"I want a real apology"

A discursive pragmatics perspective on apologies

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Research on the apology spans over half a century and has been quite prolific. Yet, a major issue with numerous studies on apologies is a lack of findings from naturally occurring interaction. Instead many studies examine written elicitations. As a result they research how respondents think they apologize, not how they do apologize. This project, in contrast, stresses the importance of studying the apology as a dynamically constructed politeness strategy in situated interaction. Apologies are part of the ever-present relational work, i.e., co-constructed and co-negotiated, emergent relationships in a situated social context. Hence, the focus is not on the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) alone, nor on the turn in which the IFID is produced, but on the interactional exchange in situ.

Naturally, data eliciting produces a larger sample size of apologies than the taping and transcribing of naturally occurring interaction does. To remedy the issue, this study uses interactions from situation comedies, which provide a large sample of apologies in their interactional context. Sitcom interactions constitute a valid focus of pragmatic research as they share fundamental elements of natural interactions (B. Mills 2009; Quaglio 2009). The validity of this approach is tested using findings from published conversation analytic studies on apologies. The analysis is set within the framework of discursive pragmatics and leads to new insights on apologies and responses to apologies.

Keywords: apology, interpersonal pragmatics, politeness, redressive speech acts, sitcom interaction

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it verifies if and how interactions from situation comedies can be valid data for discursive pragmatics research. Second, it contributes to our knowledge on social interaction in general and apologies in particular using a discursive pragmatics approach. Situation comedies have been

studied from numerous vantage points, however, insights from pragmatics have hardly been explored, nor has scholarship on sitcoms made contributions to the field of pragmatics.

The study of interaction in sitcoms is not novel (see e.g., Al-Surmi 2012; Anthony 2013; Bednarek 2012; Heyd 2010; Quaglio 2009; Raymond 2013; Stokoe 2008; Xu 2014). However, to date it remains underexplored despite Quaglio (2009, 139) showing that the interactions depicted in the sitcom series *Friends* share the main linguistic elements of naturally occurring conversations.

Data from situation comedies have been chosen as a means of this study for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that they are all but ignored by linguists, including representatives of the sub-disciplines devoted to the study of spoken language in use, such as interpersonal and discursive pragmatics, conversation analysis, and interactional sociolinguistics. Second, sitcoms have been declared one of the most popular genres on television, and they are quite influential regarding the creation and circulation of discourse in society (Staiger 2000). Consequently, they should be meaningful from a social, sociolinguistic, sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic point of view. Third, working with data from sitcoms has methodological advantages. Naturally occurring everyday interactions do not usually produce a wealth of apologies, aside from quick utterances of *sorry/I'm sorry* related to repair in the sense of Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) or other minor troubles (see Heritage & Raymond 2016, 7–9 for examples). Admittedly, I struggle with the concept of an apology as an opener or closer of the repair space because I do not recognize a slip of the tongue or a false start or the repair of either as an offense. This will be further discussed in Section 2.2. When investigating less frequent phenomena the large database of a popular multi-season sitcom offers a greater amount of tokens to analyze. In sitcoms, as we shall see in Section 2.1, apologies are rather common. Other methodological advantages – as well as disadvantages – are discussed below (see Section 3.1).

An additional reason for the use of sitcom interactions is linked to shortcomings of existing studies on apologies. A major issue with numerous studies on apologies is a lack of findings from naturally occurring everyday interaction that has been taped and accurately transcribed, which might be linked to the scarcity of apologies in spontaneous interpersonal interactions.[1] Instead they use

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1.   See also Drew et al. (2016, 3) who note that "the research literature on apologies is relatively modest" when it comes to naturally occurring apologies in everyday encounters. In contrast to this study, they contend that apologies are ubiquitous and frequent. This disagreement might be a matter of taxonomy. Like Heritage and Raymond (2016, 7), Drew et al. see a mechanical *sorry* as an apology whereas this study focuses on less habitual, on-the-record apologies (see also Section 2.2).

data from introspection or written elicitations, for example written role-play and discourse completion tasks (DCT), also called discourse completion tests and production questionnaires. Yet, written elicitations are inadequate when researching language in use. The respondents can provide only insights on how they *think* they apologize, not how they *do* apologize (cf. Beebe & Cummings 1985, 1996; Cohen & Olshtain 1981; Golato 2003; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig 1992; Holmes 1991; Labben 2016). Moreover, written responses lack prosody and other features characteristic of spoken discourse, such as pauses and hesitations that inform part of the analysis. Beebe and Cummings (1985, 3) stress that compared to naturally occurring interaction written role-plays display "less negotiation, less hedging, less repetition, less elaboration, less variety and ultimately less talk" (see also Beebe & Cummings 1996; Golato 2003; Holmes 1991; Rintell & Mitchell 1989). Holmes adds that interpersonal aspects of communication are neglected in written elicitations. Golato (2003) confirms that the data collected through DCT yields different results than data collected through naturally occurring interaction. She explicitly mentions that her study participants complained about the task being strange and difficult. Golato sees this as further evidence that participants consciously concentrate on the linguistic part of their contributions as opposed to using language spontaneously, as they usually would in naturally occurring social interaction. Finally, written elicitations cannot account for the fact that language use is a cooperative, interactive, negotiated matter. In other words, whether certain linguistic, paralinguistic, social and context features add up to an apology (or any other speech act or speech function) or not, does not solely depend on the speaker's orientation towards the sum of these features as an apology, but whether speaker *and* addressee orient towards them as an apology. Therefore it is not surprising that we as language users report what we would say in a defined situation, but then actually say something else or say it quite differently when in that situation (cf. Beebe & Cummings 1996; Golato 2003).

Evidently, elicited data, depending on the focus of the research, can offer valuable insights. Holmes summarizes:

> [DCT] provides a speedy method of gathering a large amount of data; it provides a means of developing a classification system for strategies and semantic formulas that will occur in natural speech; it provides evidence of the stereotypical perceived requirements for a socially appropriate response; it identifies social and psychological factors likely to affect speech behavior; and it elicits the canonical formulas and responses realizing certain speech acts.   Holmes (1991, 121)

In sum, previous studies have concluded that imagining and describing oneself performing a certain speech act is not the same as performing that speech act (see also Labben 2016, 72–74 for a comparison of cognitive abilities involved in the

performance of a speech act and the response to a DCT, and Walters 2013, 174–176 for a more extensive overview of the literature on DCT). A layperson knows how to interact without possessing explicit comprehensive knowledge on communication and language in use. The same should be true for sitcom writers. Nonetheless, this study examines interaction in comedies, i.e., scripted 'data.'

It is this study's working assumption that excellent writers of situation comedies – in tandem with excellent actors, directors, and producers – know how to create social interactions to use as representations of natural interactions and/or for comic effect. The performed, script based, and possibly edited communication of sitcoms constitutes a valid focus of pragmatic research as sitcom interaction shares fundamental elements of natural interaction (cf. Quaglio 2009), and was not created for research purposes, but to represent or reproduce natural interaction. The audience's approval[2] signals that the sitcom actors manage to perform onscreen interactions that appear to adhere to the audience's standards of interactions. The sitcom creators also use techniques to turn parts of those seemingly natural interactions into comedy. These techniques are described below (see Section 2.1).

Following a closer look at situation comedies, findings from previous research on apologies are discussed. Section 2.3 provides an overview of the theoretical framework for the analysis before the data is described in detail. The analysis and findings are presented and discussed in Section 4. The paper closes with a summary of its conclusions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Situation comedies

There has been much debate over the sitcom as a discrete genre and disagreement over which shows are situation comedies and which ones are not (cf. B. Mills 2005, 2009). This debate is not relevant for the current study because the show from which the data for the analysis is drawn, namely *The Big Bang Theory*, is generally recognized as a sitcom series. Nonetheless, a brief discussion of definitions of sitcom is required given the aim of the current study.

According to Mintz (1985, 114–115) a sitcom is a series with recurring characters and settings, in addition to closed off storylines and happy endings in each episode. He adds that sitcoms are typically staged for a live audience whose laughter is recorded and at times amplified for the TV audience. He calls this "an element

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2. The fact that the audience watches a sitcom week after week for many years is judged here as approval.

that might almost be metadrama" because it contributes to the audience's awareness that this is a performance that features laughables. Mintz stresses that sitcom's most important quality "is the cyclical nature of the normalcy of the premise undergoing stress or threat of change and becoming restored" (115). Brett Mills (2005) criticizes this standard definition for its focus on form, not content and for being too vague. He also emphasizes that sitcoms develop stories that do not necessarily end when an episode ends, but can continue over the course of two or a few episodes. In addition to the (usually) episodically closed off stories there can be a backstory, that is narrated over the course of one or several seasons. Mills cites the relationship of the characters of Rachel and Ross on the sitcom *Friends* as an example of such a backstory.

Brett Mills (2009, 94) who proposes a cue theory to analyze sitcom, claims that it is not the comedy that defines sitcom, but "those cues which signal it as a sitcom and which […] encourage programmes to be read as comedic." A cue theory, unlike other humor theories, potentially accounts for failed or offensive humor. Following Handelman and Kapferer's (1972) approach to joking, Mills explains that there are two forms of metacues, "category-routinised joking" cues and "setting-specific joking" cues. The first type refers to joking that needs no signal that the comics are joking because they have an established relationship with the audience and the humor depends on that relationship, i.e., the gathered shared knowledge and history that has lead to routines and "a wealth of expectations" (B. Mills 2009, 95). The latter type, by contrast, needs such a signal because the comic and the audience do not (yet) have a shared history. In that case whenever the comic intends to be humorous there needs to be a clear, explicit and intentionally conspicuous setting-specific joking signal or metacue. Sitcoms make use of both types of cues, but it is the second type that explains "why sitcom doesn't look like any other kind of television; the opening titles, the shooting style and the laugh track are 'setting-specific' cues which signal to audiences the comic impetus of the programme" (B. Mills 2009, 95).

