

I'm sorry I said that: apologies in young children's discourse*

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ABSTRACT

We examined children's use of apology terms in parent-child discourse. Longitudinal data from 9 children (5 males, 4 females) between the ages of 1;2 and 6;1 were analysed. Before 2;0, the use of apology terms was rare. Thereafter, several developmental trends were noted including a decrease with age in directly elicited apologies and an increase in indirectly elicited apologies. With age children's apologies also became more elaborate. Children were exposed to apology terms primarily through apologies directed to them and, to a lesser degree, in talk about apologies. Our study documents young children's early mastery of an important pragmatic skill and identifies parents' role in its acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

Apologies are remarkable linguistic and social tools. They can restore damaged relationships, mitigate loss of face, and preserve social standing. As such, apologies have been characterized as remedial interchanges or remedies (Goffman, 1971), and acquiring competence in their use is clearly an important developmental task all young children face. Although there are a small number of experimental studies that look at how children produce, interpret and respond to apologies (e.g. Sell & Rice, 1988; Kochanska, Casey & Fukumoto, 1995), little is known about children's earliest real world experiences with apologies. In this study, we examined young children's exposure to and use of apologies in data drawn from

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naturalistic observations. Our overall goal was to present a descriptive account of children's earliest encounters with apologies.

Conceptions of apologies

Many researchers and theorists view apologies as speech acts that follow or, in some cases, accompany or immediately precede, a perceived breach or transgression. The transgressor, recognizing both the transgression itself and his or her role in its occurrence, explicitly expresses regret. Thus, the minimum constituents of an apology include a breach or transgression, the recognition of the transgression, the acceptance of responsibility for its occurrence by the transgressor, and a linguistic expression of remorse (*Oh, I'm so sorry*).¹ Explanations, offers of repair (restitution), and promises of forbearance (pledges the behaviour will not recur) can supplement the minimum constituents (Olshtain, 1989).

Apologies have also been viewed as pragmatic behaviour designed to preserve face especially when encountering face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The concept of face includes both a desire to preserve the ability to act independently and autonomously, unimpeded by others (negative face), as well as a need to receive approval and support for one's personal sense of well-being (positive face) (Goffman, 1967). Where face is threatened, apologies can redress the threat and restore or preserve amicable social relationships. Contextual factors affecting both the likelihood of an apology being offered and the specific form it might take include the severity of the offence and the familiarity and relative power of the interactants (Olshtain, 1989; Holmes, 1990). In most languages studied to date, apologies take a small number of almost ritual-like forms (Owen, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). In English, *sorry* is the most commonly used term for expressing an apology (Owen, 1983; Holmes, 1990; Bean & Johnstone, 1994).

As speech acts, apologies have been categorized both as performatives and as expressives. As performatives, apologies are achieved through the act of apologizing (Fraser, 1981). As expressives, the standard used to judge the validity of apologies is felicity, the heartfeltness or sincerity of the feelings of remorse being expressed (Searle, 1976; Tavuchis, 1991). Thus, a real apology is sincere and truly heartfelt; a false apology is not.

Up to this point, we have been describing what might be termed classic apologies – for example, apologies made following moral or conventional transgressions. In reality, apologies serve a broader range of functions and their use extends beyond the desire to express personal remorse (Holmes,

[1] Unless noted, all examples come from our data.

1990; Blackman & Stubbs, 2001). For example, Bean & Johnstone (1994) make a distinction between personal apologies and situational apologies; personal apologies repair damaged relationships, whereas situational apologies are often used for discourse task management. In a study of telephone interviews, they found that situational apologies represented over 90% of all apologies. Of those, most were used to request repetition or clarification, or to signal a speech error (*I'm sorry, let me start over*). Apologies are also used as attention getters (Coulmas, 1981), as a way of softening directives, and, ironically, to express anger and annoyance (Borkin & Reinhard, 1978). Apologies are sometimes made by those who bear no direct responsibility over what has transpired (Coulmas, 1981; Owen, 1983; Tavuchis, 1991). As such, the party offering the apology is essentially expressing sympathy for, or empathizing with, the aggrieved party without making any inferences about underlying fault (Tannen, 1990; Meyerhoff, 1999).

A number of researchers have developed taxonomies of apologies, focusing on the content and strategy employed (Fraser, 1981; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Olshtain, 1989; Holmes, 1990) or on the underlying offence motivating the apology (e.g. Holmes, 1990; Bean & Johnstone, 1994; Meyerhoff, 1999). Attention has also been directed at evaluating the actual form apologies may take (Owen, 1983; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989), as well as at how different forms serve different functions (Borkin & Reinhard, 1978; Owen, 1983).

Methodological approaches

There are a small number of studies that have examined the production of apologies in adults and children in structured observational settings (Kochanska, Casey & Fukumoto, 1995; Blackman & Stubbs, 2001). For example, in a laboratory study Kochanska and colleagues (1995: 647) created a contrived mishap; children were led to believe they had broken a doll or stained a t-shirt. Children were then asked: *What happened? Who did it? Did you do it? What can we do about it?*

Observational studies of apologies based on audio-recorded spontaneous discourse are relatively rare. In our review we found only three (Owen, 1983; Bean & Johnstone, 1994; Meyerhoff, 1999) and none focused on children. As an alternative to gathering and analysing spontaneous speech, several researchers have used reports, hand written accounts of what has recently been observed (Fraser, 1981; Holmes, 1990; Ninio & Snow, 1996). Across both these techniques (audio-recordings and reports), the size of the corpora that have been analysed range from 35 apology tokens (Meyerhoff, 1999) to more than two hundred (Fraser, 1981; Bean & Johnstone, 1994).

