"Communication is a two-way street"

Instructors' perceptions of student apologies

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Speech act studies are increasingly likely to use retrospective verbal protocols to record the thoughts of participants who produced targeted speech acts (e.g., Cohen & Olshtain, 1993). However, although communication is always a two-way street, little is known about the recipients' perceptions of speech acts. In academic communication at universities, it is critical for students to gain awareness of the socio-cultural norms as well as knowledge of appropriate linguistic forms in interacting with instructors. Therefore, gathering perceptual information from instructors, the recipients of many speech acts such as apologies, serves an important role in realizing successful student-instructor communication. Targeting instructors' perceptions, two forms of an online survey were created via surveygizmo.com, with one including 12 spoken apologies and the other including 12 emailed apologies. An equal number of native (NS) and nonnative English speaking (NNS) students produced these apologies. The 150 instructors who responded to the survey gave significantly higher ratings to apologies made by NS students than to those made by NNS students. An analysis of instructors' explanations after the ratings showed that both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge (Thomas, 1983) were valued in the successful realization of apologies, with the majority of instructor explanations addressing the sociopragmatic aspects of apology productions. In their comments on highly-rated student apologies, instructors appreciated the fact that students took responsibility in apologizing, offered worthy explanations, and delivered the messages with minimum grammatical mistakes. Poorly rated apology messages did not contain sufficient or valid evidence, inconvenienced the instructors through inappropriate requests, and usually had multiple grammatical mistakes. This study provides useful source of information to be used in university classrooms that can orientate novice learners towards socio-cultural expectations and appropriate lexical markers to be employed in making successful apologies in academic settings.

Keywords: apologies, perceptions, instructors' ratings, online survey

1.   Introduction

Apologies are one of the most commonly occurring speech acts in our daily lives that carry important functions. One chooses to apologize to maintain good relationships with others when an offense was made due to one's own responsibility. Apologies are closely connected with multiple social factors, as mentioned in Brown and Levinson's (1978) theory of politeness. These factors include the ranking of the imposition, or R (how serious the offense is), the relative power of the hearer over the speaker, or P (e.g., doctor vs. patient or professor vs. student), and the social distance between the participants, or D (relatives, friends, or strangers). Because of these social variables, the realizations of apologies among speakers also drastically vary. Depending on the situation and the speaker, an explicit expression of apology may not be sufficient (e.g., *I'm sorry* or *I apologize*); one may need to provide as an explanation or an account (e.g., *I was sick yesterday.*) and to make a request to repair the wrongdoing (e.g., *would it be possible for us to arrange another meeting?*)

This study investigates student apologies to instructors in the U.S. university context. University instructors are a group of people who encounter a high frequency of apology messages on a daily basis, with the majority of these messages coming from students. Those of us who have taught for a while can all testify this by simply opening our emails or recalling the end-of-class or office hour conversations. Most student apologies are course-work related, such as missing a lecture, missing an appointment, and turning in an important assignment late (Cheng 2013). These scenarios are often considered as crucial because they may jeopardize a student's grade and ultimate success in a course. Success or failure in apologizing, therefore, has a potentially large influence on communication between students and instructors, and this communication could enhance or hinder the academic performance of the students. Cultural differences also play an important part in students' apologies to their instructors. Nonnative speakers of English might quite possibly encounter difficulties in apologizing in a socially acceptable and linguistically appropriate way.

Native English speakers growing up in the United States, however, do not naturally express good apologies either. As Engel (2001) has mentioned, due to the lack of attention to teaching apology as an important social skill in both family and school education, many people growing up in the United States do not even know "how to make a genuine apology" (p. 38). To make the situation worse, many do not realize the necessity of an apology when they have offended others. In university contexts, if the student has done something wrong that creates trouble for the instructor, a lack of an apology is sometimes even worse than making a linguistically problematic one. Apologies are important social skills for university students

in contemporary society. In preparation to enter the workforce after graduating from college, university students are expected to behave under the general principle of "professionalism", defined as the demonstration of good characteristics of self-regulation and self-motivation possessed by trained professionals or learners who behave in socially appropriate ways within their own professional or learning communities (Evetts 2003; Swart et al. 2009). Students' successful realization of apologies when necessary is a good indicator of professionalism, showing that they act like professionals in their own academic fields who possess the ability to reflect on their own mistakes and progress. In academic communication at universities, it is critical for students to gain sociocultural and linguistic awareness while apologizing to instructors. Perceptual information from instructors, as the addressees of student apologies, provides important insights for the success in communication between students and instructors.

2.   Background

The speech act of apologies is closely connected to the concept of politeness. Politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1978), is related to individuals' self-esteem, or face needs. Two major strategies of politeness include satisfying other's wishes of being liked or admired (i.e., positive politeness) and respecting other's freedom of action (i.e., negative politeness). The politeness theory represents some universals in language usage in Western societies, especially in the English language and is often used to address speech act performances. Certain speech acts are considered as face-threatening because they either put pressure on the addressee (e.g., orders, requests, and suggestions) or sacrifice the public image of the speaker (e.g., apologies, thanks, and acceptances of compliments). Other face-threatening acts (FTAs) go against the rules of positive politeness by showing little care of the addressee's feelings or wants (e.g., criticisms and disagreements) or damaging the speaker's own public image of a well-rounded human being (e.g., apologies and confessions).

Miscommunication often occurs when there is a lack of pragmatic awareness. Thomas (1983) states the reason for pragmatic failure as the speaker's "inability to understand 'what is meant by what is said'" (p. 91). According to her, there are two kinds of pragmatic failures: When the failure results from a lack of linguistic knowledge, it is referred to as pragmalinguistic failure (e.g., a speaker is not able to make a conventional indirect request because he/she does not know how to use modal verbs). Another type of pragmatic failure is due to speaker's insufficient sociocultural knowledge of the target language community (e.g., a speaker's request is often too direct because he/she thinks that only direct forms

are preferred in the target culture). These two categories reflect the complex nature of pragmatic performance, which draws from both the linguistic and sociocultural knowledge of a speaker.

The goal of speech act research is to describe the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features of certain speaker groups, to guide pragmatic instruction, and ultimately to enhance cultural awareness and understanding and to enlighten cross-cultural and intercultural communication. In order for these goals to be achieved, it is important to know the perceptions of not only the speaker/writer but also the listener/reader of the targeted speech acts, because audience perceptions always play an important role in communication successes or failures.

Audience perceptions of communication effectiveness, a more general area incorporating the scope of speech act perceptions, have been commonly assessed in communication studies. Littlemore (2003) has described three aspects of communicative effectiveness for second language learners of English: (1) ease of comprehension (how easy is it to work out what this person is talking about?); (2) stylishness of expression (how stylish is this person's language?); and (3) proficiency (how would you rate this person's level of English?). Based on students' spoken output, raters were given multiple options (e.g., for ease of comprehension, very difficult, quite difficult, average, quite easy, very easy). Results of Littlemore (2003) showed that learners who demonstrate analytic cognitive styles are judged by native speakers of English as more effective in their communications than those who use holistic cognitive styles.