The important role of interpersonal communication in sitcoms can also be gleaned from some of its definitions. Jones (1992, 4, cited in B. Mills 2005), for instance, includes in his definition a basic structure not unlike Mintz' (1985, see above) of threatened harmony that needs restoring. About that threat Jones writes: "The problem turns out to be not very serious after all, once everyone remembers to *communicate* […]" (B. Mills 2005, 31, emphasis added). According to this definition interpersonal communication plays a central role for the happy ending in sitcoms, i.e., for a basic structural component. Furthermore, Jones acknowledges that a lack of communication contributes to or causes the problem that is at the heart of the episodic story. As a result, apologies abound in sitcoms because they are often instrumental in the restoration of harmony given that their main function is to 'right a wrong,' as we shall see in the next section.

2.2   Apologies

Pragmatic, sociological and sociolinguistic research on the apology spans over half a century and has been quite prolific. Numerous studies from these and other (sub) disciplines, notably psychology (cf. Lazare 2004), have contributed to a better understanding of this speech act or speech event.[3] Apologies have been investigated qualitatively and quantitatively using differently collected data: from intuition (e.g., Edmondson 1981; Fraser 1981; Leech 1983), naturally occurring spoken discourse, taped (Cirillo, Colón de Carvajal & Ticca 2016; Drew & Hepburn 2016; Fatigante, Biassoni, Marazzini & Diadori 2016; Galatolo, Ursi & Bongelli 2016; Heritage & Raymond 2016; Margutti, Traverso & Pugliese 2016; Pino, Pozzuoli, Riccioni & Castellarin 2016; Robinson 2004) or recalled (e.g., Wolfson, Marmor & Jones 1989), ethnographic observation (e.g., Kampf & Blum-Kulka 2007; Shariati & Chamani 2010), DCT (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989a, 1989b; Rintell & Mitchell 1989; Olshtain 1989; Vollmer & Olshtain 1989; Ogiermann 2009), DCT in combination with retrospective verbal reports (e.g., Bella 2014), linguistic corpora (Leech 2014), role play (e.g., Demeter 2007; Rintell & Mitchell 1989) and others. Although a plethora of studies have focused on English apologies (e.g., Barron 2009; Cirillo, Colón de Carvajal & Ticca 2016; Drew & Hepburn 2016; Edmondson 1981; Fatigante et al. 2016; Fraser 1981; Galatolo, Ursi & Bongelli 2016; Goffman 1971; Heritage & Raymond 2016; Holmes 1989, 1990; Margutti, Traverso & Pugliese 2016; Murphy 2015; Pino et al. 2016; Robinson 2004), apologies in other languages have also been the focus of attention from the start, such as Akan (Obeng 1999), Bislama, a creole language, (Meyerhoff 1999), British Sign Language (Mapson 2014), French (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989b), German (e.g., House 1989; Vollmer & Olshtain 1989), Greek (e.g., Bella 2014), Japanese (e.g., Burdelski 2013; Okamura & Wei 2000; Sandu, 2013; Sugimoto 1997), Hebrew (e.g., Kampf & Blum-Kulka 2007; Olshtain 1989; Olshtain & Cohen 1983), Hungarian (e.g., Suszczynska 1999), Lombok, an Indonesian language (Wouk 2006), Persian (e.g., Afghari 2007; Shariati & Chamani 2010), Polish (e.g., Ogiermann 2009, 2012; Suszczynska 1999), Russian (e.g., Ogiermann 2009), and Spanish (e.g., Gonzalez-Cruz 2012) to name but a few. A number of publications have summarized the findings of earlier research (e.g., Leech 2014; Meier 1998; Ogiermann 2009). For that reason, a brief overview shall suffice here.

Holmes (1998, 204) draws on Goffman (1971) to define the apology as "a speech act addressed to B's face-needs and intended to remedy an offence for which A takes

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3.   Not all linguists analyzing apologies view the apology as a speech act, some prefer using the term 'speech event' to account for the fact that apologies can extend over more than one utterance (e.g. Leech 2014), or 'speech act set' (e.g. Olshtain & Cohen 1983) or action/social action (e.g. Robinson 2004).

responsibility, and thus to restore equilibrium between A and B (where A is the apologizer, and B is the person offended)." From Holmes' definition we deduce that the apology is linked to a violation of social norms and involves two parties, the offender(s)[4] or apologizer(s) and the recipient(s) of the apology. The apologizers' illocutionary intention is mending fences to re-establish peace or harmony between the parties involved.

More detailed definitions of the apology have been proposed. Like Trosborg's (1995, 375) and Ogiermann's (2009, 46), Leech's (2014, 122) point of departure is Searle's (1969) model of speech acts, which they use to characterize the apology. As the *propositional content condition* of an apology Leech names a past act performed by the apologizer, but explains that the act can take place in the present or future as well. As an apology's *preparatory condition* he proposes that the person or persons to whom the apology is addressed are harmed by the apologizer's act or that the apologizer thinks they are harmed by it. The term 'harm' does not necessarily mean bodily harm in this context and includes loss of face. The *sincerity condition* dictates that the apologizer claims responsibility for the act in question and regrets it. Finally, the *essential condition* is met if the apology is considered to be an expression of remorse for the committed or perceived offense.

A frequently quoted view of the apology goes back to Olshtain and Cohen (1983) (e.g., Barron 2009; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989a; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984; Flores Salgado 2011; Leech 2014; Meier 1998; Ogiermann 2009; Robinson 2004; Trosborg 1995). Olshtain and Cohen introduce the concept of an *apology speech act set* to capture the complete array of possible apology strategies. They name five strategies that can be used independently of each other or in any combination. According to the originators, all count as an apology. The five strategies are:

1. the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) (see also Searle 1969, 64), such as *I'm sorry, I apologize, pardon me* etc.;
2. an explanation or account of the reason of the violation, such as *my car broke down* when being late;
3. an expression of responsibility, such as *it's my fault, my mistake, my bad* etc.;[5]
4. an offer of repair, such as *I'll pay for the dry-cleaning* after spilling a drink on someone;
5. promise of forbearance, such as *I'll be more careful from here on out.*

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4. Although Holmes' definition does not state that both parties can be several individuals we know from other research that an apology can come from a group of people and can be directed at one or more individuals (cf. Leech 2014).

5. Note that less explicit expressions, such as *I was distracted*, function as taking on responsibility as well. This particular example could in addition be seen as an explanation.

A sixth strategy was added (cf. The Cross Cultural Speech Act Realisation Patterns or CCSARP coding manual in Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989b), namely expressing concern for the offended, such as *I hope you're alright*. Holmes (1990, 168) states that all but the first, i.e., the IFID, are indirect apologies. While Robinson (2004) criticizes that in their analysis many studies do not differentiate between the apology proper and other parts of the speech event, i.e., what Holmes calls indirect apologies and Robinson refers to as the supporting moves or other offense-remedial-related actions (293) that might or might not co-occur with the explicit apology, i.e., the IFID. He attributes this conflation to "the researchers' lack of sensitivity to the process of turn taking […] and sequence organization" (293). Referring to the authority of Goffman, Robinson stresses that studies have shown that interactants know how to distinguish between apologies and accounts, even between various sorts of accounts:

> For this reason and others, both Goffman (1971) and Owen (1983) have distinguished between apologies and other offense-remedial-related actions and restricted the term apology to "explicit" apologies.   (Robinson 2004, 293)

Murphy (2015) goes a step further and even excludes *sorry*. He argues that only "the verb 'to apologise' used performatively" (183) can function as the illocutionary force of apologizing. His reasoning is based on the fact that *sorry*, like *excuse, forgive, pardon*, and *regret*, can have other, nonapology functions. Therefore qua convention these terms can implicate apology, yet, not function as the IFID of an apology. Murphy finds this differentiation useful in the context of parliamentary apologies and beyond. It can be argued that *sorry/I'm* sorry and variations thereof – typically added amplifier adverbs – function as explicit apologies, i.e., perform apologies, in everyday conversations whenever apologizer(s) and offended party/parties jointly orient towards its use as apology (see Section 4).

Reporting on variation within the sequential organization of explicit apologies, Robinson (2004) shows when the apology initiates the sequence and is the main focus of it then the preferred sequence positions the explicit apology in the first utterance of an adjacency pair (301). The second utterance of that adjacency pair, the response, either accepts the requirement for an apology or refutes that requirement and thus the apology's implicit claim to have offended the addressee(s) of the apology. The latter is the preferred reaction while the former has been found to be the dispreferred response (301–302). Robinson highlights that this finding is in line with findings on other speech acts, such as requests or invitations. Like Heritage (1984), Robinson finds that preferred responses are likely to further social solidarity.

Recent interactional studies of apologies (in particular the research published in the *Special Issue on Apologies in Discourse*, see Drew et al. 2016) focus on apologies in authentic phone conversations. The seven articles make use of the same data

for their empirical investigation of apologies. Focusing on the formats of apologies and their interactional realization and context, these studies build on each other.

