Do Apologies in E-mails Follow Spoken or Written Norms?: Some Examples from British English

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Abstract. Advances in technology, easy access and efficiency have firmly established e-mailing as an important medium of communication in the last few decades. Nowadays, all over the world, especially in educational organisations, the medium has started to rapidly replace the more traditional forms of communication such as mailed letters and telephone conversations. Despite their important role in our lives, however, very little is known about the language used in e-messages. Experts in the area argue that more research is needed because the rules of interaction suitable for spoken and written language may not be valid for the new medium. In an attempt to contribute to this particular area of linguistics, the current paper, first, examines the form and type of the apologies used in e-mail messages and then compares and contrasts them with the attributes of the remedial acts employed in spoken and written language.

The corpus studied in the research consisted of 126 e-mail messages which were collected between January 2002 and March 2004. The data gathered were first transcribed in CHAT format and the apologies used in e-mails were coded according to an adaptation of the system developed by Cohen and Olshtain (1981). The analyses of the data included a frequency count of apologies and apology types and syntactic-semantic analyses.

Findings from the study show that e-mail apologies have some characteristics of written, some of spoken and some new emergent qualities that can be used to differentiate them from apologies used in other modalities.

Introduction

Historically, electronic messaging has emerged as a route of communicating both with a number of individuals simultaneously or with a specific person. The advances in technology, easy access, low cost and efficiency have firmly established it as an important medium of communication in the last few decades. Nowadays, especially in educational organisations all over the world, the medium has become increasingly important. Mailed letters and telephone conversations have been quickly replaced by e-mail messages (Gains, 1999; Louhiala-Salminen, 1996), and most of the world's universities not only have an access to the international internet system but they have also developed their own in-house electronic mail systems both for national and intra-institutional communications (Louhiala-Salminen, 1996).

Despite the widespread use of electronic communication and its important role in our lives today, very little is, in fact, known about the effects of the technological revolution on the actual communication processes and the language used during this form of interaction. Baron (1998a:133), among other researchers, argues that the rules of interaction that were valid in earlier times when members of literate societies had only two modes of communication with one another (i.e., 'either face-to-face through the immediacy of speech or at a distance through more temporally or geographically remote writing') cannot accommodate the requirements of the new modes of communication anymore. According to Baron, with the developments in technology, new communicative modalities that blend the presuppositions of spoken and written language have been made possible. Telephone conversations, for instance, allow users to speak to their interlocutors without seeing them, and for a growing number of us, the most useful telecommunication device – the electronic mail – even though written, conveys messages to the receivers in near-real time (Baron, 1998a, b).

Since a growing proportion of our linguistic communication is now achieved using electronic mails, it becomes progressively more important for us to comprehend the nature of this new medium. To be able to discuss the features of language used in e-mails, however, we should compare and contrast them with well known, well defined and well tested characteristics of the spoken and written language (Biber, 1986).

One area related to spoken and written English that has been researched extensively both by linguists and ESL/EFL practitioners (i.e., teachers and teaching material writers) since 1960s is the employment of different conventionalised linguistic formulae in social interaction. Various studies have compared and contrasted the qualitative and quantitative features of speech acts such as apologies, compliments, greetings, requests and thanks in spoken and written language. Among these *apologies* has received a special interest in relation to British English since, according to some researchers, this speech act is the way British oil society (e.g., Aijmer, 1996; Hatipoğlu, 2003; Intachakra, 2001; Marquez Reiter, 2000; Owen, 1983; Tanaka et al., 2000). Three recent studies which compared the realisation patterns of apologies in British English with Canadian English and Japanese (Tanaka et al., 2000), Thai (Intachakra, 2001), and Uruguayan

Spanish (Marquez Reiter, 2000) report similar conclusions in relation to importance of apologies in British culture. They all agree that apologies are used frequently in British culture, and that they have an extra function in this society besides being a compensatory function for an offence. Both Marquez Reiter (2000) and Tanaka et al. (2000), for example, found that British people apologised a lot even before doing anything wrong or when they knew that they were not responsible for the problem. Marquez Reiter (2000:44) writes that 'one cannot help but notice that native speakers of British English appear to have a habit of apologising in advance before they even bump into someone or brush against them'; while Tanaka et al. (2000:87-88) point out to the fact that even 'Japanese respondents actually apologised very much *less* frequently' than British respondents when the complaining person was responsible for the problem. On the other hand, Intachakra (2001:190) after explaining that apologies in Thai are not as recurrent as in British English, concludes that in cultures such as British culture 'people have more propensity to use apologies, because they view social frictions as a normal part of everyday life, and apologies play an essential role in the remedial process'.

