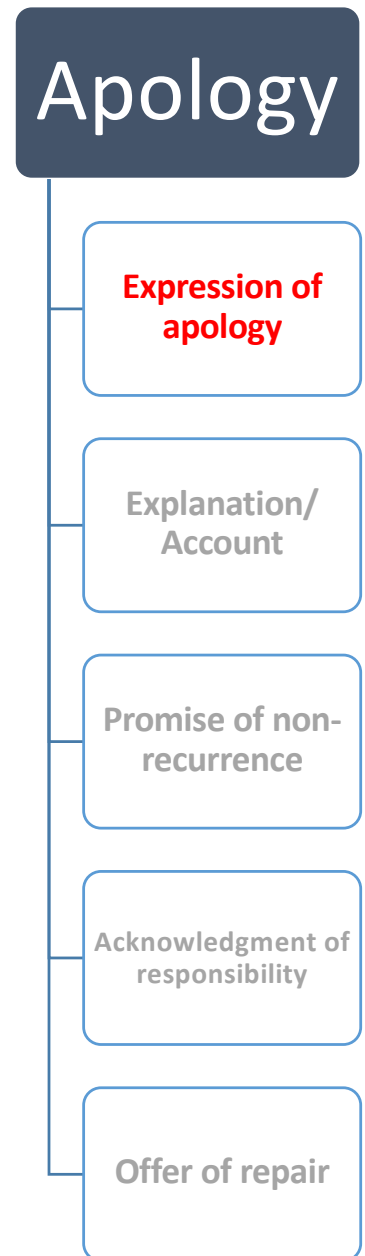
“I apologize”

“Forgive me”

“Pardon me”

“I’m afraid”