In the introductory article, Drew et al. (2016, 2) argue that an apology has to change the offensive "act itself, from one that is morally compromised into one that is acceptable". They seem to equate a social offense with a moral one, yet include "minor inconvenience[s]" (2) as apologizables. Drawing on Goffman (1971), they contend that any action has the potentially to be seen as offensive:

> This is an exact parallel with repair, apologies being a form of moral repair: Just as an action is potentially repairable (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977, 363), so any action is potentially an apologizable. (Drew et al. 2016, 3)

The fact that any action can be judged as offensive seems to acknowledge that speaker and addressee co-construct the action as apologizable (or non-apologizable). It does however not account for the judgment of any minor inconvenience or the production of a repairable as a moral offense. In Section 1, I stated that I fail to see how a repairable, such as a false start or a slip of the tongue, warrants an apology. A slip of the tongue is neither offensive, nor morally compromised. Consequently, when *sorry* is used to open the repair space (Heritage & Raymond 2016, 7) to self-repair a slip of the tongue, as it does in Example (1), or when it is used to close it after a slip of the tongue has been repaired, as it does in Heritage and Raymond's second Example (7), *sorry* seems to have this particular discourse function – opening/closing or marking the repair space – without simultaneously serving as an apology. Example (1) has been copied faithfully from Heritage and Raymond where it is used to illustrate the dual function that I would like to challenge here. I would argue that Henry as the receiver of the "apology" does not orient towards Giles's sorry in line 5 as an apology. By not even using a minimal response to acknowledge the action, let alone a lexical response, such as the common *that's alright* or *that's okay* (Robinson 2004; see also Section 4), Henry seems to ignore it.

(1) [Anderson:CC:C:15][6]

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1  Henry:     But whether that would (0.6) Whether that w- (0.3)
2             that bra::nd, (0.9) would fit in to (0.6)
3             East Midlands's got to be highly debatable.
4  Giles: ->  .t.hhhh I think, of any ↓si:te, it would fit in.
5             (0.3) <eh- eh-Sorry. Of all sites at East Midlands
6             it would fit in. It's a well known, local ↓product.
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(Heritage & Raymond 2016, 7)

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6. It is worth noting that all the data used by Heritage and Raymond are part of the 'Apologies Data Set,' a collection of over 200 British and American apologies from naturally occurring phone conversations (cf. Drew et al. 2016, 3).

In every additional repair-related example presented by Heritage and Raymond (2016) the addressee reacts in the same manner, i.e., does not orient towards the sorry as an apology. Robinson (2004) argues that apologies that are not the main focus of attention – he calls them "*subordinate* to the primary action" (297) – do not require a response[7] (see also Fatigante et al. 2016). I would contend that the absence of a response, the absence of an orientation to the action as an apology suggests that sorry does not function as an apology. Robinson, like most researchers (e.g., Drew & Hepburn 2016; Heritage & Raymond 2016; Leech 2014; Murphy 2015), acknowledges that *sorry/I'm sorry* can be used to fulfill other, nonapology functions. Moreover, if we apply Searle's model of speech acts we note that the apology's preparatory condition does not pertain to these cases since the addressee is not harmed in any way. The sincerity condition and the essential condition are not met either for the reason that the speaker does not feel genuine regret or express sincere remorse for a slip of the tongue. Consequently, in a repair environment *sorry* functions as a marker of the repair space, rather than performing an apology.

2.3   (Im)politeness, interpersonal pragmatics and relational work

Pragmatic studies on apologizing usually categorize the apology as a politeness strategy (cf. Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987; Leech 2014; Mills 2003). Studies on politeness intend to account for the variation in the realization of speech acts, such as apologies (cf. Locher 2013). Early politeness studies (Lakoff 1973; Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987; Leech 1983) take Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP) as point of departure. They develop and describe additional rules (Lakoff) or maxims (Leech) of politeness. In contrast, the most influential model, namely Brown and Levinson's model, does not formulate additional principles or maxims of politeness. Instead it claims that the maxims of the CP, due to their particular status as background presumptions, are very different from politeness maxims and further explain:

> The CP defines an 'unmarked' or socially neutral (indeed asocial) presumptive framework for communication; the essential assumption is 'no deviation from rational efficiency without a reason'. Politeness principles are, however, just such principled reasons for deviation. Linguistic politeness is therefore implicated in the classical way, with maximum theoretical parsimony, from the CP. It is true, however, that polite motivations for such deviations perhaps have a special status in social interaction by virtue of their omni-relevance. Nevertheless, this omni-relevance does not endow them with the presumptive nature enjoyed by the CP: politeness has to be communicated, and the absence of communicated politeness may, ceteris paribus, be taken as absence of the polite attitude.   (Brown & Levinson 1987, 5)

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7.   The example that Robinson uses to make his case is not related to conversational repair.

However, it should be noted that Grice himself suggested that a politeness maxim could be added to the CP (see also Watts 2003).

At the heart of Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) Politeness Theory lies the concept of the interactants' face (Goffman 1967), the question of what constitutes face-threatening acts (FTA), and the linguistic strategies that interactants adopt to handle face-threatening acts. According to Brown and Levinson, interactants choose strategies based on relative power, social distance, and the ranking of the imposition of the FTA. In addition, they take into account what Brown and Levinson call the interlocutors' positive face wants and their negative face wants, i.e., the desire for one's face wants to be pleasing to others, and to be free from imposition, respectively.

More recent research concentrates on politeness based on emergent, context-dependent, interactively co-constructed norms that may vary from one speech community, or community of practice, to the next (e.g., Eelen 2001; Watts 2003; S. Mills 2003; Locher 2004; Locher & Watts 2005). This approach also distinguishes between first and second order politeness, i.e., an emic and an etic approach. By focusing the analysis on the interaction within the larger context of the entire discourse – specifically the interactants' verbal and nonverbal actions and their orientation towards their interlocutors' contributions as appropriate, inappropriate or anything in between – the emic, i.e., the interactants' evaluation, takes precedence over the analyst's judgment. It is also important to note that the interest of researchers is no longer limited to politeness; rather, research now studies the discursive evaluation of behavior as polite, impolite, over-polite, neutral, and so on (Culpeper 1996, 2005, 2011; Kienpointer 1997; Bousfield 2008; Locher & Bousfield 2008; Haugh 2010). According to Fraser (1990, 233), being polite means that one tacitly understands and consistently conforms to the conversational contract of a given context at every turn.

In line with current views on politeness, the present study considers the apology as a dynamically constructed politeness strategy in situated interactions. As such, it is part of the ever present relational work, or, in other words, of the constantly co-constructed and co-negotiated, emergent relationships in a situated social context. Such a discursive approach values and investigates the interpersonal aspect of communication and has been labelled 'interpersonal pragmatics' (cf. Locher 2004, 2006, 2011, 2012; Locher & Graham 2010; Locher & Watts 2005, 2008; Locher, Bolander & Höhn 2015; Watts 1989, 2003, 2005, 2008). Locher and Watts consider 'relational work' to be an integral part of every human interaction. It is the work that the interactants undertake in order to construct, maintain, reproduce, and transform their relationships during the course of a social encounter (Locher & Watts 2008, 96). Locher and Watts equate relational work to facework but use the term 'relational work' in order to avoid confusion with Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) concept. Brown and Levinson view facework as a requirement when

dealing with a threat to one's face, whereas Locher and Watts take facework/relational work to be omnipresent in all social encounters, i.e., not merely when dealing with a threat to one's face. Further, they stress that Goffman's (1967) concept of face centers around social aspects while Brown and Levinson's focuses on psychological aspects. Relational work, on the other hand, characterizes face as a social *and* as a psychological concept, given that individual identities are fluid constructions that are constantly being shaped through social interaction, and that social interaction is undertaken by individuals (Locher & Watts 2008, 96).

An interpersonal pragmatics approach to (im)politeness borrows from different theories and (sub)disciplines (cf. Locher 2012, Locher 2015; Rieger 2015). It also builds on the findings from these different (sub)disciplines.

3.   Data

The data for this study consists of all currently available episodes of the sitcom series *The Big Bang Theory*, which is filmed in front of a live studio audience, i.e., Season 1 to 8 and some episodes from Season 9.[8] The apology scenes have been meticulously transcribed from the recorded episodes, notably the official DVDs, using CA (conversation analysis) conventions (Jefferson 2004; see also Jenks 2011). Included in the transcript is the laughter by non-characters of the show. While this laughter does not contribute directly to the characters' interaction it does interfere with it. Communication is usually suspended until the laughter subsides. In the transcript, this laughter is attributed to LT/AUD, i.e., the laugh track or the audience. In most instances that laughter is probably a mix of audience and laugh track laughter.

In Section 2.1, we have established that the laugh track functions as a 'setting-specific' cue to signal the comic intent (cf. B. Mills 2009, 95). The laughter by the audience/the laugh track as a sitcom-specific cue is useful to the analysis as well. It facilitates the distinction between actions that are meant to represent natural interaction and those that are used for humor or comic effect.

3.1   Advantages and shortcomings of sitcoms as data

Considering that discursive pragmatics focuses on co-constructed communicative actions in their larger context of use, sitcom interaction has an advantage over naturally occurring interaction that has been collected, taped, and transcribed for research purposes. Interactions between individuals who interact regularly have a

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8.   While this study is documented *Big Bag Theory* is airing in its ninth season.

richer discourse context than those interactions that are one or few-time events. The interlocutors share a rich history of exchanges that shape subsequent exchanges. Yet, if the researcher has access to only one or a few of these exchanges there is a lot of context or background information missing that could inform the analysis. In using sitcom data, especially interactions involving the main characters of those shows that air for multiple seasons, the researcher does have access to a wealth of interactions in which the same interlocutors have participated over the course of five seasons and more. As a consequence, there is at the disposal of the researcher the shared interactional context of the characters involved. In the analyzed apologies in this study, that shared context is used to enrich the analysis.

Other methodological advantages include, (1) data being produced for entertainment, not for research purposes, i.e., the observer's paradox (see Labov 1972) does not apply; (2) data being available in good audio and video quality; and (3) as data is already in the public domain there is no necessity to make any changes to any part of the corpus to protect the identity of the 'study participants,' the characters, for ethical reasons.

