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A Research-based Approach for Teaching Written Apologies to English for Academic Purposes Learners

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Abstract:

This article describes a research-based approach for teaching written personal, corporate, and public apologies to advanced English language learners. Following an explicit-inductive approach, the proposed lessons incorporate authentic input, metapragmatic explanation, noticing activities, corpus-based exercises, and empirically based research findings, all of which have been shown to enhance learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence. Learners apply research findings to analyze authentic apologies, revise them for greater sincerity, and use a corpus to expand the range of expressions for apologizing. The pedagogical activities expand the scope of written pragmatics instruction which has been relatively under-represented in the field of pragmatics.

Keywords: pragmatics, speech acts, apology, English for Academic Purposes

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Importance of Pragmatics

Pragmatics, defined as, “how learners come to know how-to-say-what-to-whom-when” (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013, p. 68), has long been recognized as essential to communicative competence. However, an extensive body of research has shown that advanced pragmatic competence is not concomitant with advanced linguistic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1993; Taguchi & Roever, 2017). Thus, to achieve overall communicative competence, second language pragmatics instruction is critical (Taguchi & Roever, 2017).

Previous research has shed light on pedagogical approaches for improving learners’ uptake and retention of sociopragmatic norms and pragmalinguistic forms. The collective findings from over 50 studies show that explicit instruction (with metapragmatic explanation) generally leads to greater learning gains than implicit instruction (Cohen, 2019a; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019; Taguchi, 2015) and an inductive approach typically leads to better retention of gains than a deductive approach (Glaser, 2014; Takimoto, 2009). Thus, an explicit-inductive approach has been recommended – one in which learners discover the rules after production and language analysis activities (Glaser, 2013). Studies also show that pragmatics instruction is most effective when it incorporates authentic input (Tateyama, 2019), metapragmatic explanation, production practice (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019; Taguchi, 2015), enhanced input, feedback (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019), noticing activities and empirically based research findings (Limberg, 2015; Taguchi, 2015; Tateyama, 2019).

Drawing upon collective findings for best practices in pragmatics instruction, this article outlines a research-based approach for teaching one of the most high-stakes speech acts: the apology. The lesson focuses on the personal, corporate, and public apology in written form. The following sections highlight the 1) need for teaching the apology; 2) apology characteristics; 3) learner population and learning context; 4) goals; and 5) pedagogical activities.

Need for Teaching the Formal Apology

An apology is a speech act which, according to Goffman (1971), “requires an offender who takes responsibility for a real or perceived offence and displays some emotion such as ‘feeling guilty’, 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” (as cited in Aijmer, 2019, p. 259). Cross-cultural variation creates different standards for “acceptable” apologies (cf Bella, 2014; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) and makes apologizing difficult for English language learners (Cheng, 2017). Thus, even advanced learners often lack the pragmatic competence to apologize appropriately (Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein, 1986). Given the importance of apologizing to professional success (Cheng, 2017; Youn, 2018) and the positive impact of pragmatics instruction on learners’ apologies (cf Levkina, 2018; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990), teaching learners how to craft culturally appropriate apologies should be a priority for EAP instructors.

Although instruction in personal apologies is relevant to most learners, some may also benefit from instruction in crafting corporate and public apologies. A corporate apology is defined as “an official apology given by a representative of a corporation to the offended for harm or errors of commission or omission committed by officials or staff of a business” (Song,

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Eslmai, & Galindo, 2018, p. 30). Public apologies are “public expressions of remorse and accountability for personal or institutional wrongdoing” (Song, Eslmai, & Galindo, 2018, p. 29).

There may be even more at stake with a corporate or public apology than with a personal apology. For one, the way an apology is crafted typically affects a company’s future financial performance (Carmichael, 2015). Well-received corporate and public apologies may convey the apologizer’s strength (Mills, 2001), restore the organization’s reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2008), reclaim public trust (Kampf, 2009), and achieve reconciliation on a global scale (Kampf & Löwenheim, 2012). However, those that go poorly may tarnish the apologizer’s reputation, jeopardize the apologizer’s career (Kampf, 2008), and damage international relations (Kampf & Löwenheim, 2012). Although these apologies have profound impacts, there are considerably fewer resources for teaching corporate and public apologies compared to personal apologies. To illustrate, a review of a well-known pragmatics website, the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), and a reputable text, *Pragmatics: Teaching Natural Conversation*, shows that both address the personal apology, but neither offers guidance on the corporate or public apology. Moreover, while the personal apology has received significant research attention from applied linguists (Cohen, 2019a), there are relatively fewer studies on the corporate and public apology, making those apologies less likely to be incorporated into EAP curricula. Yet given the status of English as a ‘global lingua franca’ (Kaur & Burlik, 2021) and the importance of politeness to BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) communication (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013), learners aspiring to use English for business purposes would benefit from instruction in the corporate and public apology.