+ combinations and repetitions



Expression of apology

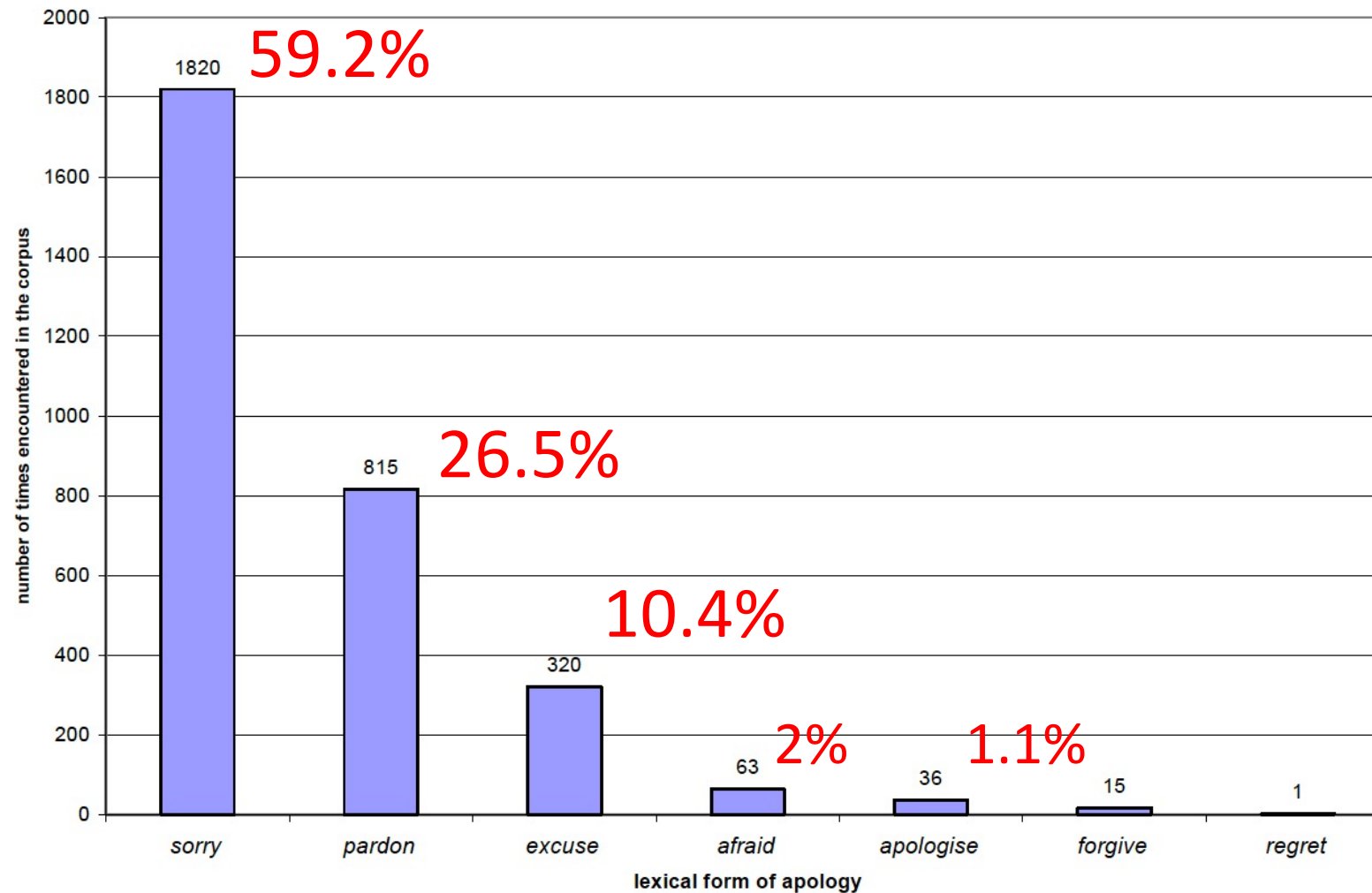


Figure 3.1. *Expressions of apologies encountered in the sub-corpus*

Deutschmann 2003: 51

Sorry – *expanded*

“Sorry”

“I’m sorry” (partially expanded)

“I am sorry” (fully expanded)

“Oh, I’m sorry” (emotives/interjections)

“I’m so/really/very sorry” (intensifiers)

“(I’m) sorry, <name> <love> <mate>”

“Sorry *about* <this/that/...>”

“Sorry *for* V-ing”

Apology

Expression of apology

Explanation/Account

Promise of non-recurrence

Acknowledgment of responsibility

Offer of repair

Detached apologies + markers

Apology	Example
Interjection + apology	Oh, sorry. Well, pardon me! Erm, sorry.
Explicit apology + name	Sorry Mike I'm sorry love.
Intensifier + apology	I do apologize! I'm really sorry!
Apology + please	Forgive me please

Syntactically complex forms

Syntactic construction	Example
Sorry + about/for + demonstrative pronoun	I'm sorry about that. I apologize for this.
Sorry + about + NP	I'm sorry about the interruption.
Sorry + to + VP	Sorry to say this.
Pardon + (for) + NP	Pardon me for being so rude.
Apologize + if + S	We apologize if anyone has been offended.
Modal marker of intent + apologize	I must apologize for...

Overview of expression of apology

1. Detached apology

“Sorry.”

“Pardon.”

2. Detached apology with additional markers

“I’m really very sorry.”

“Well, pardon me.”

3. Syntactically complex forms

“Sorry for being late.”

“Pardon me for being so rude.”

Task: Identify the apology

Rob: Hey.

Neil: Hi Rob, sorry I'm late.

The train was supposed to get here 30 minutes ago. But you know how it is... horrible delays, I'm afraid. I'll make sure next time I take an earlier train.

Rob: That's ok. Don't worry.

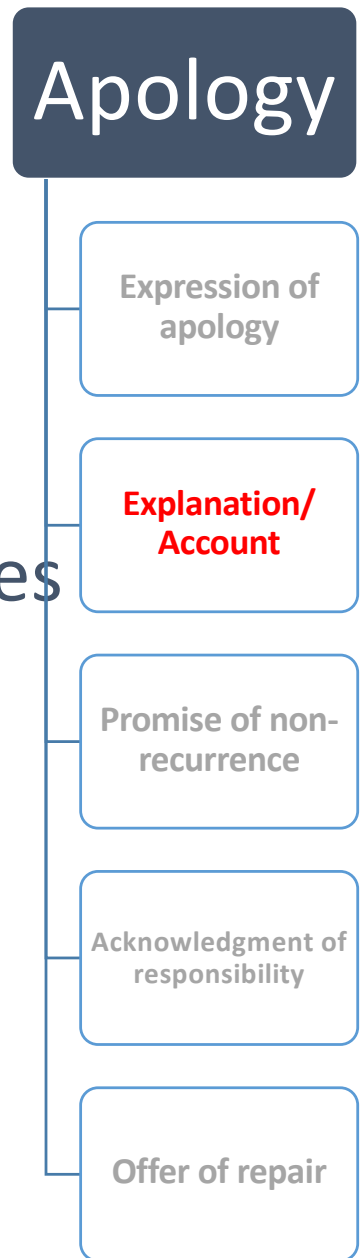
Let's go directly to the cinema. The movie starts in 15 minutes.