Using sitcom interactions as research data has disadvantages as well. The shortcomings and limitations of such data are linked to the fact that the interactions are not naturally occurring, but scripted, rehearsed, performed and possibly edited. These limitations might diminish, but do not obliterate the research value of the data, as this study intends to show. It is imperative to keep them in mind and, whenever possible, to compare findings with data from naturally occurring interactions.

3.2   *The Big Bang Theory*

The Big Bang Theory is a currently airing, very popular American sitcom in its ninth season with a cast of five (in the early seasons) to seven main characters: Leonard Hofstadter, an experimental physicist at Caltech, Sheldon Cooper, a theoretical physicist at Caltech, Penny, whose last name is never mentioned, an actress/waitress who later works as a pharmaceutical representative, Rajesh (Raj) Koothrappali, an astrophysicist at Caltech, and Howard Wolowitz, an aerospace engineer also at Caltech. Leonard and Sheldon are friends and colleagues. They also share an apartment. Penny lives across the hall from them and has an on-again, off-again relationship with Leonard that leads to marriage in Season 8/9.[9] Once married, they stay in both apartments, spending some nights in Leonard's former room

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9.   During the last episode, i.e., Episode 24, of Season 8, entitled *The Commitment Determination* and airing on May 7, 2015, the couple decides to elope and get married in Vegas. In *The Matrimonial Momentum,* Episode 1 of Season 9 airing on September 21, 2015, Penny and Leonard get married.

and others in Penny's. This unusual arrangement seems dictated by Sheldon. Raj and Howard are best friends and colleagues. They are also friends and colleagues of Leonard and Sheldon. All four hang out at the Caltech Cafeteria or at Sheldon and Leonard's place where Penny joins them regularly.

To this cast of five, two young females are added: Bernadette Rostenkowski and Amy Farrah Fowler. Bernadette is a Ph.D. student of microbiology and a part-time waitress when she has her first date with Howard. With her doctorate completed, she starts working for a pharmaceutical company where she gets Penny the job as a pharmaceutical representative. In the last episode of Season 5,[10] Bernadette marries Howard. Amy starts out at the show as Sheldon's "friend who happened to be a girl, but not his girlfriend." Later she becomes his girlfriend. Amy is a gifted neuroscientist. She shares some of Sheldon's social awkwardness (see below).

With the exception of Penny, all main characters are portrayed as highly intelligent, 'geeky nerds' who have difficulties with interpersonal relationships in varying degrees. Sheldon, as the most extreme case (cf. Bednarek 2012), is lacking social skills, avoids all physical contact, is hooked on routines, and seems inflicted by obsessive-compulsive personality disorder. Through his friendship with the other main characters, he does acquire some social skills and becomes a bit more tolerant of physical contact over the course of the seasons. In fact, in the first seasons Sheldon is relying on Leonard and the rest of the gang to understand social conventions and the social behavior of those around him. Sheldon, referring to himself as a genius, is the most 'intelligent' – in the classic sense of the term – of the bunch and aspires to winning a Nobel Prize in Physics.

We now turn our attention to the analysis of apologies in *The Big Bang Theory*.

4.   Apologies in 'The Big Bang Theory': Analysis and discussion

This study examines apologies within the context of an interactional exchange. Therefore, not only the illocutionary force indicating device – or the turn in which it is used – are of interest, but all turns directly and indirectly linked to the apology. As a result, the examples discussed tend to be longer than those used in CA studies of apologies. They are also presented together with an overview of the immediate situational context of the scene in question.

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10. Episode 24 of Season 5 aired on May 10, 2012 and was entitled *The Friendship Contraction*.

4.1   Accepted apologies

The first example is taken from Season Five's sixteenth episode where, much to Sheldon's distress, the president of Caltech forces him to take a vacation. Since Sheldon thinks that he does not need a vacation and does not know how to spend his week off, he eventually decides to work with his girlfriend Amy in her research lab. On his first day, he is disappointed that she only offers him simple tasks, such as cleaning beakers, which he considers beneath him ("Excuse me, you have Dr. Sheldon Cooper in your lab and you are going to make him do the dishes? That's like asking the Incredible Hulk to open a pickle jar.") His constant complaining, moping and bragging leads to an argument. A completely frustrated Amy finally gives in and offers him the delicate task of removing the locus coeruleus from a preserved human brain that she is examining. Sheldon seems too proud to admit that he cannot do this. He ends up accidentally cutting himself and fainting at the sight of his own blood. This constitutes the end of the scene.

   The scene with the apology in question takes place in Amy's laboratory on the next day. Sheldon is just arriving and although the door is wide open, he knocks.

(2) Excerpt from Season 5 Episode 16: The Vacation Solution

```
01 Amy:        ((standing at a lab work station, writing))
02 Sheldon:    ((gently knocks three times fast on lab door)) °Amy°,
03 Amy:        ((lifts her head))
04 Sheldon:    ((gently knocks three times fast on lab door)) °Amy°,
05 Amy:                                                  ((slightly
06             annoyed facial expression))
07 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
08 Sheldon:    ((gently knocks three times fast on lab door)) °Amy°,
09 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
10             (3)
11 Amy:        ((annoyed look at Sheldon)) whaddo you want?
12 Sheldon:    ((standing at the door, looking at Amy briefly then at the
13             floor)) <i was: kind of: ho:ping> (0.5)
14             <i could (.) continue vacationing in your ((looking at
15             Amy)) la:boratory> (1) ((looking at the floor))
16             after all ((looking at Amy)) (0.5) <i did (.) book the
17             whole ↑week>
18 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
19 Amy:        ((looks away then at Sheldon again)) do you honestly think↑
20             you can just waltz back in ↑here
21             after the way (.) you behaved yesterda:y? ((looks away,
22             continues working))
23 Sheldon:    <i was not myself↓> (0.5)
24             <i had lost> a lot of thumb blood↓
25 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
26             (1)
27 Amy:        ((not looking up)) that's not an apology.
28 Sheldon:    >that is your opinion.<
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29 LT/AUD:    ((laughing))
30 Amy:       i want a real apology ((looking at Sheldon then turning to
31            her work again))
32            (3)
33 Sheldon:   ((walks towards Amy, looks at the floor)) <i':m sorry> (.)
34            that: (1) you weren't able to-
35 LT/AUD:                        ((laughing))
36 Amy:                                       no ((slight head shake))
37 LT/AUD:    ((laughing))
38 Sheldon:   that my genius-
39 LT/AUD:              ((laughing))]
40 Amy:                   no ((slight head shake))
41 Sheldon:   that: the soap [[was]]
42 Amy:                       [[↑SHELdon↓]]
43 LT/AUD:    ((laughing))
44 Sheldon:   fine↓   (4) ((quick glance at Amy then at the floor))
45 Amy:               ((turns to look at Sheldon))
46 Sheldon:   °↑sorry↓° ((glances at Amy))
47 Amy:       ((looking at Sheldon)) you're forgiven (1)
48            ↑now if you wanna stay (1)
49            get started on these beakers (.)
50            they're still dirty from yesterday
51 LT/AUD:    ((laughing))
52            (2)
53 Sheldon:   ((looking at Amy)) next year i'm going to Epcot↓
54 LT/AUD:    ((laughing))
              ((End of the scene))
```

At the beginning of the presented scene, there are indicators that allow us to infer that Sheldon knows that his behavior on the day before was inappropriate. First, although Amy has agreed to him spending his vacation days at her lab, Sheldon does not simply enter the lab and greet Amy, instead he knocks on a wide open door; and second, the fact that he knocks gently and addresses Amy at a low voice which are marked behaviors for Sheldon who is usually loud when initiating contact. These features indicate that Sheldon is aware that he has committed an offense. Amy's reaction when she first perceives Sheldon confirms that she sees him as the offender as well. Instead of looking at him with a smile or excitement, as she usually does, her facial expression communicates annoyance and hurt. Her first words addressed at him, "whaddo you want?" (line 11), as well as their delivery, do the same. Social conventions demand that the offender apologizes to the offended or offer another offense-remedial-related action. Sheldon does neither. Apologies have been recognized as central to the maintenance of social peace in relations. In terms of relational work, apologies help reestablish the status quo from before the offense. Through the apology the offender acknowledges that an offense was committed, takes on the blame for the offense, and takes a first step towards the negotiation of forgiveness (cf. Goffman 1971; Holmes 1990; Leech 1983, 2014; Robinson 2004). Sheldon, however, does neither apologize nor use another redressive action. In

other words, he does not admit that his behavior was offensive and therefore cannot take on the blame. Nonetheless, he does not seem sure that his and Amy's previous arrangement is still valid, which is yet another indicator that he is aware of his offense. In lines 13 to 15, he requests that Amy honor their agreement (<i was: <u>kind</u> of: <u>ho:</u>ping> (0.5) <i could (.) continue vacationing in your la:boratory>). His request is indirect and makes use of the hedging device "kind of" (see line 13). Leech (2014, 120) argues that hedges render speech acts or speech events that he categorizes as neg-politeness,[11] for instance requests, pragmalinguistically more polite. The same is said of indirectness (Leech 2014, 11). We could thus say that Sheldon's request is very polite. In lines 16 and 17, however, he provides a justification for his request (after all (0.5) <i did (.) <u>book</u> the whole ↑week>) which contrasts with the indirectness of the request. It represents a face-challenging act as it reminds Amy of their arrangement, i.e., it is a reminder that she would break her promise if Sheldon were no longer allowed to work with her – or do we need to consider that she would be breaking a business deal given that Sheldon claims he has "booked" his vacation in her lab? Most probably not because the laughter that follows functions as the 'setting-specific' cue that identifies Sheldon's word choice as humorous. As a consequence of the face-challenging act, Sheldon's request can no longer be seen as polite. This is supported by how Amy orients to Sheldon's request as inappropriate in lines 19 to 22 (do you <u>honestly</u> think↑ you can just <u>waltz</u> back in ↑here (.) after the way you behaved yesterda:y?). Note Amy's lexical choices, "*waltz* back in here" that contrast with Sheldon's hesitant behavior and would be more fitting if he had indeed just entered as though nothing happened. Her lexical choice indicates that the request is interpreted as a "waltzing-back-in." At the same time, Amy's response confirms that the reason for her hurt feelings is Sheldon's behavior from the day before.