Empirical findings

We look first at findings drawn from analyses of apologies in adults in order to understand better the adult model. We then turn to the small body of literature that addresses apologies in children. Our review focuses primarily on research that has examined native speakers of English.

In looking at the nature of the offence or transgression, most apologies are for minor offences, in great part because these are likely to occur more frequently than are major offences. For example, in a study of New Zealand English, Holmes (1990) found that inconvenience or inadequate service accounted for nearly 40% of the apologies in her corpus. As noted earlier, situational apologies (related to discourse) were the most common form of apologies in telephone interviews, and many of these were used by speakers to soften a request for repetition or clarification (Bean & Johnstone, 1994). In terms of propensity to apologize, when adult participants were unknowingly deceived into thinking they were responsible for bumping a confederate, more than 90% apologized, and more than 70% tried to help the confederate, essentially an offer of restitution (Blackman & Stubbs, 2001).

In form, we have already noted that *sorry* is the most common apology term. For example, in Bean & Johnstone's (1994) study, *sorry* accounted for 77% of all tokens. In contrast, the use of the term *apologize* is rare (Owen, 1983; Holmes, 1990; Bean & Johnstone, 1994). Several studies suggest that *sorry* is frequently used in conjunction with intensifiers, verb phrases, or sentential clauses (Owen, 1983; Holmes, 1990). Holmes (1990) reports rates of what we call elaborations of nearly 40% (Table 1: 167). Her data also indicate that more than 50% of apologies receive some form of acknowledgment by the addressee (Holmes, 1989; Table 10: 207).

We turn now to the small number of studies that have examined apologies in children. First, however, it is important to point out that by the age of three, children have acquired a rudimentary sense of morality (Kochanska, DeVet, Goldman, Murray & Putnam, 1994). They have a general appreciation of right and wrong, although this may be influenced primarily by a desire to comply with powerful outside forces (e.g. parents, teachers). Thus, at a fairly elementary level, young children are capable of recognizing basic transgressions in both the moral and social domains. In addition, they are able to experience empathy and can generate appropriate, pro-social behaviours. Of course, apologies also mark breaches that are neither moral nor conventional in nature. Rather, apologies are frequently employed to mark minor disruptions in ongoing activities or interactions. As such, these apologies have little bearing on the development of morality *per se*, although they do reflect to a certain degree children's understanding of violations of standards in a variety of realms (Kochanska, Casey &

Fukumoto, 1995). For instance, a three-year old boy who says to a female observer *I step on your bag ... I sorry* demonstrates his awareness that such presumably accidental behaviour represents a minor but apology-worthy breach.

There is little in the existing literature that suggests that young children have a strong propensity to apologize. Based on parents' reports, fewer than 20% of a sample of children produced apologies before their second birthday (Ninio & Snow, 1996). In a study of what the authors termed ADVERSATIVE EPISODES, children between the ages of 2;0 and 5;0 employed a number of strategies to resolve conflicts with one another, none of which explicitly involved apologies (Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981). Furthermore, the frequency of spontaneous apologies in response to a contrived mishap was very low in a sample of two- and three-year olds (Kochanska, Casey & Fukumoto, 1995).

We should stress that the acquisition of many pragmatic skills, including apologizing, is a deceptively complex task (Becker, 1990; Snow, Perlmann, Gleason & Hooshyar, 1990; Ninio & Snow, 1996). Unlike many politeness terms (e.g. *thanks*, *please*), apologies appear infrequently in the speech of adults, as we will report. Furthermore, unlike many other politeness terms, the situations for which apologies are appropriate are less routinized and more varied. For example, parents may insist that requests made at the dinner table (*Can I have some milk?*) be accompanied by *please* (*Please may I have some milk?*) (Ely & Gleason, 1995). Requests like these are likely to occur often (Gleason, Perlmann & Greif, 1984). In contrast, situational breaches and breaches of moral or social standards occur infrequently, and can vary widely in context, salience, and significance. For the child to have mastered the appropriate use of apology terms suggests that s/he has acquired a rich understanding of human interactions, what constitute violations of those same interactions, and how, through apologies, such violations can be remedied. This is clearly not an insignificant accomplishment. Nor is it one that is likely to be achieved without the input of socializing agents, particularly parents and other adults.

Finally, we need to address the issue of context. Context is a complex and somewhat elusive concept (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Ely & Gleason, 1995). In its broadest sense, context refers to the background or frame in which behaviour occurs. In this regard, it can encompass both micro- (e.g. discourse) and macro- (e.g. culture, gender) level factors. Keller-Cohen (1978) has identified a number of distinct contexts relevant to language use including the setting (home, school), the relationship between speakers (parent-child, adult-adult), and the implicit interactional rules that govern any conversation. We have already noted how the severity of the breach and the status of interactants affects apologies (Olshtain, 1989). In this study, the primary context was everyday parent-child (and to a lesser extent,

TABLE 1. *Data on corpora*

CHILDES Corpora, child name	Number of child utterances	Participants*	Age of child
Bloom (1970), Peter (m) [†]	26 898	M, F, O	1;9-3;1
Brown (1973), Adam (m)	46 480	M, F, O	2;3-4;10
Brown (1973), Sarah (f)	37 066	M, F, O	2;3-5;1
Clark (1978), Shem (m)	17 948	M, F, O	2;2-3;2
Higginson (1985), April (f)	2321	M, O	1;10-2;11
Kuczaj (1976), Abe (m)	22 383	M, F, O	2;4-5;0
MacWhinney (2000), Ross (m)	20 103	M, F, O	2;6-5;4
Sachs (1983), Naomi (f)	15 960	M, F, O	1;2-4;9
Suppes (1973), Nina (f)	31 505	M, F, O	1;11-3;3

* Participants other than child; M=mother, F=father, O=other.