Neil: Okay.

Speech Act Set “Apology”

2. Explanation or account

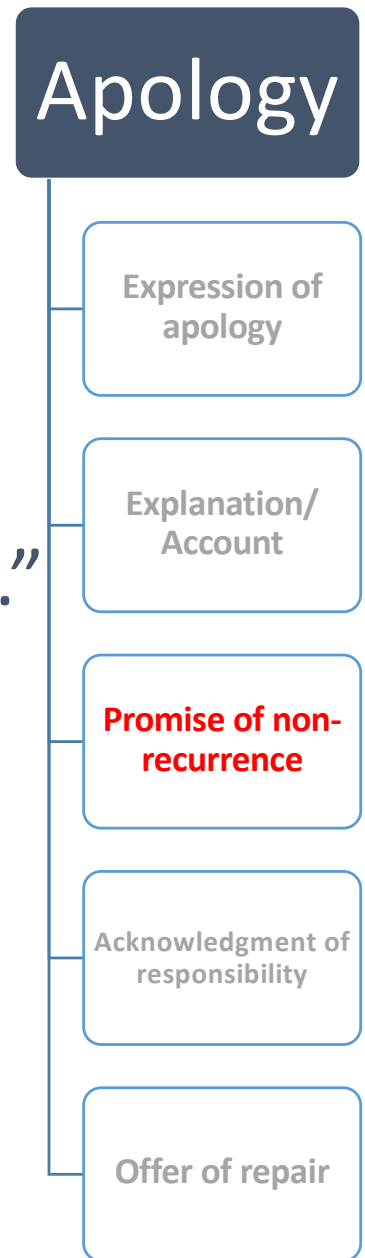
“The train was supposed to get here 30 minutes ago. But you know how it is... horrible delays, I’m afraid.”



Speech Act Set “Apology”

3. Promise of non-recurrence

“I’ll make sure next time I take an earlier train.”

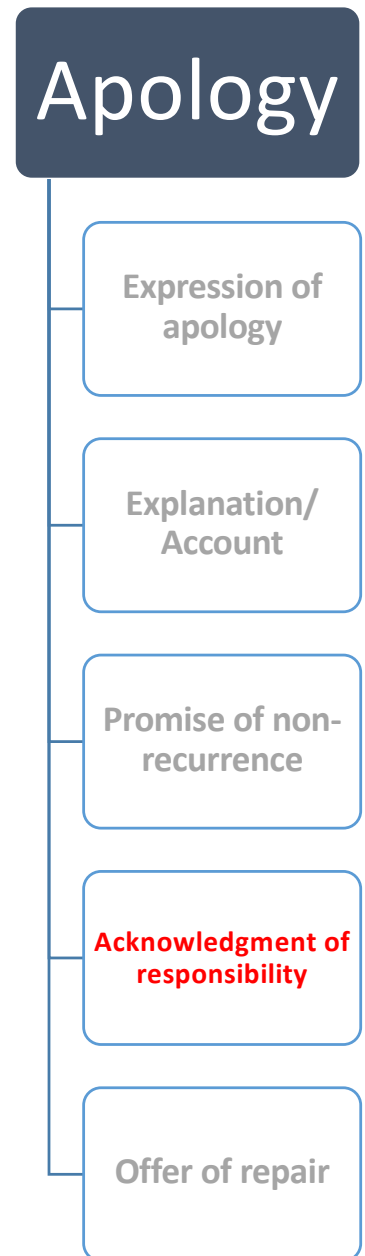


Speech Act Set “Apology”

4. Acknowledgment of responsibility

“It’s my fault.”

“I didn’t mean to...”