Although Sheldon does not apologize as a reaction to Amy's rhetorical question in lines 19 to 22, his utterance in line 23, "<i was <u>not</u> <u>my</u>self↓>", could be interpreted as an offense-remedial-related action, albeit one that does not accept responsibility for the offense. He is making excuses, as evidenced by the second part of his turn in line 24, "<i had lost> a lot of <u>thumb</u> blood↓". The offensive behavior started almost as soon as he began working with Amy, which was probably hours[12] before Sheldon cut himself and "lost a lot of thumb blood." We observe that the perlocutionary effect of Sheldon's offense-remedial-related action on his interactional partner Amy

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11. Within Leech's (2014, 11) politeness model the function of neg-politeness is "mitigation, to reduce or lessen possible causes of offenses."

12. In episode 16, there are three scenes with Sheldon and Amy in the lab on that particular day. It is at the end of the third and last scene that he cuts himself.

does not match his intended perlocutionary act, the avoidance of an apology and restoration of the status of their relationship as it was before his vacation. In line 27, Amy directly states that she does not consider this an apology and demands a proper apology in line 30 ("i want a <u>real</u> apology"). If we look at this interaction from the perspective of relational work, it can be said that such a direct request is face-challenging if not face-damaging. Goffman (1971) writes that interactants monitor their behavior at all times for its potential to offend. Upon detecting a potentially offensive action, they try to remedy the situation immediately, for example, by apologizing. Goffman further states that apologies therefore tend to be produced for potential or 'virtual' offenses and they tend to occur before other participant interactants refer to the offense. We could therefore deduce that it is unusual for interactants to be asked to apologize. Robinson (2004) affirms that cases where an offender needs to be asked to apologize are uncommon. We are tempted to specify, in interpersonal communication, it is unusual for grownup interactants to be told to apologize. As part of a child's socialization process, it is not uncommon for caregivers to tell a child to apologize when s/he has (potentially) offended someone. It is noteworthy that Fatigante et al. (2016) point out that children do not develop the capability to apologize until they are about five years of age. Caregivers probably do not only tell children to apologize so that they learn which situations warrant an apology, but also because it is their social responsibility to conform to the social norms to which the child cannot yet conform. By asking the child in their care to apologize, caregivers are indirectly apologizing for the child's committed offense as they are responsible for their children and thus for offenses committed by their children.[13] A grown man being asked to apologize can be seen as a deviation from normative interactional behavior and it is the kind of deviation that can be used for comedic effect in sitcoms. Especially since Sheldon makes use of another common comedic feature, excess.

Upon Amy's request for a real apology, Sheldon does not instantly comply with her demand. His turn in line 33 starts with the proper words, "<i':m sorry>" spoken slowly and hesitantly, but in line 34 he turns what could have been an apology into a 'blame game', putting the blame on Amy ("that: (1) you weren't able to-") which Amy immediately interrupts with a firm "no" accompanied by a feeble shaking of her head (line 36). This becomes a pattern that is repeated twice with Amy breaking the pattern in line 42 with an impatient "↑SHELdon↓." To the amusement of the audience, her tone and delivery evoke the scolding of a child. And like a child, Sheldon obeys, but not without a final act of rebellion, as seen in the emphasis and

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13. Caregivers also apologize directly for their children's actions (see for example Holmes 1989; Murphy 2015).

intonation of his reaction in line 44, "fine↓" followed by a long pause, suggesting how difficult this is for him, and finally his simple, yet effective apology in line 46, "↑sorry↓." The falling intonation indicates that his one-word apology is complete, i.e., not accompanied by any explanations, expression of responsibility, offer of repair, promise of forbearance, concern for Amy, justifications, or excuses. The fact that Amy is satisfied and forgives Sheldon in line 47 suggests awareness of the apology simultaneously being an act of taking on responsibility for the offense. It is noteworthy that Amy does not use one of the most common linguistic formulae for accepting an apology, namely *that's alright* or *that's okay* (Robinson 2004; see also Drew & Hepburn 2016),[14] instead she uses the rather unusual "you're forgiven." Robinson asserts:

> Insofar as *That's alright* and *That's okay* simultaneously acknowledge the commission of a possible offense, yet claim that no offense was actually taken, they can be characterized as performing the action of *absolution*: that is they work to reassure apologizers that their *possible* offense was not taken as an *actual* offense.
> (Robinson 2004, 305, emphasis as in the original)

Robinson's (2004) claim would explain why Amy can use neither *that's alright* nor *that's okay*. She explicitly stated that she wanted an apology, in other words, that Sheldon's behavior was *not* okay or alright. She would thus contradict herself were she to use either of both formulae when Sheldon apologizes. On the other hand, *that's alright* or *that's okay* does not necessarily refer back to the apologizable, as Robinson (2004) argues. He explicitly mentions that the indexical term does not refer to the apology, but to the possible offense. The deictic reference is ambiguous and possibly deliberately so. Not stating exactly what is alright/okay – whether the performance of a (virtual) offense, the apology, or the parties involved – allows both parties to save face (see below). First, I would argue, that for disambiguation's sake "that's" can only refer to the offense if the offense is mentioned together with the IFID, which it is not in a majority of the cases, as Leech maintains:

> *Sorry* (whether or not preceded by *I'm*) is by far the most common expression for apology in English, and of the various structural possibilities of *sorry* the use of it as an isolate (with no syntactic connection with other elements) is the most common.
> (Leech 2014, 125, italics as in the original)

Even in cases when the apology includes the apologizable it is difficult to see how *that's alright* or *that's okay* would refer to the (potential) offense exclusively. In

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14. It is worth noting that Drew and Hepburn (2016) see such a strong link between *that's alright/okay* and an apology that they use its presence to analyze absent apologies.

Example (3)[15] for instance, Mat's *that's okay* and Ann's *that's alright* would mean:
'it's alright/okay that you made us wait.' If it were alright to make friends, colleagues,
relatives, patients, etc. wait why would anyone assume that one apologizes when
being late or behind schedule, given that the response on most occasions is that it's
alright or okay to make others wait?

(3) Extract (8): GROUP MEETING [Morse:502]
```
01       MAT:  (Hey)  (    [])= ]  ((addressed to Joy))
02       JOY:             [He:]:y.=h
03 a->   JOY:  >Sorry I'm late.<
04 b1>   MAT:  That['s      oka:]y,
05 b2>   ANN:     ['t's=alright,]
06             (0.3)
07       ANN:  ('t)=least you came.
08             (.)
09       JOY:  Yeah.                              (Robinson 2004, 303)
```

In Example (3), Ann does not leave it at *that's alright*. When no one claims the floor
she adds: "At least you came" in line 7. Taken literally, that would be quite a low expec-
tation for a work meeting with a group of fellow students. Yet, we seldom co-construct
the meaning of utterances at the literal level; instead we expect and look for implica-
tures. What Ann implies is that being late – or being late by how ever many minutes
Joy was late – is a *minor* offense, especially compared to not coming at all. It is worthy
of note that through the implicature Ann compares Joy's being late to an action that
is not necessarily relevant, unless there have been occasions when Joy or someone
else from the group failed to go to a meeting. Assuming that that is not the case, and
Joy's simple "yeah" with falling intonation as a response supports that assumption,
then "at least you came" could be regarded as a reinforcement of *that's* alright. This
would not be necessary if *that's alright* had already communicated that waiting for
Joy is okay and an apology is not required, as Robinson (2004) argues: by reacting
with *that's alright* or *that's okay* the receiver of the apology refutes the apology, i.e.,
contests the necessity to apologize. By contrast, I posit that the apology is what makes
the offense acceptable. Were the offender not apologizing offense would (or might)[16]

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15. Example (3) is taken from Robinson (2004). Robinson explains that Ann, Mat and Ron are
three college students who are waiting for their fellow student Joy. All four are working on a
collaborative project. Joy is late. There is no information given on (1) how late Joy is; (2) where
the four are meeting; or (3) any other circumstances that would or could affect those who are
waiting, such as time pressure etc. Robinson uses this example to show that *that's alright* and
that's okay are "virtually semantically equivalent and thus interchangeable".

16. This mitigation is necessary given that there are personal and cultural differences regarding
the perception and evaluation of behavior as offensive or inoffensive.

be taken. *That's alright* or *that's okay* as most frequent responses to an apology do not refute the apology. This interpretation is supported by overt rejections of the necessity to apologize. In Robinson's data, e.g., there are cases of apology recipients explicitly stating that an apology is not necessary. Example (4) represents part of Robinson's thirteenth example.

(4) From Extract (13): IN LAWS [Rahman:B:2:JV14]

```
14 a->   VER:  I[:'m sorry] you had them all [on you]
15       JEN:   [(        )]                [.hh   ]
16 a->   VER:  [Jenny.    [like that.]
17 b->   JEN:  [↑Oh don't↓ [be    'si]lly, [↑No:↓ that was
18 b->        lo>ve>ly it< was a nice surpri[↑:se,↓]
19       VER:                            [   Y:]e[s ()
20       JEN:                                   [An'
21       JEN:  they look so well.            (Robinson 2004, 306)
```

The context for (4) is that Vera was not home when her family came to visit and therefore the visitors waited at Jenny's until Vera got back. In this phone conversation, Vera is apologizing to Jenny for having to take her family in. In lines 17 and 18 Jenny communicates that it is not necessary to apologize. "Don't be silly" and "no" are the terms she uses to refute Vera's apology, not *that's alright* or *that's okay*. This would be an indicator that the latter do not accomplish the same task (given that they are also the most common responses to an apology). In addition, the evaluative terms that Jenny uses "lovely" and "nice" are unreservedly positive and thus deny the existence of an offense and by extension the need to apologize.