Speech act studies are increasingly likely to use retrospective verbal protocols to record the thoughts of participants who produced targeted speech acts (Cohen & Olshtain 1993; Félix-Brasdefer 2008). Also, audience perceptions of speech act performance have been examined in a few studies (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011; Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh 2008; Ishihara 2009; Taguchi 2003, 2011; Tateyama 2001). However, none of these studies have focused on apology as a targeted speech act. For frequently occurring speech acts like apologies, which affect the apologizer's goals or interpersonal relationships with others, it is particularly important to obtain perceptual information from the addressees. This information helps to facilitate smoother communication and can provide valuable insights for material development in teaching and assessing speech acts.

Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) incorporated an online questionnaire to gather quantitative and qualitative data on audience perceptions of request emails. Twenty-four lecturers in universities in the U.K. were asked to rate and comment on "the politeness and/or appropriateness" of six natural request emails written by students (p. 3199). To reduce the various effects of different degrees of social distance perceived by the participants, they were "instructed to imagine that they received the emails from one of their students with whom they are familiar but

not close to" (p. 3199). Two dimensions were included in the 5-point Likert scale ratings: politeness and abruptness. Unfortunately, the author did not provide further explanations on the operationalization of these two dimensions. Qualitative data were also collected via comments made by the lecturers, who were asked to "explain their choice for [the ratings] by making reference to specific linguistic features from the [email]" (p. 3199). Results showed that the majority of student emails were perceived as too direct and had zero marking to downgrade the effect of the requests or just used the word "please". The NNS students in this study were judged as unprepared to send appropriate request emails to faculty members.

Another study including the addressees' perceptions was conducted by Ishihara (2009). Introducing a teacher-learner collaborative assessment tool, this study utilized the EFL teacher's comments as interpretations of the appropriateness of requests produced by learners in written discourse completion tasks. The teacher was the only audience member of the request performances in this study; however, this is not unusual in an EFL context where students rarely have contact with native English speakers. The teacher's written evaluations included a global score on appropriateness and additional comments on what native speakers would say or how they might react in the same situation, as well as other strategies and word choices that could be considered. Learners of this study were shown to demonstrate increasing awareness of contextual variables and pragmalinguistic details in producing English speech acts. This type of classroom assessment also helped learners to realize the differences between their own intentions and listeners' perceptions.

Most speech act studies reporting audience perceptions have been based on raters' perspectives (Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh 2008; Taguchi 2003, 2011; Tateyama 2001). In the studies by Eslami and Eslami-Rasekh (2008) and Tateyama (2001), two raters were included and both were native speakers of the target language. Speech act ratings were not the center of these studies but were included as a way to assess learners' pragmatic abilities. These studies provided scant description of the rating criteria and process. Both used a 5-point Likert scale and were based on the holistic impressions of the raters. Taguchi's (2003) study included a detailed speech act rating scale on the appropriateness of requests and refusals produced in role-plays. Six native-English-speaking raters who were experienced ESL teachers rated L2 speakers' pragmatic ability in two aspects: "sociopragmatics (i.e., the ability to evaluate contextual cues) and pragmalinguistics (i.e., the ability to choose appropriate linguistic expressions)" (p. 70). A rubric with 6-point rating scales was provided, with descriptions of the contextual, grammatical, and discourse variables of the targeted speech acts, as well as corresponding examples for each scale. Ratings from these studies help us to understand how native speakers view the pragmatic performance of second language learners; however, the fact that

only a limited number of speech act raters were present makes it impossible to generalize the results to a larger group.

A more complete picture of speech act assessment has been provided by Ishihara (2010), who targeted classroom assessment of ESL learners' pragmatic ability. Both a holistic rubric and an analytic rubric were provided for assessment conducted by the classroom teacher, peers, or student themselves, incorporating seven major aspects: understanding of sociocultural norms; organization of the message (i.e., discourse markers; directness, politeness, and formality); grammar strategies; semantic moves; word choice; and tone, including both verbal and non-verbal tone. Ishihara (2010) also provided a specific rubric on assessing apologies, using a 4-point scale on the following four aspects: level of formality; strategies of apologizing (e.g. expressing apology, acknowledging responsibility, giving explanation, offering repair, promising nonreoccurrence); word choice; and tone (facial expression, tone of voice, gestures).

Taguchi (2011) explored different rater characteristics in assessing pragmatic performance. Four native English speakers from different ethnic-racial backgrounds completed the rating of oral DCT recordings produced by 48 Japanese EFL learners using a five-point rating scale addressing overall appropriateness. Rater variations were revealed from the retrospective verbal protocols conducted after the global rating. Raters were found to focus on different aspects while rating learners' pragmatic performance. Some raters placed more emphasis on linguistic forms such as the use of politeness markers, whereas others based their rating decisions on non-linguistic factors such as the semantic strategies used in constructing the content of the speech. Results also revealed the influences from raters' personal experiences on their scoring decisions. An important implication from the results of this study is that native speakers did not form a unified voice on pragmatic ratings. Raters are unique individuals with different perspectives, which should be observed and valued in assessing speech act performance. How raters' social backgrounds relates to their perceptions of learners' speech act performance is an empirical question that warrants further investigations.

Previous research has been scarce in revealing the recipients' perceptions of salient speech acts like apologies. Knowing this perceptual information from the other end will help us to re-envision communication as a two-way street and to provide participants with insights on social-cultural appropriateness in the new environment they have just entered. This new environment is set up as a broad academic setting on a university campus. The main inquiry of the current study is on instructors' perceptions of student apology productions, which includes the following two research questions and sub-questions:

1. How do instructors from different backgrounds rate the communicative effectiveness of student emailed and spoken apologies?
    1.1 Do instructors give different ratings to apologies produced by NSs and NNSs?
    1.2 Do instructors of different ranks (i.e., graduate teaching assistant, non-tenure-track faculty; tenure-track/tenured faculty) give different ratings to student apologies?
    1.3 Do instructors of different age groups (i.e., 20–30, 31–40, 41–50, 51 and above years old) give different ratings to student apologies?
    1.4 Do instructors give different ratings to spoken apologies and emailed apologies?
2. How do the instructors explain their ratings?
    2.1 What types of explanations do instructors give?
    2.2 What are the qualities of highly rated student apologies, according to the instructors?
    2.3 What are the characteristics of poorly rated student apologies, according to the instructors?

3. Methodology

3.1   Online survey of instructor perceptions of student apologies

An online survey of instructor perceptions was developed via surveygizmo.com. The title of the survey avoided using the word "apologies" due to the different reactions it might cause to responders; instead, a title with a broader scope was used: "Instructor Perceptions of Academic Communication." Student apologies included in the online survey came from a pool of spoken and emailed apologies produced by native English speaking (NS) students ($n = 60$), recruited from lower- (100–200 level) and upper-level (300–400 level) university classes at the same university as the instructor participants and nonnative English speaking (NNS) students ($n = 63$), recruited from the local Intensive English Program. To collect the pool of apologies, student participants were asked to respond in emailed or spoken form to three coursework-related situations that are most likely to generate apologies: missing an important lecture, missing an important appointment, and turning in an important assignment late. A total of 369 apologies messages were elicited from student participants; more specifically, 189 emailed apologies and 180 spoken apologies that were audio recorded and then transcribed.