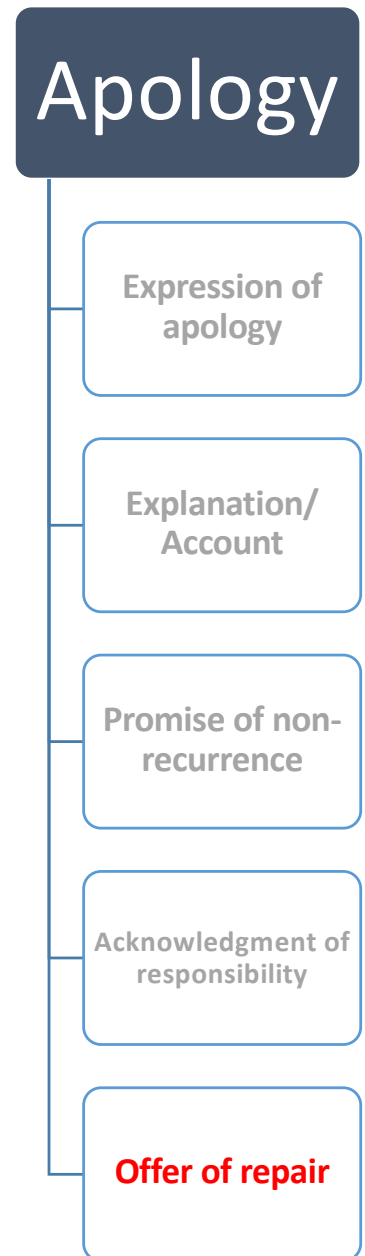


Speech Act Set “Apology”

5. Offer of repair

“I’ll make it up to you.”

“I won’t be late next time”.



Speech Act Set (SAS) Apology

1. expression of apology

- 'sorry', 'excuse', 'forgive', 'apologize', 'pardon', + combinations and repetitions

2. explanation or account

- nonspecific (such as 'There've been a lot of things distracting me at work lately') and specific (such as 'My boss called me to an urgent meeting').

3. acknowledgement of responsibility

- implicit ('I was sure I gave you the directions correctly'), lack of intent ('didn't mean to'), self-deficiency ('How could I be so clumsy?'), self-blame ('It's my fault').

4. offer of repair

- unspecified ('Can I help you?'), specified ('Let me pick up those books for you').

5. promise of non-recurrence

- (such as promise it won't happen again).

Speech Act Set Apology

- at least one strategy needs to be selected
- strategies can be combined and repeated
- sufficiency/acceptability in a given context depends on the situation and speech community
- universal set of core strategies, but particular sociocultural configuration is unique
- ‘the more, the better’ does not make an apology more sincere or more successful

Match phrase to apology strategy

Phrase	Strategy
Pardon me.	Expression of apology
My car broke down.	
Let me give you a hand.	
I didn't mean to.	Acknowledgement of responsibility
I regret that.	
It will never happen again.	Explanation
Please forgive me.	
I didn't get your text message.	Offer of repair
I'll fix it.	
Excuse me.	Promise of non-recurrence

Match the apology and the situation

A waiter brought you the wrong food

You want to ask a stranger for the way

Excuse me. Can you tell me the way to...?

Sorry to bother you again, but there's one more thing I don't understand

You spilt someone's drink.

You accidentally burped after a big meal.

I'm terribly sorry. Let me buy you another one.

Pardon me!

You are calling someone again to ask another question

I'm sorry, but I think I ordered something else

Match the apology and the situation

A waiter brought you the wrong food	I'm sorry, but I think ordered something else
You want to ask a stranger for the way	Excuse me. Can you tell me the way to...?
You spilt someone's drink.	I'm terribly sorry. Let me buy you another one.
You are calling someone again to ask another question	Sorry to bother you again, but there's one more thing I don't understand
You accidentally burp after a big meal.	Pardon me!

Role Plays – with emotions

- Task: In pairs practice the given dialog.
- Perform the dialog in a neutral way.
- Perform the dialog a second time – this time with a specific emotion (angry, sad, bored, embarrassed, kind, worried, ...)
- Discuss which emotional tone is appropriate for the situation.



Role Plays – with emotions

A: I'm sorry. I've broken your cup.

B: Oh no! That was my favorite cup!

A: I'm sorry. I'll get you a new one.

B: Alright, thank you.

A: Don't slam the door like that!

B: I'm sorry!