In Section 2.2 we have seen that apologies are meant to remedy a social offense, i.e., a face damaging or challenging act that apologizers (think they) committed, commit or will commit. We have not yet discussed that by admitting wrongdoing and taking on responsibility for it through the performance of an apology, the apologizer risks loosing face (cf. Barron 2009; Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987; Fraser 1981; Olshtain 1989; Holmes 1990). The status quo or, to use Holmes' (1998, 204) terminology, equilibrium could not be restored if the addressee simply acknowledged or accepted the apology. Further relational work would be required to attend to the apologizer's face needs. For these reasons, I believe that the most common response – *that's okay/alright* – is a way of swiftly accepting the apology, acknowledging that the apology *redressed* the offense, and at the same time it is a means of minimizing the damage to the apologizer's face, as it seems to confirm that the relationship has not suffered. By way of the ambiguity of its deictic reference, *that's alright/okay* can take on these multiple meanings simultaneously. This interpretation is still in line with Robinson's (2004) explanation, inspired by Heritage (1984), that *that's okay/alright* as preferred responses to apologies are likely to further social solidarity.

The most common response might essentially be preferred whenever someone apologizes for a minor offense where no harm or at most only minor harm was done. Minor offenses also appear to be the most frequent offenses. In those cases it seems in everyone's best interest to save face on both sides in order to return to a harmonious or functioning relationship quickly. If however the offended has been hurt by the offense, i.e., when the offense was not trivial or not perceived as trivial then the response might be a different one. This could be in accordance with the tendency of apologies to be different, more extended, for major offenses or even for not-so-minor wrongdoings (Coulmas 1981; Goffman 1971; Heritage & Raymond 2016; Holmes 1990). The latter being the category in which Sheldon's offense from Example (2) belongs. Therefore a mechanical *sorry* would be as insufficient as not apologizing is. In the end, he uses a bare *sorry* to apologize, but it is by no means a routine or automatic one. It is clear to the apology receiver, Amy, that Sheldon is aware that this is an on-the-record apology. The negotiation leading up to it ensures that. Amy promptly accepts the apology. Her uncommon *you're forgiven* shares a crucial aspect with the common *that's okay/alright*: it does not include an expression of agency. Insofar as *you're forgiven* clearly means 'I forgive you' yet does not state '*I* forgive you', *you're forgiven* does not expose the asymmetry in Amy's and Sheldon's positions and therefore allows Sheldon to save face.

The initial reluctance of Sheldon to apologize is an indicator that Sheldon considers apologizing a threat to his face. In order not to loose face, he does not apologize until it becomes clear to him that the risk of not apologizing outweighs the risk of apologizing. Lazare (2004) claims that a reluctance to apologize goes hand in hand with certain characteristics:

> We can surmise what personality traits in people make it particularly difficult for them to apologize: They need to be in firm control of interpersonal situations. They need to be in control of their emotions. They need to feel right or morally superior most of the time; they believe they rarely make mistakes. They assume the world is hostile and that relationships are inherently dangerous.   (Lazare 2004, 169)

Most if not all of these personality traits can be attributed to Sheldon's character (see also Bednarek 2012). In light of findings from previous research and the personality he portraits it makes sense that Sheldon does not like to apologize. I take this as an indicator that the sitcom creators manage to paint a complex character in Sheldon capable of more or less natural communication, albeit one that displays antisocial, awkward, childish, egocentric, inappropriate, or twisted behavior regularly for comedic effect. On the other hand, not all of Sheldon's idiosyncrasies are meant to be funny. Some are linked to his personality that is located closer to the antisocial end on the social-antisocial scale. Laughter as a cue – audience and laugh track laughter – helps differentiate between representations of natural and funny interaction elements.

Sheldon is not only the apologizer; he is also the receiver of apologies as we see for example in case (5), taken from the Pilot Episode. Shortly after they have met their new neighbor Penny, Leonard agrees to do her a favor. It consists of getting her TV back from her ex-boyfriend. They have just broken up and he is unwilling to return her TV. In the next scene, we see Sheldon and Leonard exit the ex-boyfriend's building after having talked to him – a much bigger and physically fitter man than either Leonard or Sheldon. Much to the amusement of the audience, Leonard and Sheldon are no longer wearing trousers and look utterly humiliated out on the street in their underwear. Their look evokes the vision of beaten up schoolboys.

(5) Excerpt from Season 1 Episode 1: The Pilot Episode

```
01 Sheldon:    <Leonard?>
02             (1)
03 Leonard:    ((annoyed)) wha:t?
04 Sheldon:    <↑my mom:↓> (.) bought me those pants.
05 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
06             (1)
07 Leonard:    ((annoyed)) >i'm ↑so:rry↓<
08 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
09             (3)
10 Sheldon:    ((forcefully)) you're gonna have to ↑call her.
11 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
12             (1.5)
13             ((fade out))
14             ((back at their building, both walking up the stairs))
15 Leonard:    <Sheldon↓ i'm: so: sorry (.) i dra:gged you through this:.>
16             (0.6)
17 Sheldon:    <it's: ↑okay↓> (0.3) <it wasn't my first pantsing (.) and
18             it won't be my last>
19 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
20             (2)
21 Leonard:    and you were ↑right↓ about <my motives (0.3) i ↑wa:s↓ (.)
22             ↑hoping (.) to establish a relationship with Penny tha:t
23             (0.3) might have some day le:d to (.) °↑sex:°.>
24             (0.5)
25 Sheldon:    >you got me out of ↑my pants↓<
26 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
27             (3)
28 Leonard:    anyway i learned my lesson (.) she's out of my league (.)
29             i'm done with her. (.) got my work (0.3) one day i'll win
30             the nobel pri:ze:. and then i'll die alone.
31 Sheldon:    don't ↑think like ↑tha:t↓ (.) you're not going to die
32             alone.
33             (.)
34 Leonard:    thank you ↑She:ldon↓ (.) you're a good friend.
35             (3.5)
36 Sheldon:    you're ↑certainly not going to win a nobel ↑pri:ze↓
35 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
               ((End of the scene))
```

Leonard's first *I'm sorry* in line 7 could function as an apology, however, through the annoyed delivery Leonard himself does not orient towards his verbal action as a sincere apology. It is almost as though he were saying: 'Isn't it obvious that I'm sorry?' Sheldon is not concerned about Leonard's annoyance, which could be attributed to his characterization as being unable to 'read' others' emotions (cf. Bednarek 2012). Sheldon ignores Leonard's *I'm sorry* and makes a request instead. He wants Leonard to call his, Sheldon's, mother. This request implies that Leonard explain that he, Leonard, is responsible for Sheldon's loss of her gift, Sheldon's trousers. In a way this call would be a way of taking responsibility for the loss and therefore a redress. As such it could be seen as a substitute for an apology. We do not find out whether or not Leonard agrees to call Sheldon's mother. This request is, of course, part of the comedy as it invokes a similar picture of immaturity and helplessness as the earlier visual did of Sheldon and Leonard walking, then driving, in public in their underwear.

In contrast to the first *I'm sorry*, the second one in line 15 is a textbook example of an apology. Leonard addresses the offended directly, his delivery conveys remorse, and he states the apologizable indirectly ("i dragged you through this"). The second *I'm sorry* is also contrasted with the first one by means of the intensifier 'so'. Further while *I'm sorry* in line 7 is verbalized at a faster pace, the actual apology in line 15 is spoken very slowly. Both, offender and offended, orient towards Leonard's verbal action as an apology. Sheldon's reaction is sincere and prompt. He accepts the apology with the utterance "it's okay" – a variation of the common *that's okay* – and a disclosure in line 17 ("it wasn't my first pantsing…"). The fact that this kind of humiliation is not new to Sheldon is presented as a reason for accepting the apology and like the added "at least you came" in Example (3) it reinforces the original response. At the same time it adds to the humor. Furthermore, this sharing of at least one similar embarrassing experience could be seen as a bonding event. Leonard seems to interpret it as such. He reacts with a disclosure of his own. "You were right…" in line 21 refers back to an earlier dialogue in which Sheldon questioned Leonard's motivation for driving to Penny's ex-boyfriend to retrieve her TV. Sheldon accused his friend of "thinking with his penis." However, Leonard denied that he had ulterior motives. Now he admits that he was motivated by the prospect of forging a connection with their beautiful new neighbor Penny. This confession is also a way to strengthen the apology as it is a variation on *mea culpa*, an expression of responsibility. Leonard does not leave it at that. He includes a promise of forbearance as well in lines 28 and 29 ("anyway I learned my lesson (.) she's out of my league (.) i'm done with her"). Leonard's apology illustrates Goffman's (1971) concept of proportionality (cf. Heritage & Raymond 2016; Holmes 1990). Being responsible for his friend's stolen pants and humiliation is not a minor offense and therefore demands an extended apology. Here it takes the form of an explicit

apology and two other offense-remedial-related actions (Robinson 2004). These supporting moves are offered after Sheldon has already accepted the apology. This is inline with findings from naturally occurring (phone) conversations. Fatigante et al. (2016, 44) use the term "recycled apology" for apologies that are offered more than once and after acceptance. They equate it with "over-emphasizing" responsibility. Simultaneously the offender "portrays a (critical) judgmental stance toward him- or herself and the action undertaken" (44). This behavior would encourage the offended to reject the requirement for an apology and communicate that the apologizer's "morality" is maintained. While Sheldon does not exactly react as Fatigante et al. describe, he does reassure Leonard that he will not die alone (lines 31 to 32), which can be interpreted as a confirmation of their friendship. Leonard is pleased with Sheldon's response and calls him "a good friend." The extended apology has certainly restored equilibrium and ensured their friendship is unscathed. Even the punch line in line 36 can be seen as a return to their old ways since Sheldon usually thinks very highly of himself, but not nearly as highly of his colleagues (cf. Bednarek 2012).