† m= male; f=female.

observer-child) discourse occurring in primarily European-American, middle class homes. For this population, this context is the primary arena for early childhood socialization (Ely & Gleason, 1995). However, we recognize that the findings derived from these data may not generalize to other discourse settings (e.g. child-child conversations at school) or cultures.

Research questions

Given the paucity of data on young children's real world experiences with apologies, we set out to answer a number of questions about children's use of and exposure to apology terms. Our study was guided by the following queries:

- (1) What is the developmental pattern of children's use of apologies in terms of onset and overall frequency?
- (2) Is age associated with changes in the nature of children's use of apology terms?
- (3) To what degree are children exposed to apology terms and to what degree do parents elicit apologies?

METHOD

Data

To address our research questions, we made use of a number of existing data sets obtained from naturalistic observations. All corpora were drawn from the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES; MacWhinney, 2000). Table 1 displays information about the corpora analysed including

the child's age and gender, the total number of target child utterances, and the identification of the adult speakers who were observed. We examined longitudinal data from 9 corpora in which the target child's language development was described as being typical. The age range encompassed across all 9 data sets ran from 1;2 to 6;1. Children were recorded at home in interaction with parents and, in some cases, observers.

Coding

We developed a coding scheme designed to capture the key features of children's use of apology terms. Initially we had intended to identify the nature of the breach for which apologies were offered. We know that at a fairly early age children are able to make distinctions between moral and conventional breaches. However, as was suggested earlier, many apologies are offered for breaches that fall beyond the moral or conventional domains. These situational apologies are produced in response to minor disruptions in the flow of ongoing activity. Because our analyses were based on verbal transcripts, which often had limited information regarding context, we quickly discovered that we were unable to distinguish clearly between situational breaches (e.g. speaking unclearly) and conventional breaches (e.g. interrupting). In addition, our preliminary analyses indicated that breaches that might represent moral transgressions were uncommon. We also had difficulty distinguishing between apologies accompanying breaches and apologies used to soften directives, requests, rejections, and refusals, functions often unrelated to any form of breach (e.g. a father's 'apology' for not knowing how to play a game: *Nope, I'm afraid I don't know how to play bong marble*). Given these difficulties, we elected to forego systematic attempts to identify either the presence or nature of breaches.

Speaker and addressee. We noted the speaker and the addressee (child, mother, father, other). Where the use of the term appeared to be directed to more than 1 speaker, we coded the addressee as OTHER.

Context. First, we excluded from analyses all apology terms that were used in non-apology contexts. Thus explicit expressions of sympathy marked with *feel sorry for* (*I feel sorry for some of these people ...*)² or the use of *afraid* in reference to fear were not included in our data. Then, for every apology term, we identified whether the term was used in an APOLOGY, METALINGUISTIC, OR LANGUAGE PLAY CONTEXT. APOLOGY CONTEXTS referred to the use of apology terms to make apologies (*I'm really sorry*). METALINGUISTIC CONTEXTS encompassed talk about apologies (*Well don't sit on it if you're sorry*) and elicitation of apologies (*Can you say you're sorry?*). LANGUAGE PLAY encompassed the use of apologies in

[2] This example was, in fact, the only instance of an explicitly marked sympathetic apology.

a language play context (*So sorry, tow truck*) (Ely & McCabe, 1994). For apology terms used in METALINGUISTIC and LANGUAGE PLAY CONTEXTS, no further coding was undertaken beyond noting the specific apology term employed. For apology contexts, the following codes were applied.

Prompt. Some theorists see apologies as the second step of a three or more step process (Owen, 1983; Tavuchis, 1991), preceded by an initiating step or prompt and followed by an acknowledgment or acceptance on the part of the injured party. The prompt itself can be direct or indirect.

Direct prompt. A DIRECT PROMPT explicitly requests or demands an apology (*Say you're sorry*), with the request or directive coming from the injured party or a third party. In our data, the third party was usually a parent as in Adam's mother saying *Tell Ursula you're sorry*.

Indirect prompt. INDIRECT PROMPTS take a variety of forms including a 'statement of troubles' and corrections (Owen, 1983). In a statement of troubles, the injured party makes assertions about his or her loss of face (Child: *You hurt me with that brush ...* Mother: *I'm sorry, I didn't think that it would hurt you.*). In corrections, an interactant calls attention to a preceding or imminent error committed by another (Mother: *That's a whale.* Child: *No, that's not a whale, that's a dolphin.* Mother: *I'm sorry.*).

No prompt. Apologies can also arise spontaneously, without any preceding verbal prompt, and were coded as such. Finally, apologies used to hedge directives, requests, rejections or refusals require no prompt, being apologies-in-advance (Father: *I'm sorry you better eat the rest of your sandwich*). These were also coded as NO PROMPT.

Form – apology terms. We limited our analyses to apologies marked by one of a limited number of conventional apology terms (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). Based on our review of the literature, we identified seven apology terms (*sorry, apologize, excuse, pardon, regret, afraid, forgive*).