Knowing the importance of the speech act of apology in British culture, the sheer volume of e-mail traffic in English due to the fact that the number of people who speak at least 'some' English approaches a billion, and the possible results of the clash of expectations and practices in relation to some communication strategies, it was decided to examine the rules of apologising emerging in e-mails and to compare and contrast them with the rules of apologising in spoken and written English. More specifically, answers for the following research questions will be sought:

1) Do apologies utilised in e-mails share any important attributes with apologies used in spoken and written English?

2) Do apologies in e-mails have properties that are unlike those typifying spoken and written remedial acts?

3) Do factors such as the number of interlocutors and the level of personal involvement affect the number and types of apologies used in e-mails?

It is hoped that answering these questions will not only help us explain the reasons for some failures in e-mail communication but will also assist us in monitoring and updating our knowledge of the standards and expectations in the use of redressive acts in spoken and written language (Baron, 1997, 1998a; Moran & Hawisher, 1998). It is also believed that the results of this study will facilitate EFL/ESL teachers and material writers in creating both socioculturally acceptable and grammatically appropriate material for EFL/ESL learners who want to learn and use spoken and written English as well as 'electronic' English (Collot & Belmore, 1996).

Short History of E-mails

The e-mail as it is known today is the result of advances in a number of interrelated fields associated with America's national defence services in the 1960s and 1970s. The initial goal of the researchers at the time was to find ways to make use of computers for the transmission of information in case of a nuclear attack. In the following two decades, Hiltz and Turoff (1993) worked on the development of systems of computer-based conferencing that could be utilised not only for decision making but also for broader group discussion and message-sharing. The emergence of the computer Bulletin-Board Systems (BBSs), in the late 1970s, was one of the results of Hiltz and Turoff's (1993) work. The first BBSs had a sole function: to build an on-line community, disseminating and exchanging information of various sorts. That is, receivers of the messages sent by different users were public lists (i.e., listservs). With time, BBSs' functions have broadened and users have been given the opportunity to post their messages not only to groups of people on defined lists but also to specific recipients.

This expansive area of information transmission via computers has come to be known as Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) (Baron, 1998a, b; Sabourin & Lamarche, 1994; Herring, 1996). Baron (1998a:143) specifies the following five types of CMC and states that the basis for grouping various exchanges is the relationship between the sender and the receiver: (1) posting (e.g., web page), (2) joint composition (e.g., collaborative papers), (3) anonymous dialogue (e.g., chat groups), (4) one-to-many dialogue (e.g., listservs, computer conferencing) and (5) one-to-one dialogue (e.g., e-mails). Due to the space limitations and the type of data examined in the study, we will focus on the last two CMCs.

In one-to-one and one-to-many dialogues both the sender and the receiver(s) of the e-mail are identified. As may be deduced from the name, in **one-to-one dialogue** there is one author and one reader, and the sender of the message is acquainted with the receiver either personally or by name, position or reputation. In **one-to-many dialogue**, on the other hand, there are more than one identified interlocutors and there is a chance that the sender of the message may not know all of the individuals included in the list. Hence, they usually begin with *Dear all/everybody* and even with *Dear list.* Research shows that both of these CMCs occupy a central role in academic discourse (Baron, 1998a).

The Speech Act of Apology

Apologies are linguistic formulae that serve to create and maintain 'the public order' (Goffman 1971). They are the linguistic means a speaker/writer (S/R) can use to *remedy* and/or *fix* the world after an offensive act for which the S/R feels responsible and for which others who witness the S/R also feel that s/he is responsible has taken place. In other words, the function of the 'remedial interchange' is to change the potential meaning of an act, 'transforming what could be seen as offensive into what can be seen as acceptable' (Goffman, 1971:139).

Olshtain and Cohen (1991) state that in every culture there are two types of expression that can fulfil the function of apology. The first group consists of highly conventional or routinized forms that are recognised by everybody, that are used in a wide variety of situations and that can be easily translated into other languages (e.g., *sorry* in English). The

second group, on the other hand, includes more specific expressions that are drawn upon in circumstances in which the speaker has to carefully consider factors such as the appropriateness of the level of politeness, as well as the intensity of self humiliation and the degree of solidarity. Therefore, after conducting a series of studies with a large number of subjects from eight different countries, Cohen and Olshtain proposed a classification for apologies consisting of five main strategies and many sub-strategies (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981, 1985, 1993, 1994; Olshtain 1983, 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983, 1990, 1991). Cohen and Olshtain claim that the five major formulae that make up the apology speech act set are available to speakers across languages. Nonetheless, the frequency with which each strategy is utilised and the regularity with which some formulae are combined with each other differ from one society to another (Olshtain 1983). The classification proposed by Cohen and Olshtain is the following:

> **A: An explicit expression of apology** *(E.g., I apologise, I'm sorry, Excuse me/ Forgive me)*
> **B: An explanation or account** *(E.g., The traffic was horrible)*
> **C: An acknowledgement of responsibility** *(E.g., It's my fault/my mistake, I didn't see you, You are right to be angry, I didn't mean to, I feel awful about it)*
> **D: An offer of repair** *(E.g., I'll pay for it)*
> **F: A promise of forbearance** *(E.g., It won't happen again)*

Cohen and Olshtain state that strategies **A** and **C** are general, while the other three strategies are situation specific and 'semantically reflect the content of the situation' (Olshtain, 1989:157). Since the aim of the current study is to present a detailed analysis of the apologies used in e-mails and since studies on apologies revealed that category **A** is the most frequently employed apology strategy in British English it was decided to focus on the first of the redressive acts listed by Cohen and Olshtain, i.e., ***An explicit expression of apology (A)***. *An explicit expression of apology* is described as a strategy that can be used in any situation (Olshtain, 1983). Redressive acts belonging to this group are easily identifiable since they are formulaic, routinized expressions containing explicit performative verbs such as ***apologise, excuse, forgive, pardon*** or ***sorry***.

Strategy A, has three sub-categories and these have different levels of formality and are used in different proportions in spoken and written English. The most formal one of the three sub-classes in English is the ***Offer of apology*** **(A1)** which incorporates the words ***apology, apologies, apologise*** either alone or with preceding and/or following modifiers. Aijmer (1996), Hatipoğlu (2003), Marquez Reiter (2000) and Owen (1983:63) point out that A1 is rare in spoken British English and 'it is used when either formality or absolute unambiguity is required'. Owen (1983) who examined data coming from naturally occurring tape recorded conversations reports that only two of the apologies in his corpus belonged to the A1 sub-group; and according to him, even these were not straightforward examples of A1 in spoken language because the first one was utilised as a part of a lengthy account and the second one at the beginning of a lecture. Thus, Owen (1983) argues that event though spoken, A1

apologies in these situations formed a part of a monologue which is a more natural form of interaction in writing than in speech. Hatipoğlu (2003) examined the apology strategies used by British university students to interlocutors with higher (i.e., their university lecturers), lower (i.e., their younger siblings) and equal (i.e., their classmates) status and found that 71.4% (100 out of 140) of A1 apologies in her corpus were used in situations in which students had to apologise to their lecturers. This result led her to suggest that British university students see A1 strategy as more appropriate to use in situations that are more formal.

The second A sub-strategy, *An expression of regret* (A2) is considered to be the least formal one of the three. The key word in these expressions is ***sorry*** and whether it is used alone or with intensifiers depends on the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic framework within which it is used (Aijmer, 1996). Studies on British English (Hatipoğlu, 2003; Intachakra, 2001; Marquez Reiter, 2000) as well as other Englishes (American, New Zealand and Canadian) showed that A2 is the core of the apologies in English. It is the most frequently used strategy overall and especially in studies on spoken English conducted so far it formed at least 70% of the collected apologies. According to Aijmer (1996:84), the 'frequency of *I'm sorry* (and its variant *sorry*) indicates that the phrase has developed into a general purpose or unmarked routine'. She states that this expression is used more or less automatically in many situations. Aijmer (1996) asserts that the centrality of *I'm sorry* as an apology in English is demonstrated by the fact that parents explicitly teach their children to apologise by means of prompts like *say sorry*, *can you say sorry* etc. According to Borkin and Reinhart (1978:60), A2 is a widely used remedy since

> *I'm sorry* is basically an expression of dismay or regret about a state of affairs viewed or portrayed as unfortunate by the speaker. It is not necessarily tied to occasions in which the regrettable state of affairs is the responsibility of the speaker; it is not necessarily tied to situations in which the regrettable state of affairs adversely affects the addressee; and it is not necessarily tied to situations in which there has been, or might be, an infraction of a social norm.

The level of formality of the last sub-strategy *Request for forgiveness* (A3) (i.e., *Excuse/Forgive/Ignore/Pardon me)* is believed to be between A1 and A2. There were no examples of A3 apologies in Owen's (1983) spoken corpus and Hatipoğlu (2003) reports that only 2% of the apologies in her discourse completion task (DCT) and role-play data belonged to this sub-category. One of the reasons why A3 is not employed as often as A2, according to Borkin and Reinhart (1978:60), is the fact that that *Excuse me*, is 'only appropriate when a social rule has been broken or is about to be broken, and when the speaker views or portrays himself as responsible for this breach'. Borkin and Reinhart's claim was supported by Aijmer (1996) who found only 10 examples of ***'excuse me'*** in the London Luton Corpus and they were used to apologise for minor offences involving social etiquette.