In the next section, the focus is on the investigation of apologies from *The Big Bang Theory* that are not accepted by the offended party.

4.2   Unaccepted apologies

To the best of my knowledge, interactional studies on apologies in everyday social interactions tend to focus on accepted apologies not on unaccepted apologies. The term 'unaccepted apology' refers here to apologies toward which the offended party orients as expected or necessary. In other words, it excludes apologies that were rejected as being unnecessary. Robinson (2004) looks at them in terms of dispreferred responses (308–316) and as prove that apologies constitute the first utterance of an adjacency pair. He does not seem to be interested in these unaccepted apologies per se. Examples of unquestionably unaccepted apologies are "extremely rare" in Robinson's data, "perhaps generally given their threat to a relationship specifically, and to social harmony generally" (315). In sitcom data, however, unambiguously unaccepted apologies are less rare. This might be linked to the genre's mandate of entertainment and humor. The breaking of social norms and conventions, the refusal of expressing solidarity can be seen as funny in the context of a comedy. One such instance is presented in Example (6).

The scene transcribed in (6) is also from the pilot episode. It precedes the scene from Example (5). When Sheldon and Leonard run into their new neighbor Penny on the floor of their apartment and meet her for the very first time, Leonard spontaneously invites her over to their apartment for lunch. All three are sitting around the coffee table and are about to eat together.

(6) Excerpt from Season 1 Episode 1: The Pilot Episode

```
01 Leonard:    well=this is ↑ni:ce. (1)((looking at Penny)) >↑we don't
02             have a lot of company over.<
03 Sheldon:    ((looking at Leonard)) >that's not true.< (.) >Koothrappali
04             and Wolowitz come over ((looking at Penny)) all the time.<
05 Leonard:    yes (.) i know but-
06 Sheldon:    ((looking at Penny)) >Tuesday night (.) ↑we played Klingon
07             boggle until one in the morning.<
08 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
09 Leonard:    yeah (.) i remember- ((fake smile))
10 Sheldon:    ((looking at Leonard)) >i resent you saying (.) we don't
11             have company.<
12 Leonard:    ((looking at Sheldon)) >i'm sorry-<
13 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
14 Sheldon:    >what a ↑negative social ↑implication-<
15 Leonard:    ((looking at Sheldon)) >I SAID (.) I'M SORRY<
16 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
17             (2.5)
18 Penny:      so: (0.5) ((turning to Leonard)) <Kling:on:? bo:ggle?>
19 Leonard:    <yea:h (0.3) it's: like regular boggle (0.3) but: (0.5) °in:
20             Kling:on°>
21 LT/AUD:     ((laughing))
               […]
```

In line 1, Leonard is trying to be a good host and to make Penny feel comfortable by complimenting her indirectly through the positive evaluation of having her over. In contrast, Sheldon is proving his lack of social skills when strongly contradicting Leonard in lines 3 to 4, which is likely to make their guest, Penny, feel uncomfortable. When Leonard tries to explain himself in line 5, Sheldon quickly interrupts him to demonstrate that he is right, that their friends do visit. On Tuesday they were at Sheldon's and Leonard's and not just for a short visit. They stayed until one in the morning (lines 6 to 7). Leonard is aware that this behavior can make guests feel ill at ease. Therefore he agrees with Sheldon. Sheldon however is oblivious. In lines 10 to 11, he directly communicates that Leonard offended him: "I resent you saying, we don't have company." This unconventional directness is usually seen as impolite (Culpeper 2011). Yet, Leonard ignores the threat to his face and without delay apologizes to Sheldon in line 12, possibly to avoid an argument in front of their guest. On the other hand, it is conceivable that Leonard is already used to Sheldon's direct ways of communicating and either does not take offense anymore or views Sheldon's ways as a lost cause. The audience's laughter also suggests that the apology is unexpected or unusual, especially given that Leonard has just been offended, and is therefore funny. While Leonard's efforts seem completely focused on ending this misunderstanding or argument quickly to direct his attention to Penny and her wellbeing, Sheldon does the exact opposite. He ignores the apology and takes us back all the way to Leonard's initial utterance ("we don't have a lot of company over"), which he evaluates as "a negative social implication" in line 14.

Given that Sheldon's character is introduced as a 'genius' who lacks social skills but is willing to learn socially appropriate behavior, his overreaction in this scene is not purely funny. From his perspective, Leonard's 'harmless' statement in lines 1 to 2 can be interpreted as disvestiture of Sheldon's efforts at becoming more socially apt. Sheldon's efforts include having company over. In later episodes, we find out that Sheldon used to be considerably more reclusive before Leonard became his roommate and friend. In Sheldon's eyes his behavior is thus not an overreaction, but justified. In contrast, it is ironic and therefore amusing that his distress over a perceived accusation of being socially inapt with regard to having guests causes him to behave inappropriately towards their guest. Ultimately, Sheldon keeps ignoring and thus does not accept Leonard's apology. Even when Leonard impatiently points out that he did apologize (see line 15), Sheldon responds with silence, not necessarily with a passive-aggressive silence, but rather an ignorant one. It is Penny who breaks the silence with a question about Klingon boggle in line18. On camera the incident is never brought up again. Nonetheless, Sheldon and Leonard's friendship seems to be unaffected.

Sheldon also experiences unaccepted apologies from the other side, as the apologizer who is not granted forgiveness or absolution. In the scene from which (7) is selected, we have two apologies that are not accepted. We will briefly analyze the second one and mention the first mainly as part of the context. As the "neat freak" that he is, Sheldon is troubled by the fact that Penny, is quite messy. In fact, this upsets him so much that he cannot sleep. He gets up and uses her key – Penny had left it with Leonard – to go into her apartment where he starts to clean and organize her kitchen and living room while she is asleep. He does not organize her closet but leaves suggestions for her about its organization. Upon waking up in the morning, Penny realizes what Sheldon did while she was asleep. She is furious and marches into Leonard and Sheldon's apartment complaining profusely. There she asks for her keys back. Leonard delivers a heartfelt apology ("I'm >very=very sorry.<") which Penny ignores, i.e., does not accept. Instead she continues to rant about the incident. Leonard suggests they talk more about it once Penny feels less upset. Penny rejects this suggestion in line 1:

(7) Excerpt from Season 1 Episode 2: The Big Bran Hypothesis

```
01 Penny:     >STAY=away from me< ((walks towards the door))
02 Leonard:   sure >that's another way to go< (.) ((hangs his head,
03            disappointment visible in his facial expression))
04 LT/AUD:    ((laughing))
05            (1)
06 Sheldon:   >do- d=uh PENNY↑ PENNY↑<
07 Penny:     ((turns around looks at Sheldon))
08 Sheldon:   ho=ho::ld on (1.5) ((while gesturing at Penny and walking
09            towards her)) <just↓ (.) to↓ (.) clari↑fy↓> (.)
```

```
10              <be::cause:> (1.5) there will be a discussion ((looks in
11              Leonard's direction, back at Penny)) when you leave↓
12 LT/AUD:      ((laughing))
13              (3.5)
14              ((both at the door, looking at each other))
15 Sheldon:     is: your objection: (.) SO=LELY (.) >to our presence in the
16              apartment, while you were sleeping?< (.) or:,
17 LT/AUD:      ((laughing))
18 Sheldon:     d=do↓ (.) you↓ also object, >to the imposition of a new
19              organizational paradigm?< (2) ((intense gaze at Penny,
20              eyebrows raised))
21 Penny:       ((stares, mouth open semi-wide, very slowly turns around))
22 LT/AUD:                                          ((laughing))
23 Penny:       ((leaves))
24 LT/AUD:      ((laughing continues))
25              (2.5)
26 Sheldon:     ((looks into the direction of Penny's apartment))
27              ((one hears a door falling shut))
28 LT/AUD:      ((laughing continues))
29              (2)
30 Sheldon:     ((while turning towards Leonard)) well (.) >that was a
31              little non:responsive.< ((closes door))
32 Leonard:     ((looks at the floor, then up, inaudible deep breath))
33 LT/AUD:      ((laughing))
34              (2.5)
35 Leonard:     ((while walking towards Sheldon, looking up at him,
36              pointing index finger at him)) >you are going to march
37              yourself over there< (.) right now↓ (.) and apol:ogize.
38 Sheldon:     hehehe ((walks passed Leonard into kitchen))
39 Leonard:     ((follows him with his gaze, face scrunched up))
40 LT/AUD:      ((laughing))
41              (4)
42 Leonard:     <what's: fu:nny?>
43 Sheldon:     did-, that was:n't sarcasm?
44 LT/AUD:      ((laughing))
45              (2)
46 Leonard:     <NO::↓> ((gesturing towards door))
47 Sheldon:     woo:: boy (.) you are all over the place this morning.
48 LT/AUD:      ((laughing))
49              (5)
50 Sheldon:     ((walks across the hall, knocks on Penny's door))
51              °i have a masters and two PhDs. i should not have to do
52              this°
53 LT/AUD:      ((laughing))
54              (2)
55 Penny:       ((opening door)) WHAT?
56              (1.5)
57 Sheldon:     ((mechanically with an almost blank gaze at Penny whose
58              back is turned to the camera)) i'm truly sorry for what
59              happened last night. i take (.) full responsibility (.) and
60              i hope that it won't (0.5) c=color your opinion of Leonard.
61              (.) who is (.) not only a ↑wonderful guy (.) but (.) also
62              (.) i hear (.) a: gentle (.) and thorough lover.
63 Leonard:     ((is watching from their apartment door, throws arms in the
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64              air, burying face in his hands, sits down))
65 LT/AUD:      ((laughing))
66              (2)
67 Penny:       ((slowly turns around, closes door wordlessly))
68 LT/AUD:      ((laughing continues))
69              (8)
70 Sheldon:     ((returning to Leonard)) <i did what i could>
71 LT/AUD:      ((laughing))
                ((end of the scene))
```