Form – extensions. Apologies can be strengthened through the use of intensifiers, repetition, and a designated addressee. Intensifiers (*so, really, awfully*) and repetition increase the impact of the apology. Repetition includes the use of either the same apology term or another apology term in the target utterance or within the five preceding or following utterances. An apology that included a designated addressee (*I sorry, Mommy*) in the target or immediately adjacent utterance was noted as such. By identifying specifically the person to whom the apology is directed, the speaker makes the apology more personal, and subsequently more forceful (Tavuchis, 1991). Extensions also include apologies employing verb phrases (*I'm sorry to say ...*) and sentential clauses (*I'm sorry that I interrupted you*) (Owen, 1983; Holmes, 1990).

Elaboration. Some apologies go beyond the initial expression of remorse and implicit or explicit acknowledgment of responsibility. They do so by (1) providing additional expressions of remorse or responsibility, (2)

providing an explanation, (3) offering restitution, or (4) promising forbearance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Olshtain, 1989). Elaboration can either precede or follow the apology.

Acknowledgment. Acknowledgment refers to a terminating utterance that acknowledges in some way the production of an apology (Owen, 1983; Holmes, 1990). As such, the person to whom the apology is made explicitly recognizes that an apology has been offered. Acknowledgment can be marked by acceptance and minimization (Mother: *Oops, I'm sorry, Abe.* Child: *That's ok.*), challenges (Child: *I sorry.* Mother: *You're sorry?*), formal forgiveness, or by what we term REINFORCEMENT. In reinforcement, the addressee (often a parent) reinforces the recognition of the breach by explicitly commenting on it (Child: *Sorry, Cromer.* Mother: *Alright, be careful.*).

Procedure. Using the CHILDES CLAN program KWAL, we searched for all occurrences of the seven apology terms, using a 'window' of 5 utterances preceding and following each occurrence. We then coded all tokens that were used as apology terms.

Reliability. All the data were coded by the first author. A second coder coded a randomly selected sample of tokens ($n=150$, 30.9% of the data). Cohen's kappas for all coding categories ranged from 0.73 to 1.00 and averaged 0.85, representing substantial to almost perfect inter-rater reliability.

RESULTS

Children used a total of 214 apology terms. Other participants (parents, observers) produced an additional 271 tokens of apology terms ($N_{\text{total}}=485$). In order to account for variations in the size of corpora, the following analyses are based on rates per 1000 utterances. Where we computed means, we restricted our analyses to speakers who contributed at least 1000 utterances to the data. The average rate of use of apology terms for the 9 children was 0.97 ($S.D.=0.83$), 1.44 ($S.D.=1.03$) for mothers ($n=9$), and 1.35 ($S.D.=0.42$) for fathers ($n=5$).³ There was no statistically significant difference in the frequency with which boys (1.04, $S.D.=0.91$) and girls (0.89, $S.D.=0.85$) used apology terms. Nor was there a significant difference in the rate of mothers' and fathers' use of apology terms. As can be seen in Table 2, there was a wide range of individual differences in rates

[3] Although fathers contributed data in 8 of the 9 corpora, in 3 of these corpora the number of utterances fathers produced was so small (318 or less) as to preclude their inclusion in computations of descriptive data. See note *b*, Table 2. In addition, because the category 'other speaker' sometimes encompassed more than one other adult speaker in a corpus (e.g. Adam), no other descriptive data are presented for this category.

TABLE 2. *Study 1: rate of use (per 1000 utterances) of apology terms by speaker*

Corpus (child)	Child (<i>n</i> = 214)*	Mother (<i>n</i> = 137)	Father (<i>n</i> = 65)
Bloom (Peter)	0.33	2.91	0.00†
Brown (Adam)	2.32	2.13	0.00
Brown (Sarah)	0.57	0.75	1.65
Clark (Shem)	0.11	0.53	0.90
Higginson (April)	2.15	2.84	—‡
Kuczaj (Abe)	0.89	0.58	0.49
MacWhinney (Ross)	1.54	0.00	1.80
Sachs (Naomi)	0.56	1.55	0.92
Suppes (Nina)	0.29	0.70	0.00

* Number of apology terms across all corpora for each speaker category; the category *other speaker* contributed a total of 67 tokens.

† '0.0' indicates that the rate was zero, though this was often due to very low overall utterance counts for the respective speaker.

‡ '—' indicates that the respective speaker contributed no utterances to the corpus.

across participants, from a low of 0.11 in Shem (Clark, 1978) to a high of 2.32 in Adam (Brown, 1973).

Developmental patterns. In terms of onset, Peter (Bloom, 1970) was the youngest child to use an apology term. At 1;10 he said *sorry* in response to his mother's prompt (*Can you say you're sorry?*). The latest first use was observed in Shem (Clark, 1978) at 2;11, more than 7 months after the beginning of observations. The average age of onset was 2;4; girls (2;2;0) produced apologies on average more than 3 months before boys (2;5;18), although this difference was not statistically significant.

In order to examine developmental trends in children's use of apology terms, we examined the three years (2;1-5;0) for which there were adequate data (*n* = 202), including 157 occurrences of apologies and 45 instances of METALINGUISTIC and LANGUAGE PLAY uses of apology terms. These data represented 94% of children's uses of apology terms. As can be seen in Table 3, children's overall use of apology terms drops and then rises, approximating an unbalanced u-shaped curve. Because of the small number of subjects and the low frequencies in some cells, we were unable to run inferential statistics on the individual coding categories. However, we did compute category percentages by year, and these do suggest some developmental trends. As a workable criterion, we comment on shifts of greater than 25 percentage points. Shifts meeting this standard were seen in 3 coding categories.