Two forms of the online survey were created, with one including 12 spoken apologies in audio files and the other including 12 emailed apologies. The sampling of spoken apologies included only male students to avoid any potential gender effects on listeners' judgments. Males were chosen because the student participants contributed to the apologies were mostly male, and the same gender was selected for the NS group to match with the NNS group. The 12 apologies in each survey were produced by 6 NSs and 6 NNSs. All three situations (i.e., missed lecture, missed appointment, and late assignment) were equally represented in these apologies. A test item was provided at the beginning of each survey to familiarize the participants with the survey format. Sample screenshots of the two forms of survey are displayed in Appendix A. All apologies used in the survey are presented in Appendix B.

Instructors were asked to conduct a global rating on the communicative effectiveness of each student apology message. The decision to use one global scale was informed by extensive pilot tests of more complex scales, including five components: comprehensibility, fluency, politeness, appropriateness, and accuracy. Results of the pilot tests revealed high corrections of instructors' rating scores on all the above components, which were then combined into one global scale, communicative effectiveness. Communicative effectiveness is defined as an instructor's perception of how successfully an apology is executed, considering the speaker's social-cultural awareness, via the use of semantic strategies (e.g., explicit expression of apologies and offers of repair), organization of the content, word choices, fluency, and intonation (Littlemore 2003). Each survey item includes two parts: The first part is a Likert scale question on how effective the student's communication is in a given apology sample and four choices (i.e., not effective, somewhat ineffective, somewhat effective, and effective). The 4-point Likert scale was chosen for two reasons: (1) An even-number, 4-point scale would avoid the tendency of participants choosing the middle number due to convenience or uncertainty. (2) Although increasing the points might result in more precise ratings, this in turn would require a longer reaction time. A 4-point scale, compared to a more precise scale, is cognitively less demanding and more efficient for the instructor participants. After the rating, an open-ended question is presented, asking the instructor to list the reasons why they gave the rating. While the Likert scale question was obligatory, instructors had the option to skip the open-ended question if they wish.

3.2   Participants

The participants in this study were all university instructors at a large public university in Southwest U.S. during the time of the data collection. To recruit instructor participants, an email was first sent out with a description of this study

and the links of both the spoken and emailed apology surveys to each instructor contacted. The participant had the choices to answer either form of the survey. A total of 150 instructors responded and completed the survey. Their demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of instructor participants ($N = 150$) in the online survey

		Emailed apology	Spoken apology	Total
		# of participants		
Gender	Female	59	31	90
	Male	41	19	60
Rank	Tenured/tenure-track	38	21	59
	Non tenure-track	35	16	51
	Graduate assistant	27	13	40
Age	20–30 years old	22	13	35
	31–40	14	9	23
	41–50	23	11	34
	51 and above	41	17	58
Language	NS	90	42	132
	NNS	10	8	18
Years of Teaching Mean (SD)		10.70 (9.28)	38.52 (21.98)	24.61 (15.63)

The spoken apology survey contains embedded audio files and due to this more complicated feature, fewer instructors chose to respond to it, compared to the instructors who answered the emailed apology survey. As seen in Table 1, the average years of teaching experiences of instructors who responded to the spoken survey was much larger than the ones who responded to the emailed survey. Since the sampling method did not control the instructors' L1 background, more NS instructors than NNS instructors participated.

3.3 Analysis

All instructor participants' responses were automatically saved through the survey website, surveygizmo.com. The rating scores obtained in this study, which represent instructors' attitudes towards students' apologies, were treated as interval scales to allow for the use of parametric statistics, following McKay (2006), attitudinal scales are often treated as interval scales in statistical analysis. The four choices in the Likert scale questions were converted into numerical data for individual participants (i.e., not effective = 1; somewhat ineffective = 2; somewhat effective = 3; and effective = 4). Means and standard deviations were calculated on instructors' rating scores. A paired-sample t-test was used to test the differences

in rating scores on NS apologies and on NNS apologies. One-way ANOVA tests were used to test the differences in the scores given by instructors of different ranks (graduate assistant, tenured or tenure-track faculty, non-tenure-track faculty) and age groups (20–30, 31–40, 41–50, 51 and above). An independent *t*-test was used to test the differences in ratings scores on emailed apologies and on spoken apologies.

Instructors' explanations on their ratings of student apologies were obtained via a comment box at the end of each survey item. Although not every instructor provided an explanation on each survey item, the response rates were still quite high in both the spoken apology survey (578/600 = 96.33%) and emailed apology survey (993/1200 = 82.75%). Instructors' explanations refer to both types of pragmatic knowledge, sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge. Following Thomas's (1983) distinctions of these two types of knowledge, a coding scheme was established. Sociopragmatic explanations are explanations on the appropriateness of the content of an apology message, which can be further divided into two sub-categories: (a) the use or misuse of semantic strategies (e.g., acknowledging responsibility, requests, and explicit expression of apologies); and (b) different aspects of professionalism, such as directness, formality, appropriateness, politeness, attitude, and timing. Pragmalinguistic explanations focus on linguistic or praralinguistic features of an apology message, such as word choice, tone, pause, and speech rate. Comments that cannot fit into the above two categories are labeled as others.

Two graduate students in TESOL went through a 2-hour training session with the researcher and independently coded instructors' comments from the emailed and spoken surveys into categories following the above coding schemes. The percentages of agreement between the two coders and the researcher were 87.77% and 92.91%. All disagreements in coding were resolved via discussion.

4.   Instructors' ratings of student apologies

This section reports the results on instructors' ratings of student apologies and provides answers to the first general research question and its sub-questions.

4.1   Instructors' ratings of NS apologies vs. NNS apologies

A paired-sample *t*-test was conducted to address RQ1.1, and results showed significant differences on instructors ratings of NS apologies and NNS apologies ($t_{(149)}$ = 5.98, *p* = .00, .21 ≤ μ ≤ .42). Apologies produced by NS students received a significantly higher mean ratings (*M* = 2.65, *SD* = .65) than those produced by NNS students (*M* = 2.34, *SD* = .59). Descriptive statistics (see Appendix C and D)

also showed that instructors of different ranks and age groups unanimously gave higher mean ratings to apologies produced by NSs than by NNSs, despite the fact that they were not told the first language background of the student apologizers. This significant rating score difference indicates the existence of serious problems in NNS apologies, although NS apologies were not by all means perfect, as the average rating score on NS apologies was just a bit over the 50th percentile on a 4-point scale.

4.2   Instructors' ratings of student apologies by rank

RQ 1.2 asks if any significant differences existed in ratings given by instructors of three ranks (i.e., graduate teaching assistants, Non-tenure-track faculty, and tenured/tenure-track faculty). Descriptive statistics showed that graduate teaching assistants gave the highest mean rating among the three groups ($M = 2.67$, $SD = .48$), followed by non-tenure-track faculty ($M = 2.60$, $SD = .52$), while tenured/tenure-track faculty produced the lowest mean rating ($M = 2.46$, $SD = .50$). However, these differences did not reach statistical significance, as shown from the result of a one-way ANOVA test ($F_{(2)} = 2.15$, $p = .12$). Therefore, instructors' ratings of student apologies were not influenced significantly by their ranks at the university.