This scene is taken from the second episode. The character of Sheldon is still in the process of being introduced to the audience. Social awkwardness paired with high intelligence make up his core qualities. Moreover, Sheldon is depicted as a willing student of socially appropriate behavior and he seems to accept Leonard as an authority in the matter. Therefore Sheldon immediately, especially compared to his resistance in Excerpt (2) and despite not knowing how exactly he offended Penny, follows Leonard's demand to apologize to her. The apology in lines 58 to 59 includes *I'm sorry* as the IFID, the intensifier 'truly,' and the offense. The later is vague, not directly stated, and excludes an expression of agency. "What happened last night" comes close to an excuse as it suggests that Sheldon cannot be blamed, he simply had no choice – and it is quite possible that he perceives it that way. After all, he could not sleep until he got Penny's apartment organized. "What happened last night" also contrasts with the expression of responsibility in line 59 and therefore weakens the latter and makes it sound insincere. Add to this a delivery that invokes a poorly memorized poem and we have an apology that is fitting for a socially awkward character. Had Sheldon left it at that Penny might have been inclined to accept the apology, especially given that at that point she already knew of his challenges regarding social behavior. However, the comic element would have been absent. In adding "and I hope that it won't color your opinion of Leonard who is not only a wonderful guy but also, I hear, a gentle and thorough lover" in lines 60 to 62, Sheldon unknowingly does exactly the opposite of his intended perlocutionary act, namely taking on the blame and leaving Leonard out of it. By communicating that Leonard should not be held accountable for Sheldon's actions and 'casually' mentioning Leonard's qualities as a sexual partner, which in and on itself is highly inappropriate in the context of new neighbors, Sheldon draws attention to Leonard's involvement not only in the despised act for which he is apologizing, but also his involvement in the apology itself. Penny orients to Sheldon's apology as inappropriate and unacceptable by ending the encounter without uttering a single word. The act meant to remedy offense added further offense – and lead to more and prolonged laughter by the audience, laughter that operates as the familiar setting-specific metacue to mark the apology as humorous.

   In life, unaccepted apologies are rare and very serious because they threaten relationships (Robinson 2004), which ultimately translates into a lot of relational

work to redress the initial offense and the failed attempt(s) to apologize or they lead to the end of relationships. In sitcoms, unaccepted apologies are neither rare nor serious. They lead to laughter (on the part of the audience) and the relationships endure – sometimes with very little relational work. A case in point is related to (7). Leonard writes Penny a long apology and tries to slide the note underneath her door, which she opens during that process. Nervously, he starts to read from his note instead of talking freely, but Penny seems touched and interrupts his reading with a hug and the words, "Leonard we're okay." Thereby not only accepting the apology, but also confirming that their relationship is enduring. True to the genre of the sitcom, as described in Section 2.1, "trouble in paradise" never lasts and the restoration of harmony needs to be as funny as its threat had been. For these reasons, unaccepted apologies in sitcoms could not have the same effect or the same consequence that they have in natural interaction.

4.3   Apologies in spontaneous interaction, in sitcom interaction, and elicited apologies

When it comes to the study of apologies there are many that analyze data that does not capture spontaneous discourse. Like those projects, this one has examined nonnaturally occurring data. Unlike those projects, the data of this study does not consist of elicited apologies and it includes a large interactional context. In closing the analysis, I briefly contrast the apologies from sitcom interactions with spontaneous apologies and elicited apologies from written and oral DCT.

A look at the transcript excerpts with natural apologies in Examples (3) and (4) and at the transcripts of the examples from *The Big Bang Theory*, (2), (5), (6), and (7), shows apparent differences between these data sets. There are, for example, no overlaps in the latter, no audible inhalations or exhalations and less self-repair compared to the former. The sitcom data clearly shows that the dialogues are rehearsed. On the other hand, these examples also show commonalities shared by both kinds of data sets, namely the use of spoken language as opposed to written language, prosody of spoken utterances, hesitation pauses, discourse markers, multimodal use of communication, co-constructed and co-negotiated meaning, and relational work – all these elements are absent from DCT, even oral DCT (cf. Rintell & Mitchell 1989). The relational work in sitcom interaction partially differs from relational work in spontaneous discourse,[17] especially when shortcuts are taken for entertainment reasons or when inappropriate behavior is used for comedic effect and little relational work is undertaken or necessary. The analysis did show that

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17. Other features of spoken language use, such as hesitations, other pauses etc., might differ as well. An in depth discussion of these is beyond the scope of this paper.

apologies in *The Big Bang Theory* are similar to natural apologies – especially those apologies that are character and story driven as opposed to those that are comedy and humor driven. Overall, this confirms that there are differences and similarities between the language and language use in natural interaction and sitcom interaction (cf. Bednarek 2012; Quaglio 2009; Wickham 2007). It also confirms that sitcom interactions are valid discursive pragmatics research data, depending on the focus of the research, and especially when used with supplementary analyses of naturally occurring interaction to corroborate the findings. In contrast, apologies from DCT are so different that a first glance can reveal some of these differences. The following examples of written [(8), (9)] and oral DCT [(10)] were taken from the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989a).

(8) Written examples produced in Australian English

```
7. I am very sorry, I forgot to bring it.
8. I am so sorry but I forgot to bring it with me.     (Olshtain 1989, 166)
```

(9) Written example produced in American English

```
(Utter. 210, written) I'm sorry I forgot to bring it in today. If you
would like I could get it to you by the end of the day, or else I could
bring it in tomorrow. (33 words)
```
(Rintell & Mitchell 1989, 255)

(10) Oral example produced in American English

```
(Utter. 403, oral) I'm sorry I forgot your book. I will go home and get
it if you need it today. But otherwise I can make arrangements to give
it to you later. (30 words)
```
(Rintell & Mitchell 1989: 255)

Examples in (8) were elicited using the following:

(b) At the College teacher's office

A student has borrowed a book from her teacher, which she promised to return today. When meeting her teacher, however, she realizes that she forgot to bring it along.

Teacher: Miriam, I hope you brought the book I lent you.
Miriam: _____
Teacher: Ok but please remember it next week.
(Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989b, 14)

Examples (9) and (10) were elicited using a modified version of (b). Rintell & Mitchell (1989, 251) revised the description to eliminate the second line by the teacher because of their chosen oral format. They used the same modified version to collect written responses as well, which they compared to the oral responses. As a consequence of the modification the space for the study participants' responses is no longer limited. This might account for the longer contributions in (9) and (10) compared to (8). The explicit apologies or IFID in the examples from (8), (9),

and (10) are almost identical. In addition, all responses mention the offense. The examples in (9) and (10) also include an offer of repair. However, by design they are one-sided, non-negotiated, imagined utterances that do not offer valid data for a discursive pragmatics approach to the study of the apology. Sitcom data thus has advantages over elicited data when apologies are to be studied from an interpersonal pragmatics perspective.

5.   Conclusion and outlook

This study has examined apologies from sitcom interactions within the context of their interactional exchange and has discussed, compared, and contrasted the findings using results from previous research mainly from naturally occurring interactions. It has incorporated brief analyses of spontaneous apologies [(3), (4)] and a glance at elicited apologies [(8), (9), (10)] to strengthen the argument of validity regarding script-based data from sitcoms. Findings confirm that sitcom interaction offers useful data for the study of certain pragmatic aspects, apologies in particular, from a discursive perspective. Apologies from *The Big Bang Theory* were accepted as valid data, especially when previous results from spontaneous interaction or when new analysis of naturally occurring apologies could be used to substantiate the results from the analysis of the *Big Bang* apologies. This was neither the case for humor driven apologies nor unaccepted apologies. The later obviously need further study – in their own right first, additionally to verify the findings reported in Section 4.2.

The apologies discussed here contribute to our knowledge on apologies in spite of their origin as nonnatural, rehearsed, performed, script-based 'data'. The analyses show that:

1. an apology is a co-negotiated, co-constructed speech event and therefore needs to be studied in its interactional context;
2. dependent on the interactional and relational context, a bare *sorry* can function as an on-the-record apology;
3. dependent on the interactional and relational context, a bare *sorry* can redress a not-so-minor violation of social norms;
4. preferred responses to apologies, namely *that's alright* or *that's okay*, do not question the need for an apology as claimed by Robinson (2004); instead they accept the apology, acknowledge that the apology *redressed* the offense and minimize the damage to the apologizer's face;
5. responses to apologies that do not include expressions of agency support the apologizer in saving his/her face.

As part of Section 2.2, this paper rudimentarily discussed Heritage and Raymond's (2016) categorization of a bare *sorry* in the self-repair space as an apology. This classification was questioned based on the absence of an apologizable and the non-orientation of the interlocutor to the *sorry* as an apology. I suggested that *sorry* in the context of the repair space could merely function as a marker of the repair space because it does not share the main characteristics of an apology. Perhaps future studies will shed more light on the different functions of the bare *sorry*.

In concluding, I want to reiterate that communication takes centre stage in sitcoms, which warrants attention from interactional linguistics, such as discursive pragmatics. Findings based on data from sitcom interaction can and should be further investigated using naturally occurring interaction.

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