First, in context, there was a drop in the proportional rate with which children used apology terms in APOLOGY CONTEXTS from a high of 79% in

TABLE 3. *Developmental patterns in children's use of apology terms (per 1000 utterances)*

Overall rate			
Age 2	1.43 (1.60)*		
Age 3	0.27 (0.23)		
Age 4	3.73 (4.80)		
Apology term			
	<i>sorry</i>	All others	
Age 2	1.01 (0.80) [71%]†	0.41 (1.10) [29%]	
Age 3	0.23 (0.23) [83%]	0.04 (0.08) [17%]	
Age 4	3.59 (4.86) [96%]	0.14 (0.22) [4%]	
Context			
	APOLOGY	METALINGUISTIC	LANGUAGE PLAY
Age 2	1.13 (1.61) [79%]	0.11 (0.14) [8%]	0.19 (0.23) [13%]
Age 3	0.17 (0.16) [63%]	0.04 (0.05) [15%]	0.06 (0.12) [22%]
Age 4	1.08 (1.31) [29%]	1.03 (1.72) [28%]	1.62 (3.57) [43%]
Prompt			
	NO PROMPT	INDIRECT	DIRECT
Age 2	0.61 (1.08) [54%]	0.21 (0.30) [19%]	0.31 (0.51) [27%]
Age 3	0.07 (0.08) [41%]	0.08 (0.10) [47%]	0.02 (0.04) [12%]
Age 4	0.34 (0.74) [31%]	0.74 (0.99) [69%]	0.00 (0.00) [0%]
Extension			
	Unextended	Extended‡	
Age 2	0.35 (0.48) [31%]	0.77 (1.44) [69%]	
Age 3	0.08 (0.09) [42%]	0.11 (0.13) [58%]	
Age 4	0.32 (0.57) [30%]	0.76 (1.28) [70%]	
Elaboration			
	Unelaborated	Elaborated	
Age 2	1.01 (1.55) [89%]	0.12 (0.14) [11%]	
Age 3	0.08 (0.12) [44%]	0.10 (0.14) [56%]	
Age 4	0.53 (0.63) [48%]	0.56 (1.10) [52%]	
Acknowledgment			
	Unacknowledged	Acknowledged	
Age 2	0.74 (1.25) [65%]	0.39 (0.56) [35%]	
Age 3	0.11 (0.12) [61%]	0.07 (0.06) [38%]	
Age 4	0.60 (0.81) [55%]	0.48 (0.64) [44%]	

* Figures in parentheses represent standard deviations.

† Figures in brackets represent percentage by age.

‡ Individual categories of extensions (e.g. intensifiers, addressee) were collapsed into one 'extended' category due to small cell counts.

two-year-olds to a low of 29% in four-year-olds. There was a concomitant increase in the proportional rate of LANGUAGE PLAY, from 13 to 43% across the same age span. Second, looking only at APOLOGY CONTEXTS, there was an increase with age in the proportional rate of indirectly elicited apologies (from 19% in two-year-olds to 69% in four-year-olds) along with a drop in the rate of DIRECT PROMPTS (from 27 to 0% across the same

time period). Finally, there was an increase in the proportional rate with which children elaborated their apologies from 11% in two-year-olds to more than 50% in three- and four-year-olds. Unfortunately, low cell frequencies precluded examining developmental trends in parents' use of apology terms.

Exposure. Children were exposed to adult apologies and adult talk about apologies at rates that were generally higher than those of the children themselves (Table 2). Looking only at APOLOGY CONTEXTS, mothers (95%) and fathers (98%) directed almost all of their apologies to the children themselves. Thus, in the context of these recordings, children heard very few apologies directed to others. The correlation between mothers' and children's overall use of apology terms was positive but not significant (Spearman's rho, $r(9)=0.33$, $p=0.38$); this correlation drops to zero when direct elicitations and their respective responses are removed. However, the correlations between fathers' and children's rates both including and excluding direct elicitations/responses were identical and significant, Spearman's rho, $r(5)=0.90$, $p<0.05$). In other words, children whose fathers used many apology terms were themselves likely to use many apology terms, and vice versa.

Overall, 28% of children's use of apology terms in APOLOGY CONTEXTS were the result of DIRECT PROMPTS and these prompts almost always included the use of an apology term on the part of the speaker eliciting the apology. As we noted earlier, these prompts were largely directed to children when they were young, with all but one occurring in children under three years of age. Children were highly compliant, responding positively to 87% of DIRECT PROMPTS. Overall, METALINGUISTIC use of apology terms, which included DIRECT PROMPTS and talk about apologies, accounted for 21% of mothers' and 26% of fathers' total use of apology terms. In summary, children's exposure to apology terms came about largely through being the party to whom apologies were directed, and only to a lesser degree through DIRECT PROMPTS and talk about apologies (which together constitute the category METALINGUISTIC CONTEXT).

Table 4 presents data comparing overall rates for children and parents. Using the same standard (>25%) we employed in assessing developmental shifts, there were several notable parent-child differences. Mothers' rate of unprompted apologies (69%) was greater than that of children's (43%). More striking was the difference in rates of directly prompted apologies, with children's rate (28%) exceeding the 0% rate for mothers and fathers. In elaboration, children's rate of elaborated apologies (16%) was less than that of mothers (43%) and fathers (54%). Finally, in acknowledgment, children's apologies were acknowledged at a rate (40%) that was far greater than that of mothers' (5%) or fathers' (2%).