In sum, instruction on *all* forms of the apology is critical because apologies are challenging for learners, high-stakes (Cohen, 2019b), face-threatening (Ellis, 2008), and one of the most

common speech acts in daily life and public discourse (Aijmer, 2019). Clearly, the impact of an apology (or lack thereof) is far-reaching.

Apology Characteristics

According to politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), the act of apologizing threatens the apologizer's positive face, or positive self-image, because the apologizer expresses regret for committing a prior face-threatening act. The way the apology is constructed is influenced primarily by the power of the recipient over the apologizer, the social distance between them, and the severity of the offense. When the social distance between interactants is high, when the recipient has significant power over the apologizer, and when the transgression is serious, the apology is likely more formal, polite, and elaborate.

There are at least three essential components to an apology: recognition of the offense, an expression of regret, and responsibility for the action (Deutschmann, 2003). Expressing remorse (Exline, Lise & Holeman, 2007), concern for the offended party's feelings (Haugh & Chang, 2019), and humility (Boyd, 2011) also enhance the apology's effectiveness. An apology expressed in the present tense (e.g., "I apologize") is stronger than one framed as a desire or promise to apologize (e.g., "I would like to apologize.") (Kampf, 2009). An expanded apology expression (e.g., "I'm sorry" vs. "sorry"), formal and deferential language (Aijmer, 2019), intensification, and specificity in naming the transgression typically enhance an apology's effectiveness (Heritage, Raymond, & Drew, 2019; Murphy, 2019). However, vague words such as "mistake" or "that" to characterize the offense distance oneself from the transgression (Murphy, 2019). The apology is further weakened when the word "but" follows an admission of wrongdoing or when a modal makes the transgression hypothetical (Battistella, 2014).

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There are a number of ways apologizers may claim or shirk responsibility for an offense. Explicitly acknowledging fault (Deutschmann, 2003), apologizing in the active voice with the pronoun “I” (Haugh & Chang, 2019), using “my” in front of the transgression, and specifically naming the affected parties (Battistella, 2014) help the transgressor claim ownership for the offense. In contrast, framing the apology in the passive voice (Battistella, 2014) or using the conditional (Murphy, 2019) (“I apologize if I’ve offended anyone”) minimize a transgressor’s responsibility for the offense. Other ways apologizers shirk responsibility include apologizing for the outcome (such as hurt feelings) rather than the act which caused the hurt (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010), claiming a lack of intent to do harm (Deutschmann, 2003), apologizing for part, but not all, of the offense (Kampf, 2009), attributing blame to external causes (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010), using “we” to collectively apologize for one’s individual transgression (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010), and using “sorry” in an ambiguous way to express regret without responsibility (Kampf, 2009).

Learners should be aware of the aforementioned pragmatic and linguistic choices when apologizing. However, learners may not encounter this breadth of research in EAP courses, especially because it is still quite common for instructors to design instructional materials based on their own or a textbook author’s intuitions (Nguyen, 2011). Thus, a research-based approach for teaching apologies is critical. This proposed lesson begins with instruction on the personal apology to activate learners’ schema and scaffold instruction for the less commonly taught and researched corporate and public apologies.

Learner Population and Learning Context

The lesson was designed for English language learners enrolled in a 15-week credit-bearing EAP Business Correspondence course in the United States which met twice weekly for two

hours per class. Learners were pursuing master's degrees in international policy, nuclear nonproliferation, or translation and localization management. Students were at least 21 years old and had attained at least an 80 (though often higher) on the Internet-based TOEFL exam. Although this lesson was designed for international graduate students, it would also be relevant to English language learning professionals, especially those working with U.S. counterparts in client-oriented or public-facing positions wherein an apology may be needed.

The Business Correspondence course was intended to hone students' professional communication skills, helping them compose polite emails and professional reports for the workplace. The pedagogical activities described in this article for crafting personal, corporate and public apologies were intended to enhance students' *pragmalinguistic* competence, or ability to use appropriate linguistic forms [to apologize], and their *sociopragmatic* competence, or ability to understand the social norms governing how to perform the [apology] speech act (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). The lesson spans one two-hour class period and was included as part of a three-week unit at the end of the course on face-threatening speech acts such as writing a polite declination to an invitation, customer claim denial, rejection (e.g., of a proposal or job offer), and negative news message (e.g., involving layoffs or pay cuts).