Methodology

Data

The data used in this study consisted of 126 e-mail messages which were collected between January 2002 and March 2004. The initial criterion for gathering the e-mails was the fact that each of them included a remedial expression. Later, the collected e-mails were divided into two main groups using Baron's (1998a) 'sender-receiver relationship' norm discussed in Section 2. There were 56 e-mails in the **one-to-one dialogue group (G1)** and they were sent by 44 different writers to 18 interlocutors. The second, **one-to-many dialogue group (G2)** consisted of 78 electronic messages. The size of the groups of receivers varied from five members of a highly specialised group to all members of staff at the university. After closer examination of the senders and the types of messages in G2, however, it was decided to further divide G2 into two sub-groups depending on the level of personal involvement of the writer of the message with the presented apology. There were 46 messages in the first sub-set (G21) and the sender of the messages was apologising for his/her own mistake. The second sub-group (G22) comprised 32 more 'professional' e-mails. The writers of these remedial acts were apologising either for an offence that is 'required' by their post (e.g., as a head of school) or for an offence committed by a group of people for whom the writer acted as a spokesperson (e.g., as a member of IT services or as a member of the committee organising a conference). Since the data for the study were gathered mainly from a university's in-house electronic mail system 55 of the senders of the messages in G2 were members of the university staff and 15 of the e-mails including apologies were sent from other institutions. Where examples of the e-mail data are given in the text, all original typographical errors have been retained, but for reasons of anonymity, the names of the organisations are indicated by [**] and personal names are indicated by [N].

Data Analysis

The collected data were first transcribed in CHAT format. Participants' apology expressions were coded according to the adapted system developed by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) described above. The main categories of analysis were as follows: *A1: An offer of apology, A2: An expression of regret* and *A3: Request for forgiveness.* To be able to do calculations in CLAN, the CLAN Speech Act Coding Scheme (Ninio et al., 1994) was used as a basis. Some codes were redefined, and others were replaced by new ones in order to make the scheme more suitable for its particular context and purpose. The analyses included a frequency count of apologies and apology types and syntactic-semantic analyses.

To find the frequency of the examined formulae, the occurrence of each sub-strategy was counted. In remedial utterances such as the one given in Example 1, for instance, two occurrences of the sub-strategy *A2* were recorded.

Example 1

I'm really sorry about the mix-up today. Things are still fairly hectic. Let's meet tomorrow at 2 and sorry again.

In addition, the data were analysed for frequency of intensifiers. As shown in Example 2, there was a specific code for each bare or intensified apology (see Hatipoğlu, 2003 for the full coding manual).

Example 2

1. I am sorry.	A2	(bare apology)
2. I am very sorry.	A2V	(intensified apology)
3. I am really really sorry.	A2RR	(intensified apology)

So, the A2 expressions used in Example 1 were listed as two different forms of the expression of regret. Later, statistical analyses were employed to determine whether or not some of the observed differences between the apologies used in the one-to-one and one-to-many groups had statistical values.

Results and Discussions

Quantitative Analysis

When we examine the data presented in Table 1, we see that there are similarities and differences in the distribution of the apology strategies between the three groups (i.e., G1, G21 and G22). The similarity between the groups is that in all of them A3 was very rarely employed. In one-to-one letters, there were only two examples including the verb *excuse me* as in Example 3. And in G21, there was only one example in which another verb – *ignore* - belonging to A3 was used (see Example 4). In all of these e-mails, A3 verbs were preceded by the word '*please*', which is argued to make the utterances more polite, and as a result the apologies more effective and more acceptable. The fact that people writing e-mails would aim at finding more polite but widely accepted formulae when compared with those employing spoken language, could be explained with the lack of other factors such as the intonation and the facial expression, which could facilitate apologisers during a face-to-face interaction. The success of the e-mail writer depends on the strength of the words included in the written message, therefore, they employ strategies that speakers may not need.