TABLE 4. *Comparison between children's, mothers' and fathers' rates (per 1000 utterances) across coding categories*

Apology term	<i>sorry</i>	All others		
Child	0.75 (0.65)* [77%]†	0.22 (0.46) [23%]		
Mother	0.86 (0.70) [60%]	0.58 (0.79) [40%]		
Father	0.93 (0.57) [69%]	0.42 (0.39) [31%]		
Context				
	APOLOGY	METALINGUISTIC	LANGUAGE PLAY	
Child	0.75 (0.82) [77%]	0.11 (0.19) [11%]	0.11 (0.11) [11%]	
Mother	1.04 (0.79) [72%]	0.30 (0.31) [21%]	0.10 (0.18) [7%]	
Father	0.96 (0.20) [71%]	0.35 (0.43) [26%]	0.04 (0.05) [3%]	
Prompt				
	NO PROMPT	INDIRECT	DIRECT	
Child	0.33 (0.45) [43%]	0.22 (0.21) [29%]	0.21 (0.42) [28%]	
Mother	0.72 (0.62) [69%]	0.32 (0.34) [31%]	0.00 (0.00) [0%]	
Father	0.48 (0.26) [50%]	0.48 (0.31) [50%]	0.00 (0.00) [0%]	
Extension				
	Unextended	Extended‡		
Child	0.29 (0.39) [39%]	0.46 (0.60) [61%]		
Mother	0.42 (0.48) [40%]	0.63 (0.60) [61%]		
Father	0.16 (0.17) [17%]	0.80 (0.25) [83%]		
Elaboration				
	Unelaborated	Elaborated		
Child	0.64 (0.81) [84%]	0.12 (0.17) [16%]		
Mother	0.59 (0.57) [56%]	0.45 (0.32) [43%]		
Father	0.44 (0.36) [46%]	0.52 (0.37) [54%]		
Acknowledgment				
	Unacknowledged	Acknowledged		
Child	0.46 (0.53) [60%]	0.30 (0.40) [40%]		
Mother	0.99 (0.74) [95%]	0.05 (0.09) [5%]		
Father	0.95 (0.17) [98%]	0.02 (0.04) [2%]		

* Figures in parentheses represent standard deviations.

† Figures in brackets represent percentage by age.

‡ As noted in Table 3, this represents a collapsed category of all forms of extensions.

DISCUSSION

Well before their third birthday, children begin to use apology terms primarily in order to make apologies that are appropriate for the situation. In our discussion section, we look first at the developmental pattern of children's use of apology terms. We turn then to examine the ways in which children's apologies differ from those of their parents. We conclude with a consideration of the significance of parents' role in socializing children's use of apology terms through elicitation, modelling, and explicit talk about apologies. We want to caution at the outset that because of the relative rarity of the phenomenon under investigation we were not able to employ inferential statistics in our analyses of developmental

trends and parent-child differences. Consequently, findings related to developmental trends and parent-child differences should be treated cautiously.

Developmental patterns. The late average age of onset (2;4) supports our claim that competent use of apologies represents mastery of a relatively more challenging pragmatic skill. For example, routines involving terms like *please*, *thank you*, *hi*, *hello* and *good-bye* are all reported to appear regularly in the discourse of children under the age of two (Fenson, Dale, Reznick, Bates, Thal & Pethick, 1994; Ninio & Snow, 1996). Acquisition of these more common terms involves a smaller set of schemas that are likely to be more routinized and frequent (Ninio & Snow, 1996). In contrast, knowing when to apologize requires both an awareness of a wide array of moral, social, and situational standards (Kochanska, Casey & Fukumoto, 1995) as well as an appreciation of what represents (often infrequent) 'apologizable' breaches of such standards. In addition, it is also possible that parents may increasingly hold children more accountable for their behaviour as they enter toddlerhood. In this regard, it is noteworthy that most direct elicitations of children's apologies occurred only after the second birthday. Although we are unaware of comparable onset data on other politeness routines, we suspect that parents are prompting children to say *please* and *thank you* at a much earlier age. Thus, it is not surprising that the acquisition of apology routines lags behind the acquisition of other politeness routines.

The developmental pattern in the overall frequency of use of apology terms across the age period 2;1 to 5;0 is curious. Obviously, with a small sample, outliers at any data point can skew the results and this may well be the case in these data. For two subjects there were single data points that were many standard deviations beyond the mean. Nevertheless, even with the data from these two corpora removed, there is still an unbalanced u-shape curve, with apologies being particularly rare in three-year-olds.⁴ The pattern may reflect the reduction in DIRECT PROMPTS parents address to children between the ages of 2;0 and 3;0, although this effect is limited, as directly elicited apologies represented only 28% of children's use of apology terms in APOLOGY CONTEXTS (and an even smaller percentage of children's overall use of apology terms). It may be that after an initial mastery that may represent a somewhat superficial competence, children may eschew apology terms until they have acquired a deeper appreciation of their meaning. This could also explain in part in the rates of METALINGUISTIC and LANGUAGE PLAY uses of apology terms (Table 3).

[4] Excluding Adam's and Naomi's data, the rates (and standard deviations) for two-, three-, and four-year-olds are 0.93 (0.83), 0.29 (0.24), and 2.06 (1.58).

Initially, when children are two-years-old, most apology terms are used in apology contexts (79%). But by the time they are four, children are treating apology terms as objects in both talking explicitly about apologies (see examples that follow) and in language play (Ely & McCabe, 1994). Finally, it should be pointed out that by age four, children are apologizing at a rate (1.08) comparable to that of their mothers (1.04) and fathers (0.96).

The proportional data reveal two other developmental patterns. First, there was a change in how apologies come about (PROMPTS) which will be addressed in the section on socialization. Second, there was an increase in the rate of elaboration. In two-year-olds, most apologies (89%) were unelaborated in that they were restricted to the explicit acknowledgment of remorse. They lacked, for example, explicit descriptions of the transgression or offers of restitution. However, in three- and four-year-olds, more than half of all apologies included elaboration, a rate in line with that reported by Holmes (1990) for adults. For example, at 4;9 Abe (Kuczaj) says to his mother *I'm sorry [that] I was on your hair*. Similarly, Nina, at age 3;2 apologizes for having put hair in her mother's face:

Mother: You gonna fix it for me?