Goals

The primary goals of this lesson are to 1) help learners analyze and write pragmatically appropriate personal, corporate, and public apologies for a US audience and 2) broaden learners' vocabulary for apologizing. An overview of the activities for teaching the apology speech act is presented in Table 1.

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Table 1

Overview of Apology Activities

Apology Type	Activity	Purpose	Duration
Personal	Analyzing and revising apology song lyrics	Learners apply Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) apology taxonomy and other research insights to revise Justin Bieber's apology in the song "Sorry"	20 minutes
Personal	Analyzing and revising personal apology emails	Learners draw upon Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) apology taxonomy and other research insights to analyze and revise personal apology emails	25 minutes
Corporate	Analyzing corporate apologies	Learners apply research findings to analyze corporate apologies	20 minutes
Corporate	Corpus analysis	Learners analyze apology expressions from authentic apologies, brainstorm alternative expressions, compare their expressions with those that are corpus-based, and identify subtle nuances in word choice for apologizing	25 minutes

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Public	Analyzing and revising public apologies	Learners apply Boyd's (2011) framework and other research insights to evaluate and revise public apologies	30 minutes
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Teaching the Personal Apology

Analyzing and Revising Apology Song Lyrics

This activity uses song lyrics to introduce students to Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) apology taxonomy (one of the most widely cited apology taxonomies across languages and contexts) and helps learners apply research findings to enhance an apology's effectiveness. The instructor elicits from learners what they would say to apologize for a mistake (e.g., I'm sorry; It won't happen again). Learners classify these expressions according to Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) apology taxonomy: an expression of apology, acknowledgment of the blame, explanation, offer of repair, or promise of non-recurrence. Learners listen to Justin Bieber's "Sorry" song, follow the transcript, and classify his apology statements into one of Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) categories. Three strategies – an expression of apology, acknowledgement of the blame, and offer of repair – are used, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Apology Strategies in Justin Bieber's "Sorry" song

Apology Strategy	Song Lyrics	Revised Version	Rationale
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<p>Expression of Apology</p>	<p>“I’m sorry, yeah” “Sorry, oh” “Sorry”</p>	<p>I’m really, extremely, so, very, or terribly sorry for [X].</p>	<p>An expanded apology expression (Aijmer, 2019), specificity, agency, and intensification enhance the apology’s effectiveness (Heritage, Raymond, & Drew, 2019).</p>
<p>Acknowledgment of Blame</p>	<p>“I know you know that I made those mistakes maybe once or twice. By once or twice I mean maybe a couple a hundred times.”</p>	<p>Making those mistakes a couple hundred times was completely wrong.</p>	<p>Explicitly acknowledging fault enhances responsibility (Deutschmann, 2003).</p>
<p>Acknowledgment of Blame</p>	<p>“Yeah I know that I let you down.”</p>	<p>I deeply regret I let you down.</p>	<p>Expressing regret (Weeks, 2003) or remorse (Kimoga, 2010) makes the apology more apologetic.</p>

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Acknowledgment of Blame	“I’ll take every single piece of the blame if you want me to.”	I will take all the blame because I am completely at fault for my actions.	Conditionality weakens the apologetic tone (Murphy, 2019) and the apologizer’s acceptance of responsibility (Harrison & Allton, 2013).
Offer of Repair	“So let me, oh let me redeem, oh redeem, oh myself tonight.”	I will do anything to redeem myself and not hurt you anymore.	Concern for the offended party’s feelings (Haugh & Chang, 2019) and an offer of repair (Chang & Haugh, 2011) enhance the apology’s effectiveness.

Learners revise Justin Bieber’s lines to sound more apologetic. Comparing the lyrics with their revised versions, they discern the qualities that make an apology sound apologetic. The instructor shares research findings, such as how regret makes an apology effective (Weeks, 2003) or how conditionality weakens it (Murphy, 2019), to help learners craft pragmatically appropriate apologies.

Analyzing and Revising Personal Apology Emails

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Building on learners' familiarity with Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) apology taxonomy, the next activity involves analyzing and revising authentic personal apology emails (collected by the instructor) to enhance sincerity. Learners compare two personal apology emails for a similar transgression, such as a late response, identify which of Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) strategies are used, and determine which email sounds more apologetic.