4.3   Instructors' ratings of student apologies by age group

RQ1.3 asks if any significant differences were present in ratings given by instructors of different age groups. Descriptive statistics showed that instructors who were 31–40 years old gave the highest mean ratings ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .46$), followed closely by those who were 20–30 years old ($M = 2.64$, $SD = .46$), while seasoned instructors gave lower mean ratings ($M = 2.56$, $SD = .54$ for those who were above 50 years old and $M = 2.44$, $SD = .51$ for those who were 41–50 years old). Results from a one-way ANOVA test indicated that the above differences were not significant ($F_{(3)} = 1.35$, $p = .26$). In another word, age group was not a significant factor which caused different instructor ratings of student apologies.

4.4   Instructors' ratings of emailed apologies vs. spoken apologies

RQ1.4 asks if the mode in which student produced their apologies (emailed vs. spoken) was a significant factor for instructors to give different ratings. Descriptive statistics showed almost identical mean ratings and standard deviations on emailed apologies ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .51$) and spoken apologies ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .50$).

Result from an independent t-test adds further evidence to the lack of differences in instructors' ratings of student apologies due to the mode of communication ($t_{(148)}$ = .016, p = .99).

To summarize the results on the first general research question, instructors gave significantly higher ratings to apologies produced by NS students than those produced by NNS students. However, no significant differences were found in the rating scores by the rank or age group of the instructors; nor did the communication mode of student apologies cause any significant differences on instructors' ratings.

5.   Instructors' explanations of their ratings

This section reports the results in answer to the second general research question and its sub questions. Different types of instructors' explanations were first presented, followed by discussions on the qualities of highly-rated and poorly-rated student apologies.

5.1   Types of explanations

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of instructor explanations dealt with sociopragmatic features of student apologies, followed by pragmalinguistic explanations and other explanations.

Table 2 displays the total frequencies of occurrence of the three categories and sub-categories of instructor explanations on their ratings of emailed and spoken apologies. The majority of sociopragmatic explanations were made in regards to students' use of semantic strategies in realizing their apologies (52.12%). Instructors often voiced strong expectations that students should take responsibilities for their own learning by admitting mistakes and taking initiatives. Although excuses were sometimes not welcomed, inappropriate reasons presented by students frustrated instructors even more, as shown in the following:

(1)   Even though the student apologized, I think the excuse that he woke up late is not worth sharing. (on spoken sample G)

(2)   He basically says he prioritized other classes over this one. Not a good reason. Everyone is busy. (on spoken sample K)

The semantic strategy most frequently referred to is the use of request as a compensation: While only a few messages led to the instructor's agreement on the effective use of requests, most student apology messages either lacked specific requests or incorporated an inappropriate one, which irritated instructors:
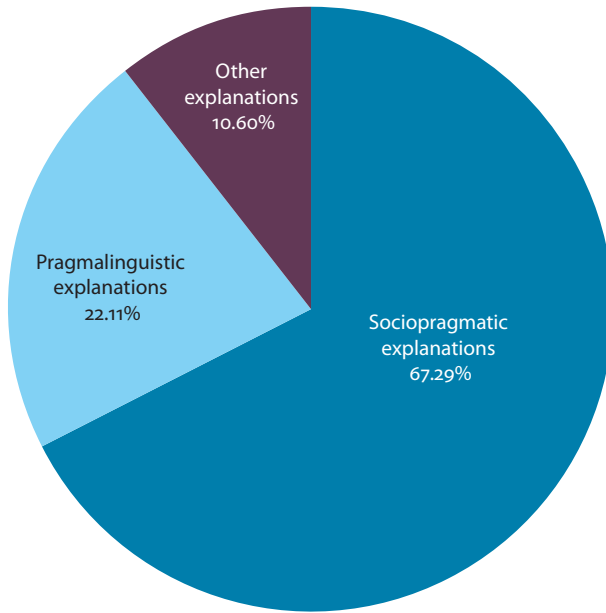
Figure 1. Percentages of three types of instructor explanations on apology ratings

(3)   The student only gives an excuse and does not take action to ask if it is possible to make another appointment. As an instructor, I hear excuses every day. I want students to be responsible and take action. (on email sample F)

As discussed earlier, successful realization of apologies in university contexts is closely connected to the concept of "professionalism", defined as good attributes to take responsibilities and to perform in socially appropriate ways (Evetts 2003; Swart et al. 2009). Sociopragmatic explanations regarding aspects of professionalism (15.17%) included instructors' perceptions of the directness, formality, appropriateness, politeness, attitude, and timing of students' apology messages:

(4)   This message is presumptuous and rude. (on email sample A)

(5)   The student sounds sincere and respectful. (on spoken sample A)

(6)   The student should have contacted me before missing an appointment. (on spoken sample G)

Compared to sociopramatic explanations, pragmalinguistic explanations were less frequently given by instructors (22.11%). Although instructors mostly focused on content while rating the effectiveness of a student apology, they also commonly pointed out the frustration they faced while reading a message that was written using incorrect grammar:

Table 2. Frequencies of instructor comments by categories

Category of instructor explanations	Raw frequency (percentage)		
	Emailed	**Spoken**	**Total**
1. Sociopragmatic explanations	1020 (64.56%)	599 (72.52%)	1619 (67.29%)
a. on semantic strategies	751 (47.50%)	503 (60.90%)	1254 (52.12%)
b. on professionalism	269 (17.01%)	96 (11.62%)	365 (15.17%)
2. Pragmalinguistic explanations	394 (24.93%)	138 (16.71%)	532 (22.11%)
3. Other explanations	166 (10.51%)	89 (10.77%)	255 (10.60%)
Total	1580 (100%)	826 (100%)	2406 (100%)

(7) The fact that the e-mail contains the sort of grammatical errors that come from poor editing only makes it worse: You don't dash off and fail to edit an e-mail where you're asking – really, demanding – special accommodations for no good reason. (on email sample C).

For spoken apologies, pragmalinguistic explanations were frequently made on specific paralinguistic features, such as a student's intonation:

(8) The student was sort of hard to understand and didn't use much intonation to indicate sincerity. (on spoken sample D).

Specific word choices were often referred to in instructors' pragmalinguistic explanations as well. For example, instructors quoted specific words or phrases from the student's apology message and discussed them:

(9) … 'the very least' catches me off guard. Like it is MY job to make sure they get the notes when they can get them from classmates" (on email sample A).

Instructors' pragmalinguistic explanations on NNS apology samples often addressed the context of ESL. Most instructors had sympathy for students who speak English as a second language and some were even willing to establish a different standard in rating their communicative effectiveness:

(10) The apparent ESL issue works in his favor and I'm more likely to ignore the hesitancy with which he speaks and focus on the content of his communication". (on spoken sample K).

However, there were still a few instructors who were apparently frustrated by communication difficulties experienced by some international students. To this group of instructors, students' marginal linguistic ability not only impeded their communicative effectiveness but also placed them in danger of not achieving academic success in general:

(11) The poor grammar and lack of English proficiency suggest that the student should be remediated. (on email sample H).