A: You don't sound very sorry.

B: Actually, I'm not. Leave me alone!

A: Ow! That really hurt. You've just stepped on my foot!

B: I'm sorry, I didn't see it. Oh look, it's bleeding. Here's a tissue.

A: Ow, thanks.

B: I'm sorry.

A: Miss, I'm sorry, I haven't done my homework.

B: Well, then you'll have to stay in during the break and do it then.

A: Oh, do I really have to?

B: Yes, I'm sorry, you do!

(Beecroft 2015)

Listening task: How to apology (BBC)



1. When is it sometimes more polite to say “I’m sorry”?
2. How would you apologize for stepping on someone’s foot in a crowded train?
3. How can you make your apology sound truly sorry?
4. What did you learn about body language when apologizing in British culture?
5. Name three ways to express why you are sorry?
6. How can say sorry without actually using the word “sorry”?

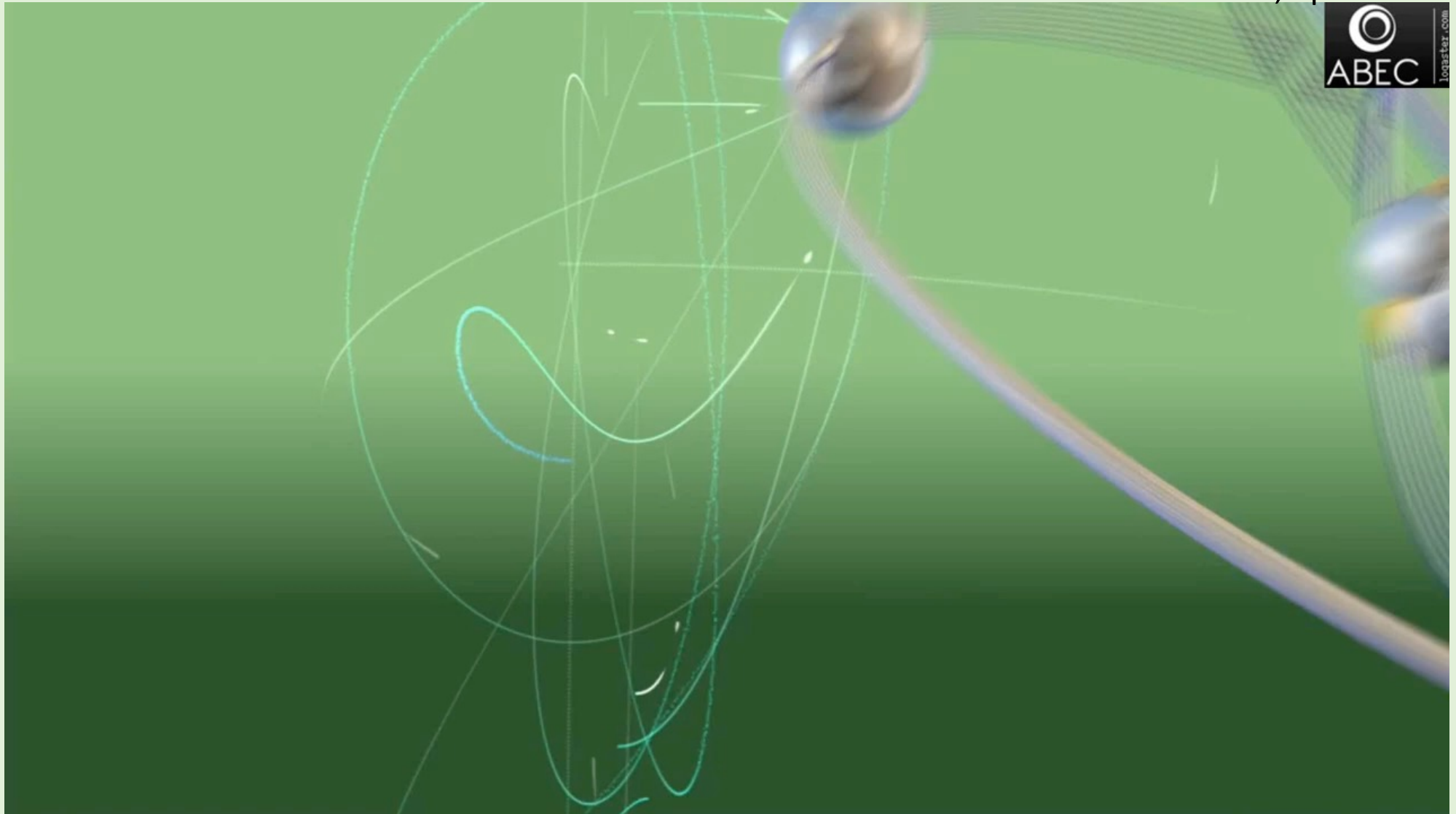
Listening task: How to apology (BBC)