Example 3

Dear N1,
Please excuse me next Tuesday, I shall not be able to come to the lectures as my mother's brother died this week and we have the family funeral on that day. Could you give N2 any notes for me, and she can tell me the homework.
Thank you, N3

Example 4

My sincere apologies to the list. I have committed the dreadful crime of sending to the whole list a message intended only for the list owner. **Please ignore it**. N

The prominent differences between the groups, on the other hand, were related to the utilisation of the other two apology strategies - A1 and A2. G1 and G22 showed an interesting cross-pattern related to the use of these remedial categories. In the one-to-one group (i.e., G1), which is defined as the group including personal e-mails

intended for only one receiver, A2 apologies formed 85.7% of the corpus and only one-tenth of the apologies included the performative verb *apologise* or the noun *apologies* and their derivatives. So, the distribution of the apologies in G1 is similar to the one encountered and reported by researchers examining spoken English. A1 apologies are reserved for more formal situations, and the fact that only 7 of the 63 apologies in G1 belonged to A1 could be interpreted as a support for the experts arguing that the language in e-mails when compared with traditional writing is less formal (Spears & Lea, 1992).

Table 1. Use of A sub-strategies in e-mails with different aims

| | One-to-one group (G1) | | One-to-many group (G2) | | | |
| | | | G21 | | G22 | |
	N	%	N	%	N	%
A1	7	11.1	24	52.2	31	96.9
A2	54	85.7	21	45.6	1	3.1
A3	2	3.2	1	2.2	0	0
TOT	**63**	**100**	**46**	**100**	**32**	**100**

Conversely, in G22 (i.e., professional e-mails) all but one of the redressive acts were from category A1. This may lead us to believe that their writers viewed these e-mails as business letters whose aim was to restore the distorted balance between interlocutors than to express the feelings and beliefs of authors just as Gimenez (2000) as well as Seldon (2004:114) in her *Collins Complete Guide Letter Writing* handbook warn writers preparing to compose business letters:

> 'The content and construction of business letters are, and should be quite different from personal correspondence. The biggest difference between social and professional letters will be the tone. Even if you know the recipient of a business letter personally, you should still aim to be informative and objective as possible. In all business letters the tone should be formal'

And the widely accepted formal way of apologising, as we mentioned in Section 3, is to use the strategy *An offer of apology* (e.g., *I apologise*). The same strategy is also reserved, according to Olshtain (1983) and Owen (1983), for situations in which absolute unambiguity is required. This could explain the reluctance of G22 e-mails' writers, who act as representatives of a group or as holders of specific position, to use the other two strategies which could have broader interpretations. It can also be argued that as one of the group the authors of G22 e-mails do not feel that they have the freedom that G1, or even G21, writers have. As a result the apology messages in G22 have the most predictable and most homogeneous features when compared with the other two groups (i.e., 31 of the 32 e-mails in this group included an offer of apology).

Finally, in the semi-professional e-mails, similarly to G22, A1 (52.2%) strategies were employed more often than the A2 (45.6%) strategies but it seemed as if writers viewed both of these apology classes as nearly equally appropriate for e-mails with this register. Therefore, in most of the situations they used them interchangeably or sometimes together in the same message as in Example 5 given below. The combination of A1 and A2 in this e-mail seems in harmony with the double function of this type of messages, i.e., personal apology sent to a list. The first redressive act '*Apologies to those of you who have received this more than once*' fulfils the formality requirement. That is, the author sends an apology to a group of people some of whom s/he may not even know. Conversely, the second remedial strategy (i.e., *I have had some difficulties with the email this morning because we have just started using the new system, really sorry*), with the personal pronoun '*I*' and the A2 strategy '*really sorry*' shows the level of personal involvement of the author. The choice of strategy A2 instead of strategy A1 in the second part of the message is important for closing the distance between the writer and the receivers of the e-mail created by the formal 'apologies', in the first part of the message. In short, with this two-sided e-mail the writer acknowledges that the problem that the receivers of the message may encounter (e.g., duplicate e-mails in their personal folders) is partially (if not fully) caused by the sender of the message.

> **Example 5**
> **Apologies** to those of you who have received this more than once. I have had some difficulties with the email this morning because we have just started using the new system, **really sorry**. N

By looking at the quantitative analysis of the e-mail data, our first conclusion could be similar to that of Yates (1996:46) who claims that 'as with both written and spoken discourse, computer mediated communication is affected by the numerous social structural and social situational factors which surround and define the communication taking place'.

The quantitative scrutiny of the data gives us the general picture which, although very valuable, may not always reveal all of the important details related to these apology strategies (Suszczynska, 1999). In the following section, in order to build up a more inclusive picture of the e-mail apologies, the corpus will be examined qualitatively. Due to the space limitations, nonetheless, the analysis will concentrate only on the content (Section 5.2.1) and form (5.2.2) of redressive acts that have been utilised most consistently in the three groups, i.e., *An offer of apology (A1)*.