When instructors' explanations do not belong to either one of the two major categories, they were marked as "other explanations" (10.60%). These explanations were often vague (e.g., "bad communication") or did not relate to the topic of this study (e.g., "*Why have I not yet heard female voices on this survey*?")

5.2   Instructors' comments on highly rated student apologies

Why did instructors give high ratings to certain apology samples? Identifying the rationales provided by instructors for highly rated student apologies could help us understand what instructors deem important in student apologies. Two of the top-rated student apology messages are displayed below:

> Emailed Apology Sample E:
>
> Hello Dr. Smith,
>
> I am so sorry about missing our appointment earlier. I would still like to talk to you about this matter but I understand if you do not wish to schedule another appointment. I will stop by your office during your office hours. Again, I apologize for missing our appointment.
>
> Thank you for your time,
>
> Mary

> Spoken Apology Sample J:
>
> I realize that I missed the submission date for the assignment this morning and I was really hoping that I can make that up. Um if not, I totally understand. I take full responsibility for not submitting it on time.

These two samples were both constructed by upper-level NS students, and they received the highest mean ratings from all instructors with small standard deviations: Email Sample E received a mean rating of 3.50, *SD* = .77, and Spoken Sample J received a mean rating of 3.43, *SD* = .74. Instructors' comments covered some major areas in the descriptors of the top score (4 = appropriate) in the holistic assessment rubric for speech act performance in Ishihara (2010).

First, these two messages received high scores from instructors due to the sociopragmatic competence demonstrated by the student apologizers. Instructors applauded the fine-tuned awareness of sociocultural norms reflected in these apologies, especially the fact that students were willing to take responsibilities for their mistakes, acknowledged the possible consequences, and initiated effective requests

for make-up work. In the U.S. academic culture, efficiency and respect are equally emphasized in professional communication. The students in the two topic-rated apologies showed good understanding of these social-cultural norms in academia by strategically incorporating different semantic strategies of apologies. Multiple instructors favored the fact that these students were not wasting time by giving excuses for their mistakes, which made the messages sound brief and right on target. In Emailed Apology Sample E, the student's request not only gave the instructor an option for not rescheduling the appointment but also showed the student's initiative to make up the appointment by attending office hours, a set period of time requiring no additional arrangements on the instructor's part. Although giving explanations is often viewed as an essential part in making apologies, this student demonstrated that not presenting reasons could also be effective given the right context. This helps to protect instructor's negative face because valuable time is saved by not having to read excuses presented by the student for something that has already been missed. Instead, the instructor can focus on the unresolved matter mentioned in the student's request. Moreover, since the student offered to attend the instructor's office hours, omitting the reason in the email is legitimate because she can give an oral explanation during her office-hour visit. Similarly, in Spoken Apology Sample J, the student did not give an excuse either, which was again viewed as preferable, as well as the fact that the student acknowledged that the instructor might not accept the late work and was clear about the consequence of not being able to turn it in. One instructor comments on the student's good grasp of sociopragmatic rules:

(12)   Culturally, it is more acceptable to talk about what can be done when something had already happened instead of why an assignment was submitted late. Full responsibility is more appealing to a professor than the reasons why the assignment was missed.

This student, again, demonstrated effective use of negative politeness by not intruding the instructor's time and course policy but still conveying a genuine desire to do well in class.

Another reason for instructors to give high ratings to these two messages is because of the pragmalinguistic knowledge demonstrated by the student apologizers. Both apology messages contain an appropriate range of grammar structures and word choices with minimum errors. In Emailed Apology Sample E, many instructors commented on the student's careful use of words and sentence structures, as well as the appropriate salutation, which helped to convey the apologetic attitude more effectively. For a spoken apology to be considered effective in language use, good use of linguistic devices were not the only factors. Aspects

of delivery, such as fluency, appropriate use of hesitation markers, and tone were also very important. Effective use of these paralinguistic features, combined with linguistic features, helped instructors to sympathize with the student apologizer in Spoken Sample J. As noted in one instructor's comment, good grammar, word choice, combined with appropriate tone and fluency "*lead [one] to believe [the student] and honor his request.*"

5.3   Instructors' comments on poorly rated student apologies

Why did instructors give low ratings to some apology samples? Identifying the rationales provided by instructors for poorly rated student apologies could help us understand how students can avoid making poor apologies. The transcripts of two student apology messages that received the lowest ratings are displayed below:

Emailed Apology Sample B:

Hi Mr. Smith how are you? hope you have a nice day. i really email you because i have missed an important lecture and as you know the next two weeks we will start the final exams. i seen all my friends and nobody was taking notes or anything else. Would you mind repeat the lecture again or give me a brief summary for the lecture. Because i really need it as soon as possible to study it for the exam

Spoken Apology Sample G:

Um teacher, I'm so sorry about um yesterday the meeting um because I'm get up um is late so I'm so sorry about it.

These two samples were both constructed by NNS students, and they received the lowest mean ratings from all instructors with small standard deviations: Email Sample B received a mean rating of 1.38, *SD* = .69, and Spoken Sample G received a mean rating of 2.05, *SD* = .98. Instructors' comments covered some major areas listed in the descriptors of the lowest score (1 = inappropriate) in the holistic assessment rubric for speech act performance in Ishihara (2010).

In contrast to the top-rated apology messages, these two messages received low ratings because of their lack of reflections of sociopragmatic knowledge of the student apologizers. Instructors expressed frustration with Emailed Apology Sample B due to the student's lack of knowledge about the U.S. academic culture:

(13)   I was very annoyed just reading this. I would likely be a bit harsher than normal with this student. This does not reflect a collegiate level of writing, thought or respect.

The student's request was considered as inappropriate because he did not understand that in the U.S. academic culture, asking the professor to repeat the lecture is not an option. Many instructors were also annoyed by the explanations provided by this student:

> Because i really need it as soon as possible to study it for the exam.

This self-centered statement was perceived as ineffective, as noted by one instructor:

(14)   I prefer a specific request for a meeting date and time rather than a statement of emergency.

The student's unrealistic request and its follow-up explanation are seen as disrespectful and threatened the negative face needs of the instructor because such language impeded the instructor's time and freedom. In addition, multiple instructors found the following line particularly offensive:

> I seen all my friends and nobody was taking notes or anything else.

The student may have just intended to state his observation about the classroom; not only did this statement have questionable validity, but it also portrayed an overall pessimistic learning atmosphere in the whole class, something no instructor would wish to see in a student email message. This statement was viewed as an insult to many instructors, who cared a lot about the popularity of their lecture content that can trigger students' positive learning experiences. Therefore, it threatened the instructor's positive face need, which is to be liked and admired by the students.

Spoken Apology Sample J did not reflect a good understanding of the cultural reasoning or the norms in U.S. academic culture either. Although an explanation is often considered as an essential element of an apology, social norms expect this explanation to be valid and important enough to be shared. In academic communication, instructors expect to maintain a professional relationship with students by showing mutual respect and commitment to learning. The student in this message, however, gave the excuse that he woke up late, which was considered as not worth sharing and conveyed an irresponsible and careless attitude towards learning. Instructors cared more about the fact that the student took the initiative to make up the missed work, while this particular aspect was missing from the message. Furthermore, by failing to acknowledge how valuable the instructor's time is, the student jeopardized the instructor's negative face need.