1. With people you don't know, it is more polite to say "I'm sorry".
2. Just "sorry" would be enough.
3. Use the word "really" or "so", "I'm really sorry."
4. Make eye contact, perhaps put a hand on the person's arm as we speak.
5. "I'm sorry, I'm late." "I'm sorry about the mess." "I'm sorry for eating the last piece of cake."
6. "I want to apologize for ..."

Apology in *The Big Bang Theory*

Series 9, Episode 23



Apology in *The Big Bang Theory*

Sheldon: (*Knock, knock, knock*) Amy.

(*Knock, knock, knock*) Amy.

(*Knock, knock, knock*) Amy.

Amy: Come in.

Sheldon: Hello, everyone. Oh, Beverly, good to see you. I'd love to chat, but there's a line that could start moving any minute, so let's do this. Amy? A proper apology requires three steps. Step one, an admission of wrongdoing. Amy, I was wrong. Step two, a promise never to repeat said action. Amy, that action will never be repeated, and that's a promise. Step three, an earnest request for forgiveness. Amy, I hope you can forgive me. And I hope you do it right now, 'cause there's an Uber waiting downstairs, and I don't want to repeat this apology nonsense with my driver Ganesh.

Amy: Fine.

Sheldon: Oh, thanks, you're a peach. Beverly, we'll catch up soon. Bernadette, it was a pleasure as always, Penny, you have spinach in your teeth.

Penny: How long have I had spinach in my teeth?

Beverly: Since the airport, dear.

Apology in *The Big Bang Theory*

Sheldon: *(Knock, knock, knock)* Amy.

(Knock, knock, knock) Amy.

(Knock, knock, knock) Amy.

Amy: Come in.

Sheldon: Hello, everyone. Oh, Beverly, good to see you. I'd love to chat, but there's a line

that could start moving any minute, so let's do this. Amy? A proper apology requires three steps. Step one, an admission of wrongdoing. Amy, I was wrong.

Step two, a promise never to repeat said action. Amy, that action will never be repeated, and that's a promise. Step three, an earnest request for forgiveness.

Amy, I hope you're forgiven. And I hope you do it right now, 'cause there's an Uber waiting downstairs, and I don't want to repeat this apology nonsense with my driver Ganesh.

Amy: Fine.

Sheldon: Oh, thanks, you're welcome. Bernadette, it was a pleasure as always. Penny, you have spinach in your teeth.

Penny: How long have you had spinach in my teeth?

Beverly: Since the airport, dear.

**Admission of wrongdoing
(acknowledgement of responsibility)**

**Promise never to repeat the action
(promise of non-recurrence)**

**Request for forgiveness
(expression of apology)**

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Public Apology Central is the web's best source for crisis summaries, transcripts, videos, and audio of public apologies (*apologia*) from politicians, celebrities, athletes, organizations, religious leaders, media figures, heads of state, and lay citizens. *Apologia* includes a variety of defensive strategies used by those accused of wrongdoing, including denial ("I didn't do it"), shifting blame ("He did it"), minimization ("It wasn't that bad"), and mortification ("I'm sorry"). *Apologia* This site deals with all forms of persuasive defense and not simply "apology," where one takes responsibility for his or her actions.

The website is strictly for educational purposes (not for profit) and highlights the primary strategies employed by people accused of harmful acts. The site creators make no claims about the guilt or innocence of those accused of wrongdoing.

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Questions/Discussions



Thank you for your attention and participation!

Contact: holger.limberg@uni-flensburg.de

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- [BBC Learning English – How to ... Saying sorry](#)
 - [BBC Learning English – Unit 19, Session 4: How do you....say sorry?](#)
 - [CARLA \(Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition\) – Apologies](#)