Qualitative Analysis of A1 Apologies

Content

As it was explained in Section 3, a speaker/writer, who decides to employ the A1 redressive act, can express his/her apologies either using the verb (i.e., apologise) or by means of the singular or plural noun form **apology, apologies**. The examination of A1 apologies in G1, G21 and G22 showed that in all groups the noun form is preferred over the verb form, and in all of the groups bare forms are used more frequently than the modified forms (see Table 2).

Table 2. Intensifiers used with An Offer of Apology (A1)

Code	Expression	G1 N	G1 %	G21 N	G21 %	G22 N	G22 %
A1	I apologise	1	14.3	2	9	6	19.4
A1WP	Please let me apologise			1	4		
A1A	Apologies	5	71.4	18	75	25	80.6
A1AM	Many apologies			1	4		
A1AS	Sincere apologies			1	4		
A1PAS	Please accept my sincere apologies			1	4		
A1AC	Can I present my apologies	1	14.3				
TOTAL		7	100	24	100	31	100

According to Collot and Belmore (1996), the personal involvement of the sender in crafting the messages is revealed in the number of first and second personal and possessive pronouns included in the message. They state that the more personal and possessive pronouns are included in the message, the more involved the writers are. Moreover, they argue that pronouns from these categories are more frequently used in oral interactions than in written communications. The fact that the writers of the e-mails in our corpus used more nominal A1 redressive acts than verbal ones is important because when the verb form of A1 is used then it has to be preceded by a personal pronoun such as in Example 6, otherwise the expression becomes ungrammatical (e.g., *apologise). That is, the syntactic constraints of English force the users of the verb based A1 apologies to make statements including personal pronouns that, in turn, are interpreted as more personal. With the nominal form, however, the inclusion of personal or possessive pronouns is not a must, and the apologiser is allowed to remain unidentified but s/he is still able to fulfil his/her goal, i.e., to offer an apology and to remedy the situation (see Example 7).

Example 6
Hi N1,
I am writing to you to let you know that I have decided to change the subject of my coursework as I feel that the topic was too complex for me to be able to cover in such a short amount of time.
I apologise for any inconvenience I may have caused you but I am no longer seeking a N2 student to interview. Thank you for your help on this matter. N3

Example 7
Looking forward to next week's lecture, **apologies** again for not having been able to attend this week. N

Interestingly this tendency (i.e., to use nominal apologies) is valid across all groups even though the level of personal intimacy between the writer and the receiver changes. In G1, there were seven remedial acts belonging to class A1 and all of them but one, were in a noun form. Similarly, in G21, 21 of the 24, and in G22, 25 of the 31 A1 apologies were in nominal form.

The trend revealed in e-mail messages is in complete contrast to the tendency found in spoken British English studies. In her study, Hatipoğlu (2003) examined apologies coming from two sources: role-plays and DCT. That is, two data gathering techniques in which informants have to imagine themselves in specific contexts and to perform in front of the camera, or as with the DCT to imagine themselves in a scene and to write down what the appropriate remedial act in these circumstances would be. In neither of these data sets were there more than a few examples of nominal A1 apologies and they were employed in formal situations in which university students had to apologise to their lecturers. The observed phenomenon in e-mails can be explained by reference to Baron's *'paper trail paradox'*. She states that 'although we generally treat e-mail as if it were ephemeral (like speech), it is still physically writing' (Baron, 1998a:156). That is, even when they know that they are writing to their friends, e-mail senders still obey the rules of the written language taught to them in class.

Another criterion that is often used to differentiate spoken from written apologies is the presence or absence of modifiers. Writers who prepare to compose apology letters are advised in handbooks to bear in mind that the 'letter should always be as short as possible and to the point, and that trying to incorporate further excuses simply makes you look pathetic and might even make the situation worse' (Seldon, 2004:78-79). While in spoken language, apologies stripped of their intensifiers do not carry the same value as intensified apologies. Vollmer and Olshtain (1989:213) maintain that intensifiers have the effect of emphasising speaker's feelings, empathy and concern for the victim of the offence committed by them. That is, the more intensifiers speakers use the more efficient the apology is considered in spoken language.

The analysis of the A1 apologies in G1, G21 and G22, showed that the majority of the e-mails in all of the groups were used without intensifiers (57 out of 62 or 92%) and the employed modifiers were not the ones most regularly encountered in spoken language (i.e., auxiliary verbs *do* and *must*) (see Table 2). Hatipoğlu (2003) reports, for example, that 81% of the modified apologies in her A1 group were intensified either by *do* or *must* as in *I do/must apologise.* In contrast to her DCT and role play data, none of the A1 apologies in the e-mail corpus was modified by *do* and *must*. The modifiers employed in the electronic messages included the words *many* and *sincere* as well as the expressions *Please accept my…* , *Please let me….* and *Can I present …* As indicated above, however, the number of modified apologies in the e-mail data was very low (only 5 out of 62).