Another reason for instructors to give low ratings to these two messages is due to their pragmalinguistic failures. Many instructors equated these language problems to negative learning attitude:

(15)   Lack of proper punctuation and grammar indicates a lack of interest in really succeeding and making a strong impression.

Harsher consequence was also warned by some, who suggested that due to the poor language use in the emailed message, the student probably should not pass the course. In addition, many instructors were not particularly fond of the salutation, which was perceived as weak, chatty, and informal. This, again, threatens the instructor's negative face in order to maintain a professional and formal relationship with the student.

Despite its shortness, the spoken message contained three sentence-level mistakes, an inappropriate addressing term (i.e., *teacher*), and four occurrences of a dysfluency marker (i.e., *um*). Many instructors mentioned in their comments on the ineffectiveness of this message due to these language problems. Given the time the student used in producing this apology, more useful information could have been conveyed with a faster speech rate and fewer filled pauses. Moreover, the hesitancy reflected in the student's tone of voice is perceived as another feature that marks down the rating score because this shows that the student may not be willing to admit the mistake and make a genuine apology.

A careful examination of instructors' perceptions of the top-rated and poorly rated apology messages showed the importance of both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge (Thomas 1983) in realizing a successful apology and connected well to Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory. Instructors' negative face needs were well protected when students took responsibility in apologizing, offering worthy explanations, making appropriate requests, and delivering the message by accurately utilizing linguistic and paralinguistic devices. In contrast, both the positive and negative face needs of the instructors were threatened when students' apologies were not supported by sufficient or valid evidence, inconvenienced the instructors, and contained multiple grammatical mistakes.

6.   Pedagogical implications

In a higher education setting, successes or failures to apologize for coursework-related situations are closely connected to the interpersonal relationship between student and instructor. A student's ability to produce polite and appropriate apologies is important for successful academic communication. The study results showed many NNS students had trouble utilizing major semantic strategies in apologizing to address the face needs of the instructors. While explicit expressions of apologies were often missing, students also had trouble presenting valid and important explanations and taking responsibility as well as making appropriate

and relevant requests to restore a good professional relationship with their instructors. Most instructors in this study reported feelings of frustration with students' poor apology skills in daily spoken and emailed interactions. This observational finding warrants pedagogical interventions regarding institutional apologies for novice university students, especially NNS students.

In a low-division undergraduate classroom, instructors could give mini-workshops in a few classes to address the latest issues emerging from recent academic communication with students. A lively discussion format could be used rather than a lecture from the instructor on general expectations of professionalism. Instructors could save student emailed apologies from previous years, change the names, and use them as examples to generate student discussions on effective and ineffective apologies in commonly occurring situations. For example, a 10-minute mini-workshop on professional email etiquette would be time well spent for any entry-level courses. The content of this instruction can include what to put in the subject line, appropriate addressing terms, level of formality, formatting, and attachment. In their endeavor to be smart communicators in important coursework-related situations, students might also appreciate hearing their instructors' perceptions about what factors constitute a professional apology message. Class discussions can be organized on the importance of contextual variables on making an effective apology, such as the severity of the situation, social distance and interpersonal relationships between professors and students, and the mode of communication. For example, the missed appointment and late homework situations were judged by students as more severe and demanding more detailed apologetic statements compared to the missed lecture situation. Also, emailed apologies were generally viewed as more formal and polite compared to spoken apologies (Cheng 2013).

NNS students (intermediate levels and above) could benefit from explicit and implicit instructions on important speech acts like apologies and requests in ESL classes. Explicit instructions on the importance of apologies, common semantic strategies in making apologies in English, and effective use of stance markers could be incorporated into any class of a specific language skill or an integrated skill class. For example, students can be made aware of the difference between a direct request statement (e.g., *I need/want…*) and a conventionally indirect request (e.g., *Can/Could I…?*).

Institutional apologies could also be introduced through cross-cultural comparison activities. Instructors can ask NNSs to respond to coursework-related scenarios like the ones used in this study in their L1s before responding to them in English. This will generate interesting discussions on why different forms are used in making an apology in the same situation. Instructors should be able to elicit reasons voiced by the students themselves. For example, Cheng (2013) investigated

the different opinions between NS and NNS students on whether or not they should provide explanations in apologizing to instructors. NS students, especially those who are in upper-level university classes, did not see reasons or excuses as a central concern of instructors in coursework-related situations. On the other hand, NNSs considered explanations as necessary in their apologies to instructors and emphasized on the authenticity of their excuses and their concerns to make these excuses believable to instructors. This example shows the different socio-pragmatic norms adopted by some NNS students in making apologies. Differences in pragmalinguistic forms could also contribute to variations in student apology statements. For instance, a student's direct request to a professor, such as "Please accept my paper", could be perfectly polite when said in Japanese.

NNS students at more advanced levels of proficiency could also benefit from implicit instruction on institutional apologies through discussing different apology samples presented to them as well as producing and reflecting upon their own apology emails and utterance in various contexts. Students could also benefit from knowing how their instructors perceive their apologies through apology task evaluations or interactional feedback, like the ones used in Ishihara (2010).

The following information could be usefully addressed in classroom instruction on making appropriate institutional apologies:

1. A good apology message should reflect a fine-tuned awareness of sociocultural norms in the academic community. For critical course-work-related situations, students are expected to take responsibility for any work they have missed by providing an explicit apologetic note. Explanations with legitimate reasons are welcomed; however, instructors usually put greater emphasis on students' taking initiative in making up the work they have missed. Instructors also appreciate acknowledgements from students in showing understanding for the instructors' time and addressing the inconvenience, e.g., *I understand that you have taken time out of your day to help me*, as well as acknowledgements of possible consequences, e.g., *I understand that points will be taken off for late submission based on the syllabus.*

2. A good apology message is appropriate in the levels of politeness, directness and formality. Instructors value a sincere and apologetic tone from students. Students are also generally expected to sound formal and considerate of the recipient's time in apologizing to their instructors: A follow-up request is often expected after an explicit apology for missed coursework, and students should take care to frame such a request in conventional indirect form showing care to the listener/reader, such as using forms as *could I* and *I was wondering if.* Students also should be attentive in using formal salutations and punctuation.

3.   A good apology message contains an appropriate range of grammatical structures and word choices with minimum errors. A particular linguistic feature that is worth teaching is stance markers, such as modal verbs (e.g., If there is any way that we *could* schedule another appointment, I *would* greatly appreciate it.), hedges (e.g., *I was wondering if, I hope, possible/possibly*), and amplifiers (e.g., *deeply, sincere/sincerely, completely, thoroughly, mistakenly, greatly, accidentally, unfortunately*). Students should be taught the importance of using these stance markers accurately because they are not only often connected to instructors' perceptions of student language proficiency levels but also associated with their impressions of students' learning attitudes and potential to succeed in coursework.

Finally, it is worthwhile for students to realize that successful academic communication always involves two parties, both the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. Findings of this study highlight the importance of examining perceptual data from the addressees, which were rarely studied in previous literature. In academic communication in university contexts, it is critical for students to gain awareness of the socio-cultural norms as well as knowledge of appropriate linguistic forms to interact with instructors.