In one email in which the difference in social distance and status was high between the sender and receiver, the apology is expressed twice as follows: "First, please accept my apology for taking so long to respond to your email" and "I am sincerely sorry about that." In this case, the sender apologizes for a late response to the receiver's reply to a request made for his professional expertise. The two males working in different industries had never met. In the comparison email between two close female colleagues of relatively equal status, the apology is expressed once as, "I'm sorry for the delay." The first email sounds more apologetic with words such as "sincerely" to modify "sorry" and more formal and deferential apology expressions such as "please accept...". As another example, this line from the first email expresses humility: "My first year as a faculty member has taught me some hard lessons about inbox management." The second email, by comparison, offers a matter-of-fact explanation without humility: "It's been busy wrapping up the semester, and I'm just getting to this now." Learners analyze how variables such as social distance and status may have impacted the writer's rhetorical choices. Sharing research such as the importance of humility (Boyd, 2011), intensification (Aijmer, 2019), and deference (Aijmer, 2019) helps learners strike an apologetic tone appropriate for the context in personal emails. After the analysis, learners work in teams of three to revise the less apologetic email and give and receive peer feedback on each other's revisions.

Teaching the Corporate Apology

Analyzing Corporate Apologies

Drawing upon learners' developing awareness of an apology's sincerity, the next activity involves the instructor guiding learners in analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of authentic corporate apologies from the Internet to promote noticing of pragmalinguistic features. One apology, issued by Southwest Airlines for questioning a passenger whether her biracial son was hers, reads, "We apologize if our interaction made this family uncomfortable – that is never our intention." The instructor asks what the effect would be if the apologizer had replaced the conditional "if" with "because" as follows: "We apologize because our interaction made this family uncomfortable..." The instructor highlights how the apology is weakened because it is issued for a potential outcome (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010), is framed in the conditional (Kampf, 2009), uses "interaction" to characterize the offense in vague terms (Murphy, 2019), and defends the apologist's innocent intentions (Deutschmann, 2003).

From this analysis students learn about the importance of tailoring apologies to their audience. The politest apology may not be ideal for all circumstances. For example, while specifically naming the transgression conveys sincerity (Deutschmann, 2003) and helps maintain rapport with the offended party (Page, 2014), restating the offense may tarnish a company's reputation by emphasizing its failures. That may be why few companies restate the offense. In fact, according to one study, twice the percentage of offenses in corporate apologies posted to Twitter were not restated as compared to those that were explicitly restated (Page, 2014). This discussion, with concomitant research findings, deepens students' understanding of pragmatic choices when apologizing.

Corpus Analysis

Like the previous activity which focused on the pragmalinguistic features of apologies, the corpus-based activities described in this section broaden learners' vocabulary for apologizing, which is important because even advanced learners tend to rely upon familiar expressions rather than experiment with more native-like ones (cf Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Osuka, 2017). Although these activities utilize corporate apologies as authentic input, personal or public apologies could also be used. In the following two activities, learners analyze apology expressions from authentic apologies, brainstorm other apology expressions to use, and compare the expressions they have generated with those that are corpus-based.

In the first activity, the instructor presents lines extracted from authentic apology emails and learners brainstorm alternate expressions. For example, learners brainstorm words other than "very" (such as "extremely") to modify "sorry" in "We are very sorry for all the inconvenience this has caused you." Likewise, learners brainstorm words other than "sincere" (such as "heartfelt") to modify "apology" in "I hope that you will accept my sincere apology." Such words need not be direct synonyms but should be contextually appropriate.

Learners then compare the words they brainstormed with those arising from a search of the Business Letter corpus, available at www.someya-net.com/concordancer. Either the instructor or learners can search the corpus for the words "sorry" and "apology" and list all the modifying terms to supplement the list they already generated.

Once learners have a list of apology expressions compiled, the instructor facilitates a discussion about subtle differences in word choice and shares research findings. For instance, students learn that "really" is the most common intensifier for "sorry" in American English

(Meier, 1997). While “really” conveys regret in American English, “very” enhances politeness (Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein, 1986). “Sorry” is the most used word for oral apologies in American (Beeching, 2019), British (Aijmer, 2019; Beeching, 2019; Deutschmann, 2003), and Canadian (Beeching, 2019) English. In terms of written apologies, “sorry” and “apologize” are the two most frequent words in corporate apologies posted to Twitter (Page, 2014). “Sorry” is the most common term used in personal email apologies, whereas “apologize” is used most frequently in professional emails (Hatipoglu, 2005).