Format

With the analysis of the form of the A1 remedial acts in the corpus, important features of e-mail apologies differentiating them from spoken and written redressive strategies emerge. It appears that new apology formulae, specially tailored for electronic communication have been introduced into English. In this article we present two of these 'e-mail' specific scenarios and discuss the attributes of apology expression associated with them.

The first scenario arises from the fact that the number of internet users and the purposes for which the e-mails are utilised increases every day. As a result of these developments, one of the most common problems all e-mail users face is being 'over quota'. If this happens then there is a danger that they will not be able to receive and view new messages. Because e-mail senders are aware of this danger the following e-mail apologies have been created first, to apologise but maybe also to warn the receivers (Example 8):

> **Example 8**
> a. Apologies for any duplicate e-mails/multiple posting
> b. Apologies if N has already sent this ….
> c. (With) apologies for (any) cross-posting

The second 'problem' that comes with the new technology is that sometimes e-mail users are sent information that has nothing to do with them. Especially in universities' in-house electronic mail systems, where different mailing lists overlap, frequently people receive mails which are not related to them at all. This problem, though possible, would have been much rarer with regular mails. Therefore, the following apology formulae could be said to be specifically designed for solving problems created by the new medium of communication:

> **Example 9**
> a. Apologies if this does not concern you/ this e-mail is not relevant to you
> b. With apologies in advance if this 'broadcast' e-mail is irrelevant to you
> c. Apologies to those not involved
> d. N members – apologies to others
> e. To all N – with apologies to N

The two types of formulae presented above are used in three fixed positions in e-mails – at the very beginning (Example 10) or at the very end of the message (Example 11), or very rarely after the opening/first line (Example 11). When compared with the places of apologies in various spoken and written redressive messages, it seems as if that the e-mail A1 apologies have the most predictable place of appearance of all.

> **Example 10**
> **Apologies for cross-posting.**
> The Department of Languages at the [**] University is offering a PhD studentship in language learning, starting in October. Details are at [**] and the deadline for applications is 21 May.
> Please alert potential applicants to this opportunity.
> Thanks and best wishes, N

Example 11
Dear Colleagues
I have removed all [**] student users who were listed on N up until 09:30 this morning, and then registered all [**] students on N2 that were registered on ISIS on 30 September 2002. All such students can access the system by using the user-ids and passwords that were issued to them for logging on to the network by ITS.
….
Apologies to all those who have no interest in these matters.
Regards
N

Example 12
Call for Papers: Fall meeting of [**] at [**] (**With apologies for cross-posting**.)
N1 at the 46th Annual N2; November 4-7, 2004; [**]
Topic: "Language Variation and Change in the N3"
Papers dealing with varieties of English or other languages spoken in the N3 will be considered. Presentations may be based in …..
Many thanks,
N4

These new remedial strategies also have semi-fixed structures. If we divide the A1 nominal apologies in the corpus into *main* (i.e., the part including the noun *apologies*) and *explanatory* parts we see that a limited and predictable number of formulae emerge (see Example 13).

> **Example 13**

$$(\text{WITH}) \quad \text{APOLOGIES} \quad \Big| \quad \text{MODIFIERS} \quad \Big| \quad \begin{bmatrix} +\text{FOR}+\text{NP} \\ +\text{TO}+\text{NP} \\ +\text{IF}+\text{S} \end{bmatrix}$$

When the main part is at the beginning of the redressive strategy (i.e., MAIN PART + EXPLANATORY PART), the bare nominal A1 (i.e., *apologies*) can appear alone (as in Examples 8a-b, 9a, c, 10 and 11) or it can be modified. In our corpus, *apologies* is pre-modified by the preposition *with* (as in Examples 8c, 9b and 12) and post-modified by phrases such as *in advance* (as in Example 9b). Three possible explanatory parts follow the main redressive strategy in these expressions: prepositional phrases beginning with *for* and *to* as in Examples 8a, c, and 9c; and *if-clauses* as in Examples 8b and 9a.