7.   Conclusions

This study investigated instructor perceptions of student apologies. Results showed that although instructors' ranks and age groups, as well as the communication mode of student apologizers did not contribute to any significant differences in instructors' ratings of student apologies, apologies produced by NS students received significantly higher ratings than those produced by NNS students.

Similar to the findings in Taguchi (2011), instructors' explanations on their ratings referred to both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge of the student apologizers. Students' good use of semantic strategies, correct grammar, appropriate tone and word choices, and knowledge of social-cultural norms in the U.S. academic context and aspects related to professionalism often contributed to a higher rating of student apologies. In turn, poorly rated student apologies usually showed misuse or lack of major semantic strategies, limited English language proficiency, lack of awareness of social-cultural conventions, and inappropriateness in the level of politeness, directness, and formality.

The current study has several limitations. First, the student apologies included in the online survey were elicited using oral or written discourse completing tasks. Although this was done for practicality, the lack of authenticity in the survey items

may quite likely influence the instructors' judgement. Future studies should consider including authentic samples in speech act ratings and in studying addressees' perceptions. Second, a much greater number of NS instructor participants *n* = 132) participated in this study than NNS instructors (*n* = 18). With more NNS instructor participants, a new research question could be added on the relationship between instructor's first language background and their rating behaviors. Finally, this study only examines a very specific type of apology – student-instructor apologies in certain U.S. university contexts. Future research on other types of apologies in different situations and international contexts would certainly contribute to a more nuanced and complete picture of overall communicative abilities.

Although apologies have been relatively well researched in different languages and contexts, we know little about how they can be assessed in classroom research and language tests. Perceptual information from instructors of different ranks, age groups, and disciplines in this study will shed some light on how to develop assessment criteria for apologies and other major speech acts, which could be further explored in future studies.

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Appendix A. Screenshots of instructor online surveys

Instructor Perceptions of Email Academic Communication
Overview

This is a survey to gather instructors' opinions about email academic communication. There are no right or wrong answers. You will read 12 email samples, each designated by a letter and presented in a random order. These emails are in response to three common situations in universities: missing an important lecture, missing an important appointment and turning in an important assignment late. You will be asked to rate the communicative effectiveness on a 1 to 4 scale. The whole survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

Note: All email messages appear just as they were written by the students.

Please take a minute and answer the following sample question to get yourself familiar with the format of this survey.

Here is a student's email in response to the following situation:

"You have missed an important lecture before the final exam. Email your instructor about this."

Sample Email:

Hello Dr. Smith,

Due to an unforeseen circumstance I was unable to attend the review lecture last class period, however I still have a few questions I need cleared up before the exam. Would it be possible to schedule a time to meet in your office so that I may get them answered?

John

How effective is the student's communication?

Not Effective	Somewhat Ineffective	Somewhat Effective	Effective
○	○	○	○

Why did you give the above rating?

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[                    ]
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| Back | Next |

12%

Student research survey powered by:
surveygizmo
Professional research tool with SPSS experts

Save and continue survey later

Instructor Perceptions of Spoken Academic Communication
Overview

This is a survey to gather instructors' opinions about spoken academic communication. There are no right or wrong answers. You will listen to 12 short speech samples, each designated by a letter and presented in a random order. These samples are in response to three common situations in universities: missing an important lecture, missing an important appointment and turning in an important assignment late. You will be asked to rate the communicative effectiveness on a 1 to 4 scale. The whole survey will take about 20 minutes to complete.

Please take a minute and answer the following sample question to get yourself familiar with the format of this survey.

Here is a student's response to the following situation:

"You have missed an important lecture before the final exam. Talk to your instructor about this."

Listen to the recording: Test Sample

How effective is the student's communication?

Not Effective	Somewhat Ineffective	Somewhat Effective	Effective
○	○	○	○

Why did you give the above rating?

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[                                        ]
[                                        ]
[                                        ]
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12%

Appendix B. Student apology samples included in online surveys[1]

Email apology samples

Email sample A (NS_Lower)

Dear Professor Smith,

I regrettably missed the lecture today, and would like to make it up. Is there any way we could meet during your office hours so you can help me? If not at the very least email me the notes so I can review it myself.

Sincerley,

Mary

Email sample B (NNS_Arabic)

Hi Mr. Smith how are you? hope you have a nice day. i really email you because i have missed an important lecture and as you know the next two weeks we will start the final exams. i seen all my friends and no body was taking notes or anything else. Would you mind repeat the lecture again or give me a brief summary for the lecture.

Because i really need it as soon as possible to study it for the exam.

Email sample C (NS_Upper)

Dear Dr. Smith,

I hope you're day is going well. Unfortunately I was unable to make it to lecture today, and seeing as our final exam is next class I'm assuming there was a fair amount content that is essential for me to exceed on the exam. If there's anyway you could send me a powerpoint or outline of your lecture, or possibly meet before the exam to discuss the material, it would be greatly appreciated. Let me know.

Sincerely,

John

Email sample D (NNS_Chinese)

Dear Professor Smith:

Hi, I am Xiaoming. I am sorry about that I have missed the your lecture before the final exam. Because at that time, I had a fever and I have to see the doctor, I will give you my evidence letter. Could you give me some important information about this final exam? Thank you!

Best wishes.

Xiaoming

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1. All samples were displayed as they were written by the students except for format changes to fit to the page.

Email sample E (NS_Upper)

Hello Dr. Smith,

I am so sorry about missing our appointment earlier. I would still like to talk to you about this matter but I understand if you do not wish to schedule another appointment. I will stop by your office during your office hours. Again, I apologize for missing our appointment.

Thank you for your time,

Mary

Email sample F (NNS_Chinese)

Dear, Mr. Smith,

I'm very sorry miss the appointment. Because I have a big trouble. It is about my visa, I have to go to the international office to talk about my visa, so that why I miss the important appointment.

Sincerely,

Xiaoming

Email sample G (NS_Lower)

Professor Smith,

I was supposed to meet with you yesterday, but I was unable to make our appointment. I'm very sorry for any inconvenience this has caused. Please let me know if it would be possible to reschedule.

Thank you for your time.

John

Email sample H (NNS_Arabic)

Dear Mr Smith

i want to apologia about yesterday appointment, and i have resone for that. i had family problems and i tried my best to finish this problem but i wasn't work. can you forgive me please.

Sincerely

Ahmed

Email sample I (NNS_Arabic)

Hello Mr: Smith

i am sorry to turned assignment late. Because i could not understand very well. so it took me long time to did it.

i hope to accepted the assignment.

Ahmed

Email sample J (NS_Upper)

Hello Dr. Smith,

I am very sorry that I have turned in my assignment late and would greatly appreciate it if you are willing to accept it. I worked on the essay for hours last night and when I completed it, I thought

that I had emailed the assignment to myself to print before class. Unfortunately it was not sent to my email and I was unable to print and hand in the assignment during class. I have attached the assignment in this email. Again, I am sorry for the inconvenience.

Kind Regards,

Mary

Email sample K (NNS_Chinese)

Hi Professor Smith,

I am Xiaoming Wang, I am so sorry about I turned in my homework late today.