In the second corpus-based activity, learners compare two apology expressions the instructor has selected from a corpus to understand how subtle differences in word choice may dramatically impact an apology’s effectiveness. The instructor draws upon research-based insights (listed in Appendix A) to select apology expressions which demonstrate contrasting pragmalinguistic features, such as an apology expressed in the active or passive voice. The instructor asks students which expression in the pair sounds more apologetic and why: 1) “[...] I apologize that mistakes were made...” 2) “I apologize that I made a mistake...” In this case, “I apologize that mistakes were made” in the passive voice does not sound as apologetic as “I apologize that I made a mistake” in the active voice. Students also compare apologies for “my outburst,” “this mistake,” and “the inconvenience” and determine that apologizing for “my outburst” with the pronoun “my” (Battistella, 2014) and a specific noun (Murphy, 2019) sounds the most apologetic. This type of approach in which learners infer the rules and then receive explicit research-based findings supports an explicit-inductive approach to teaching pragmatics.

Teaching the Public Apology

Analyzing and Revising Public Apologies

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The next noticing activity builds upon learners' research-based knowledge from studying personal and corporate apologies so they can apply research-based insights and Boyd's (2011) framework to evaluate the effectiveness of public apologies. The instructor introduces Boyd's (2011) framework: revelation (admission and explanation for a lapse); recognition (empathy); responsiveness (timeliness); responsibility (ownership for the offense); remorse (guilt and humility); restitution (repair); and reform (assurance of nonrecurrence). Boyd's (2011) framework was chosen because it is based on data from naturally occurring public apologies and builds upon frequently cited features in apology research. Learners apply this framework when analyzing public apologies, such as this one from Airbnb's CEO to customers: "Bias and discrimination have no place on Airbnb, and we have zero tolerance for them. Unfortunately, we have been slow to address these problems, and for this I am sorry. I take responsibility for any pain or frustration this has caused members of our community. We will not only make this right; we will work to set an example that other companies can follow." This apology falls short on many of Boyd's (2011) strategies. It has inadequate revelation, because the CEO apologizes for being slow, rather than the more serious problems of bias and discrimination. There is inadequate recognition, because "any" pain or frustration does not show adequate empathy. There is inadequate responsiveness with the admission that Airbnb has been slow to address these problems. The CEO appears to claim responsibility only for pain and frustration and not for bias and discrimination, resulting in inadequate responsibility. No guilt is mentioned, so there is inadequate remorse.

After analyzing the example public apology, the instructor then facilitates a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of various public apologies from the Internet and shares research findings. One such apology comes from Oscar Munoz, the former CEO of United Airlines, who

issued this apology in 2017 after a passenger was forcibly removed from an aircraft for failing to give up his seat: “Earlier this month, we broke that trust when a passenger was forcibly removed from one of our planes. We can never say we are sorry enough for what occurred, but we also know meaningful actions will speak louder than words.” The apology has several weaknesses: it uses the passive voice (Battistella, 2014), the collective “we” which disperses responsibility for the offense (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010), and an ambiguous expression of sorrow “for what occurred” which fails to target the main offense (Haugh & Chang, 2019) and could be interpreted as regret rather than an apology (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010). It also lacks concern for the offended party’s feelings (Haugh & Chang, 2019).

After this analysis, teams of three learners revise a different public apology to show empathy and responsibility for the transgression. Each team shares their revisions and a rationale for the changes made. Other learners and the instructor provide feedback on the strengths and areas for improvement in each team’s apology. Instructors may share their own revisions, such as this one of the United Airlines apology, “Earlier this month, we broke that trust when we forced a passenger from one of our planes. We can never say we are sorry enough for our actions, and we deeply apologize to Mr. ____ and to all our passengers whose trust we violated. We know meaningful actions will speak louder than words and we pledge to do better. I have put policies in place to ensure this never happens again.” Providing multiple possible revisions, from learners and the instructor, is consistent with the approach advocated by scholars that no “sole” model is used for instruction (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010).

Conclusion

There have been calls to expand research on authentic written academic and business communication (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010) and devote greater pedagogical attention to apology

letters and emails (Limberg, 2015). Although some studies do focus on written apologies (cf, Harrison & Allton, 2013 on email apologies; Page, 2014 on corporate Twitter apologies), they are relatively sparse. Much of the existing research focuses on oral apologies (cf Aijmer, 2019; Haugh & Chang, 2019; Heritage, Raymond, & Drew, 2019) or apologies collected via discourse completion tasks intended to emulate oral apologies (cf Barron, 2019 on German learners' apologies; Kanik, 2017 on L1 and L2 English speaking teachers' apologies). Thus, the research-based activities outlined in this article for teaching the written apology are valuable for expanding the scope of pragmatics instruction, adding to the body of research on written pragmatics which has been relatively under-represented (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010).