A slightly different arrangement of the apology expression is observed in the context in which the writer knows that the sent message may not be relevant to all of the recipients (see Examples 9d and 9e). To avoid the waste of time on the part of the reader, the author of the message begins the e-mail by specifying the relevant audience (e.g. 9a. *N members*, 9b. *To all N*) and then apologises to the rest of the people who will receive the e-mail but are not interested in the topic. The apology part of these expressions has identical form with the ones discussed in Example 13. These formulae were more frequently used in G21 and G22 apologies but they were also encountered in e-mails defined as personal (i.e., in G1). It seems as if new rules of apologising are emerging in English together with the spread of the electronic communication in our lives. As Baron (1998a) argues maybe as we have conventions of

interaction in spoken and written language we will have to very soon develop (most probably by trial and error) and start using new discourse protocols that work best in the new communicative modality.

Conclusion

The aim of the project was to discover, and then to compare and contrast, some of the characteristics of the apologies used in e-mails with those utilised in spoken and written language. More specifically, the effects of the variables number of the recipients and the level of personal involvement of the sender with the committed offence on the quality and quantity of apologies were tested. Acknowledging that the corpus examined in the study is not sufficient to claim general validity for the presented results and the fact that the paper concentrated on only one of the identified apology classes (i.e., An explicit expression of apology), the following conclusions are drawn. First, the study shows that the e-mail apologies have some characteristics of written, some of spoken and some new emergent qualities that can be used to differentiate them from apologies used in the other two modalities. The results also revealed that with the widespread use of electronic messages new apology formulae not encountered in spoken and written interactions have been introduced into English. Therefore, language teachers should be aware of these properties and if their aim is to graduate students able to cope with the requirements of the new rules of interaction in the best way possible, they should acquaint them to students. Material writers, on the other hand, should now add a new group of teaching resources to the spoken and written materials since with every new research it becomes clearer that 'electronic English' has rules that set it apart from the other two modalities.

Second, the analysis demonstrated that similarly to spoken and written language, the type and the number of the apologies used in e-mails might be affected by the structural features of the language (e.g., English) and the context within which the communication takes place. In our corpus, we saw that the writers of more informal personal messages intended for a single recipient adopted rules parallel to ones mostly observed in spoken communication. The strict rules of written language, on the other hand, were followed in the repair work included in the so called professional messages, whereas a more eclectic way of apologising was introduced in single author-list recipient (i.e., G21) e-mails where authors used both formal and informal apologies either interchangeably or together for a bigger impact on the receiver of the message.

Finally, the content and form of A1 apologies (i.e., mostly nominal and bare) and the frequency with which they were used in the e-mail corpus, even in the informal personal messages, can be accepted as an indication that the rules of explicit apologising in electronic communications are closer to the rules of apologising in written languages than to those valid in spoken language. Therefore, this study could also be seen as providing a partial support (i.e., when A1 apology strategies are concerned) for Baron's (1998a) *'paper trail paradox'* claim which argues that e-mail writers tend to obey written language rules even when the messages are intended for their friends simply because it is still actually writing.

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Çiler Hatipoğlu

Atsiprašymų el. laiškuose atitikimas šnekamosios ir rašytinės kalbos normoms

Santrauka

Dėl keleto dešimtmečių technologinės pažangos, prieinamumo ir tinkamumo el. susirašinėjimas tapo svarbia bendravimo priemone. Mūsų dienomis visame pasaulyje, ypač švietimo įstaigose, ši priemonė pradėjo sparčiai keisti labiau įprastas bendravimo formas (laiškus ir telefoninius pokalbius). Deja, el. laiškų kalba dar labai mažai tyrinėta.

Šios srities ekspertai įtikinėja, kad reikia atlikti daugiau tyrimų, nes bendravimo taisyklės, kurios tinka šnekamajai ir rašytinei kalbai, gali netikti naujai bendravimo priemonei. Siekiant papildyti minėtą lingvistikos sritį, šiame straipsnyje, pirmiausia, nagrinėjama atsiprašymų, kurie vartojami el. laiškuose forma ir tipas, o po to jie lyginami ir gretinami su šnekamojoje bei rašytinėje kalboje vartojamais korekciniais veiksmais.

Tyrimo metu išnagrinėti 126 el. laiškai, kurie buvo rinkti nuo 2002 m. sausio mėn. iki 2004 m. kovo mėn. Surinkti duomenys pirmiausia buvo pervesti į CHAT formatą, o el. laiškuose vartojami atsiprašymai buvo koduoti pagal pritaikytą Cohen and Olshtain (1981) sukurtą sistemą. Duomenų analizė apėmė atsiprašymų dažnio, tipų ir sintaksinę-semantinę analizes.

Tyrimo metu gauti duomenys parodė, kad el. laiškai atitinka dalį rašytinės ir šnekamosios kalbos charakteristikų bei dalį naujai atsiradusių savybių, kurios gali būti taikomos jų atskyrimui nuo atsiprašymų, vartojamų kituose modalumuose.

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