I know it is a very important assignment, but the class content of yesterday is too difficult. I spend my all free time to work on it, but I still turned in late. I promise turn in the next assignment on time.

Thank you very much

Your sincerely,

Xiaoming Wang

Email sample L (NS_Lower)

Dear Mrs. Smith,

I have turned in this recent homework project late, and due to this late grade I now have a D+ in your class. However, if I could receive full credit on this assignment I could bring it up to a C. This class is really important to my major, and I'm very afraid to fail, and I feel like I still have a very good understanding of the material. I'm very sorry for the late assignment, and I was wondering If there was anything I could do to make up the points.

Sincerely, John

Spoken apology samples

Spoken sample A (NS_Upper)

Hey I just wanted to let you know that I accidentally missed the last lecture before the final exam. I did get the notes from a fellow student but I can come to your office hours to possibly go over any questions about the lecture? You know on Friday or something like that?

Spoken sample B(NNS_Arabic)

Um actually I missed the the one class it was two weeks later before the exam the final exam sorry. So I wonder if you can um help me with the um that class because it was really really um helpful for for me so I wonder if you can help me if you have um more copy for of the um important um the important things it will come in our exam.

Spoken sample C (NS_Lower)

Ah um sorry but I missed the lecture that we just had um I really hope that maybe you can help build me in I really wanna do well in the final I wanna make sure I have covered all my basis so if maybe you can help me out with that, that'll be great.

Spoken sample D (NNS_Arabic)

Um I just have trouble to came the to the last class um because I have something necessary and you know I didn't have any absence. Um could you send to me the important thing for what happened the last class of the important message about the exercises by the email um I appreciate it if you do that. Thank you teacher.

Spoken sample E (NNS_Arabic)

Hi teacher. I'm sorry about that but my roommate he have a diabetes and increased diabetes in his blood so I we went to the hospital and um I was with him because he need me I I have to support him. I really was confused about how can I miss this um appointment but what can I do? I have to support him because he's my roommate and he's my friend.

Spoken sample F (NS_Lower)

Sorry for missing the appointment that we had arranged. And something had come up and I had to take care of it immediately and I had no time to notify you, as it was pressing. And and again I'm sorry. But is there any like another time that we could make up for another appointment I promise I'll be there early.

Spoken sample G (NNS_Chinese)

Um teacher, I'm so sorry about um yesterday the meeting um because I'm get up um is late so I'm so sorry about it.

Spoken sample H (NS_Upper)

I'm really sorry I missed our appointment. I mean I know your times are valuable. Um and I made the appointment I should been there. Um I'm really sorry um. Can we make a follow-up appointment?

Spoken sample I (NNS_Arabic)

Yeah sorry about the um because I missed the assignment but um I really need I really need to improve my grade in your class and um if you just can give me chance this time and I promise you next time I will bring it at the due date. Thank you very much.

Spoken sample J (NS_Upper)

I realize that I missed the submission date for the assignment this morning and I was really hoping that I can make that up. Um if not, I totally understand. I take full responsibility for not submitting it on time.

Spoken sample K (NNS_Arabic)

Actually I'm sorry about the um I um I didn't I didn't do the homework yesterday but I do today this is late. Because yesterday I have um I had um a lot of homework and I don't have time to do all the homework. There's five homeworks and we finish here late, ok? And I don't have time just I want to raise because I begin my day from eight to four and I went to my home just five o'clock five pm and I don't have time. But actually I'm sorry and I have this homework late homework if you can accept this is for me. I'm sorry very much.

Spoken sample L (NS_Lower)

Hello Professor. Sorry for turning in your assignment late. I find it hard sometimes to find a balance between my other classes since I'm taking five other ones as well so it makes it so hard. I'm willing to take any penalty that you will put on it. As long as it's still counts for somewhat of a grade.

Appendix C. Descriptive statistics of instructors' ratings of student emailed apologies

Rank	Age group	N	All samples mean (SD)	NS samples mean (SD)	NNS samples mean (SD)
Graduate teaching assistant	20–30	19	2.63 (.45)	3.06 (.62)	2.19 (.49)
	31–40	4	2.83 (.59)	3.17 (.59)	2.50 (.62)
	41–50	4	2.33 (.65)	2.71 (.60)	1.96 (.72)
	All	27	2.60 (.56)	2.98 (.60)	2.22 (.61)
Non-tenure-track faculty	20–30	3	2.22 (.55)	2.67 (.76)	1.78 (.42)
	31–40	7	2.44 (.24)	2.81 (.45)	2.07 (.27)
	41–50	10	2.44 (.46)	2.67 (.70)	2.22 (.51)
	51–Above	15	2.74 (.68)	2.75 (.79)	2.35 (.72)
	All	35	2.46 (.48)	2.73 (.68)	2.11 (.48)
Tenure-track or tenured faculty	31–40	3	2.58 (.25)	3.00 (.17)	2.17 (.44)
	41–50	9	2.38 (.54)	2.70 (.80)	2.06 (.50)
	51–Above	26	2.60 (.50)	2.75 (.52)	2.45 (.59)
	All	38	2.52 (.43)	2.82 (.50)	2.41 (.51)
All	20–30	22	2.57 (.48)	3.01 (.64)	2.14 (.50)
	31–40	14	2.58 (.38)	2.95 (.45)	2.21 (.44)
	41–50	23	2.40 (.50)	2.69 (.70)	2.11 (.53)
	51–Above	41	2.65 (.56)	2.77 (.62)	2.54 (.64)

Appendix D. Descriptive statistics of instructors' ratings of student spoken apologies

Rank	Age group	N	All samples mean (SD)	NS samples mean (SD)	NNS samples mean (SD)
Graduate teaching asst.	20–30	11	2.70 (.42)	3.05 (.44)	2.35 (.55)
	31–40	2	3.21 (.18)	3.42 (.59)	3.00 (.24)
	All	13	2.96 (.30)	3.24 (.52)	2.68 (.40)
Non-tenure-track faculty	20–30	2	3.00 (.59)	3.58 (.59)	2.42 (.59)
	31–40	4	2.98 (.55)	3.08 (.52)	2.88 (.58)
	41–50	4	2.67 (.30)	3.21 (.16)	2.13 (.50)
	51 – Above	6	2.50 (.36)	2.78 (.47)	2.22 (.40)
	All	16	2.79 (.45)	3.17 (.44)	2.42 (.52)
Tenure-track and tenured faculty	31–40	3	2.36 (.50)	2.72 (.48)	2.00 (.60)
	41–50	7	2.43 (.65)	2.69 (.74)	2.17 (.73)
	51–Above	11	2.24 (.42)	2.41 (.73)	2.08 (.77)
	All	21	2.34 (.52)	2.61 (.65)	2.08 (.70)
All	20–30	13	2.74 (.43)	3.13 (.48)	2.36 (.53)
	31–40	9	2.82 (.56)	3.04 (.53)	2.61 (.66)
	41–50	11	2.52 (.54)	2.88 (.64)	2.15 (.63)
	51–Above	17	2.33 (.41)	2.54 (.66)	2.13 (.65)