The pedagogical activities described in this article are not without limitations, however. First, it can be difficult for some learners to critique apologies without any formal instruction. Even though the explicit-inductive approach (in which learners infer pragmatics rules and then receive explicit research-based findings) is linked to improved learning outcomes (Glaser, 2014; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019), it may be helpful for learners to review research about apologies *before* they critique professional apologies, as that may enable them to make more meaningful contributions to the discussion. Moreover, when analyzing the apologies, learners could benefit from considerable instructor scaffolding. That is, rather than the instructor asking learners broad, open-ended questions such as, "How can the apology be improved?", the instructor may ask more focused questions such as, "How does the apologist name the transgression? Is the transgression named explicitly or referred to in generic terms?" Another challenge for some learners may be the difficulty of working with two apology taxonomies in a single lesson, so instructors may spread the instruction on personal, corporate, and public apologies over multiple class periods. In addition, it may be difficult for learners to analyze emails when they are neither

the sender nor recipient. This difficulty could extend to the instructor if the instructor lacks information about contextual variables such as status and social distance affecting the way an apology is crafted. Similarly, learners with little professional experience may find it difficult to analyze and revise apologies written by CEOs or public figures. Thus, it may be easier for learners to work with their own emails because they are intimately familiar with the context. If learners' lack of professional experience restricts them to coursework related emails, studies such as Cheng (2017) may be incorporated for improving learners' academic emails.

This lesson on the written personal, corporate, and public apology aims to simulate real-world communication experiences which improve learners' pragmatic competence (Taguchi & Kim, 2018), answering the call for greater pedagogical attention to culture-specific writing genres (cf Chen, 2015; Nguyen, Do, & Nguyen, 2015).

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Appendix

Research-Based Apology Characteristics

What makes an apology effective?

Expression of apology (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981)

Recognition of the offense (Deutschmann, 2003)

Admission and explanation for a lapse (Boyd, 2011)

Responsibility for the action (Boyd, 2011; Deutschmann, 2003)

Explicit acknowledgement of fault (Deutschmann, 2003)

Regret (Deutschmann, 2003; Weeks, 2003)

Remorse (Boyd, 2011; Exline, Lise & Holeman, 2007; Kimoga, 2010)

Empathy (Boyd, 2011) / Concern for the offended party's feelings (Haugh & Chang, 2019)

Timeliness (Boyd, 2011)

Offer of repair (Boyd, 2011; Chang & Haugh, 2011)

Reform / Assurance of nonrecurrence (Boyd, 2011)

An apology expressed in the present tense (Kampf, 2009)

An expanded apology expression (Aijmer, 2019)

Formal and deferential language (Aijmer, 2019)

Intensification (Heritage, Raymond, & Drew, 2019)

Specificity in naming the transgression (Deutschmann, 2003; Murphy, 2019) *

An apology expressed in the active voice with the pronoun “I” (Haugh & Chang, 2019)

The pronoun “my” in front of the transgression (Battistella, 2014)

An apology which includes the affected parties’ names (Battistella, 2014)

What detracts from an apology’s effectiveness?

Lack of remorse (Gruber, 2011)

Emphasis on a lack of intent to do harm (Deutschmann, 2003)

Blame attributed to external causes (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010)

An apology for the outcome (such as hurt feelings) rather than the act which caused the hurt (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010)

An apology for the tone rather than the content (Kampf, 2009)

An apology for part, but not all, of the offense (Kampf, 2009)

A desire or promise to apologize rather than an actual apology (Kampf, 2009)

Use of “sorry” in an ambiguous way to express regret without responsibility (Kampf, 2009)

Vague words to characterize the offense (Murphy, 2019)

Use of “but” after an admission of wrongdoing (Battistella, 2014)

Use of a modal to express a hypothetical, rather than actual, transgression (Battistella, 2014)

An apology expressed in the passive voice (Battistella, 2014)

Omission or blurring of the agent (Kampf, 2009)

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Use of the conditional in the apology (Murphy, 2019)

Use of the pronoun “we” to collectively apologize for one’s individual transgression (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish, 2010)

** Restating the offense in corporate apologies may tarnish the company’s reputation (Page, 2014)*