Child: There.

I was sorry to do that.

Mother: That's okay.

In these two instances, by going beyond the minimal constituent (*sorry*) and clearly identifying their role in the breach, both children's apologies can be said to be more forceful (Olshtain, 1989).

Parent-child differences. Table 4 presents data comparing the rates of coding categories for children, mothers and fathers. In general, there was a remarkable degree of similarity across speakers in context and in form (apology terms and extensions). However, there were notable differences in prompts, elaboration, and acknowledgment.

Although DIRECT PROMPTS are appropriate in parent-child discourse as part of socialization practices, they are rare in adult-adult discourse (Owen, 1983). In our data no adult apology was the product of a DIRECT PROMPT, a not unexpected finding given the nature of the context. However, it is interesting to note the degree to which mothers' and fathers' apologies were the products of INDIRECT PROMPTS. As most of their apologies were directed to children, it clearly indicates that in addition to acquiring competence in producing apologies children are also learning how to elicit apologies from others, and doing so indirectly in the manner appropriate to adult discourse. This can be seen in the following exchange

in which Ross (3;8) reprimands his father for the same behaviour he, Ross, is being chided for:

Father: Honey, don't be bossy.

Child: You're bossier than I am.

Father: I see.

Well, I'm sorry.

I'll won't be bossy.⁵

In the use of elaboration, children's overall rate (16%) was much lower than that of mothers (43%) and fathers (54%); the rate for parents is comparable to the nearly 40% rate reported by Holmes (1990). Although, as noted, with age children do become more elaborate, they rarely approach the kind of elaboration seen, for example, in Naomi's mother's offer of forbearance (*Oh, I'm so sorry honey, I'll try not to do it again*). Finally in acknowledgment, it is clear that children rarely acknowledge the apologies directed to them. In contrast, mothers, fathers, and other adults regularly recognize the production of children's apologies. In one instance, Abe's mother acknowledges his apology with an apology of her own after having hurt herself by stepping on one of his toys.

Mother: Abe, you're going to have to put your trucks away.

Child: I'm sorry.

Mother: I'm sorry too; I should have looked where I was walking.

This kind of rich acknowledgment was not seen in the children's data, and clearly is one domain in which children's apologies differ dramatically from those of their parents.

Socialization. Parents have a vested interest in assuring that their children attain full communicative competence, including of course, mastery of apologetic discourse. Children are exposed to apology terms and encouraged to use apology terms through DIRECT and INDIRECT PROMPTS, through adult apologies, and through talk about apologies.

We found that only a proportion (28%) of children's apologies were the result of DIRECT PROMPTS, and those that were typically occurred at the younger ages. For example, at age 2;6 Peter's mother demands that he apologize to the observer after having hit her in the face with a pen. The investigator acknowledges Peter's apology (*It's all right*), adding what we have termed REINFORCEMENT (*Just please don't do it again*).

Mother: Peter that wasn't a very nice thing to do; say you're sorry.

Child: Sorry.

Observer: It's all right.

Just please don't do it again.

[5] This is how the utterance appears in the CHILDES transcript (Ross44, line 1374).

Children were generally compliant. However, there were several instances of outright refusal. For example, at age 2;6 Adam's mother requests an apology:

Mother: Adam, will you say excuse me please?

Child: No.

There is no follow up. Likewise, April, at age 2;11 suffers no consequences in ignoring her mother's DIRECT PROMPT (*Will you say excuse me for me, hmm?*).

In contrast to the direct form of elicitation, many more apologies at 3;0 and 4;0 were the product of INDIRECT PROMPTS, including corrections and statements of troubles (Owen, 1983). For example, at age 3;8, Abe apologizes after being rebuked by his mother:

Child: ... can I have some gum?

Mother: No, you didn't eat your sandwich.

Child: Sorry, I got one piece [of gum] already out.

And Ross, at age 4;1, apologizes after being reproached by his father through both a correction (*No, that's too many, Ross*) and a statement of troubles (*Oh, Ross*).

Father: All the puzzles are coming out of there?

No, that's too many, Ross.

Just one or two.

Oh, Ross.

Child: I'm sorry.

Prompts such as these increased with age, representing the motivation of half of all apologies by the time children were four. This greater reliance on INDIRECT PROMPTS could be a reflection of how parents fine-tune their input to their perceptions of their children's expanding social, cognitive, and linguistic abilities. In addition, parents may be treating their children as more responsible social and moral agents, and using linguistic markers (INDIRECT PROMPTS) appropriate to this newly emerging status (Kochanska, Casey & Fukumoto, 1995).

Children heard adults use apology terms, and most of these terms were embedded in apologies directed to the children themselves. Given that much of the data were based on parent-child or observer-child interactions, it is not surprising that children were the primary addressees. However, it is notable that parents were apologizing at rates that often exceeded those of children. We recognize that parents in their roles as socializing agents get to define what constitutes a breach, and hence may be more inclusive in their breadth of what they deem to be apologizable transgressions. We believe two additional processes may also be at work.

First, in making apologies to young children, parents and other adults may be modelling what they believe to be an important pragmatic skill. In essence, they take advantage of situations that might otherwise be less deserving of apologies to offer up models that their children can then emulate. For instance, in response to a prompt from her daughter while working on a picture puzzle, Sarah's mother makes a relatively elaborate apology where a simple SORRY (or just an acknowledgment) would have sufficed.

Child: Oh, you forgot, Mommy.
 Mother: Oh, I'm sorry I made a mistake.
 Child: Now that go?
 Mother: There ...

By not only apologizing for her oversight, but also making the grounds for the apology explicit, it could be said that Sarah's mother is implicitly teaching her daughter how to apologize.

By apologizing for what in typical adult-adult discourse might not routinely be an apologizable breach, parents may also be marking their children as more vulnerable interactants who are more deserving of solicitous treatment. This notion is related to our second explanation for the relatively higher rate of adult apologies to children: the degree to which parents and other adults employ the sympathetic form of apology (Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1993). This is a type of apology in which the party offering the apology strives to connect with the emotional state of the aggrieved party without claiming responsibility for it (Owen, 1983; Meyerhoff, 1999). Although we had excluded from our analyses all explicit uses of sympathy that employed the phrase *feel sorry for*, it is clear that the simple form of *sorry* can encompass this function, as seen in the following examples:

Child: My tummy is hurting.
 Mother: Is it hurting now?
 Child: Yeah.
 Mother: Oh, I'm sorry. (Sachs)
 Child: Dat why it hurts.
 And it hurts again.
 But it hurts.
 Mother: Oh, I'm sorry. (Adam; Brown)

In both these instances, mothers are apologizing for states over which they had no control. By doing so, they are 'framing' themselves as connected to their children's feelings more than owning up to any sense of responsibility or remorse for those same feelings (Tannen, 1990: 232). The use of the sympathetic form of apology is indicative of the degree to which parents

appear to go out of their way to address the positive face needs of their children (Snow, Perlmann, Gleason & Hooshyar, 1990).

The third way children are exposed to apology terms is in explicit talk about apologies. Such conversations were often quite salient, and were sometimes prompted by the children themselves. For example, the following exchange between Adam (at 3;1) and his mother was in response to his mother saying *whoops, excuse me* after causing a cart to hit his face:

Child: Why you said scuse me?

Mother: Because I was afraid you were hurt.

This is an example of how parents teach their children about apologies, and in this case, the lesson was initiated by the child. In a second example, Naomi (at 2;11) is questioned by her father about her response to having pushed another child (*Naomi, what did Kimberly do when you pushed her?*):

Father: She cried?

Child: Yeah.

Mother: Did you say that you were sorry?

Child: Yeah.

[indecipherable]

Mother: Were you sorry?

Child: Yeah.

I sorry.

This sequence, involving both parents, reflects the degree to which parents are invested in their children's mastery of not only the form of the apology routine but also its associated affective experience.

In our last metalinguistic example, a father clearly takes the teacher role by engaging his son (Ross, age 4;2) in an extended discussion about apologies:

Father: What does it mean to say you're sorry?

Child: It means that if you break something you say you're sorry.

Father: Good.

Father: What does it mean to apologize?

Child: It means if you're bad to somebody else, you apologize.

Father: And what do you say when you apologize?

Child: I apologize.

Father: Or, I'm sorry.

Child: I'm sorry

Although this exchange could be dismissed as being the product of a parent who is also a child language researcher (and it was embedded in a series of similar metalinguistic queries), it is not atypical of how many middle-class

parents socialize their children's language through talk about language in general (Ely, Gleason, MacGibbon & Zaretsky, 2001) and politeness routines in particular (Gleason, Perlmann & Greif, 1984; Becker, 1990).

Finally, there was some modest evidence for a correspondence between child and parent use of apology terms, at least with fathers. We speculate that this correlation reflects individual styles of family emotional expressiveness (Halberstadt, 1986). In this regard, it is interesting to note that several of the items in Halberstadt's (1986) Family Expressive Questionnaire explicitly tap the propensity of families to apologize ('Apologizing for being late,' 'Saying *I'm sorry* when one realizes one was wrong'). We would argue that a particular family discourse style, once established, is likely to influence interactions that occur within that family. The wide individual differences in the use of apology terms seen in children and adult speakers, along with the correlation between children and fathers support this interpretation. In short, in some families, apologizing may be routine, even expected and demanded; in others, apologizing is rare. Clearly, future research should further explore the existence and ultimate source of these individual differences.

CONCLUSION

We began this study by asking a number of questions about children's real world experiences with apologies. We found that apologies do indeed emerge later than other more common politeness routines (Ninio & Snow, 1996). With age, children develop an increasingly sophisticated mastery of this relatively rare but important routine, reflected, for example, in the degree to which their apologies are a response to INDIRECT PROMPTS and in their increased use of elaboration. Children are also adept at eliciting apologies from others. Finally, we found that parents and other adults play an important role in socializing children's evolving competence by modelling apologetic discourse, by prompting their children to apologize, and by talking explicitly about apologies. The degree to which parents engage in this form of teaching can be seen in our last example, in which a mother of a child (Abe, age 3;3) exaggerates the degree of her injury in order to elicit an apology from her son.

Child: ... because you're the biggest stinker in the whole world.

Mother: You think that I'm a stinker!

Oh no (pretends to cry).

Child: I'm sorry I said that.

Mother: I was just pretending that I was crying.

By overplaying the extent of her hurt, she successfully highlights the importance of atoning for breaches; her son offers her an appropriate,

sincere, heartfelt apology: a statement of remorse (*I'm sorry...*) that includes an explicit acknowledgment of his wrongdoing (... *I said that*). In his third year, he already demonstrated a fairly sophisticated grasp of the apology routine, a competence that likely served him well in the coming years.

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