

## Investigating the performance of emailed apologies by Australian learners of Italian

TALIA WALKER  
The University of Sydney

Received 20 January 2021; accepted after revisions 17 December 2021

### ABSTRACT

**EN** This paper explores the strategies chosen by Australian learners of Italian when performing emailed apologies in Italian. Through a modified discourse completion task, 42 participants produced a total of 317 emails. This paper presents an adapted typology of these emailed apologies in Italian which, while drawing on previous literature, has been tailored to be more specific to and therefore more effective in the analysis of the data collected in this project. It was found that the apology act as performed by Australian learners of Italian consists of two principal components, the apology and the repair, the latter of which is optional but is usually included. In addition, supportive strategies can be included prior to or following either of these components to strengthen the illocutionary force of the apology act. The analysis also evidenced that while a broad speech act structure can be identified, the apology act is a complex phenomenon which can be performed with great variation.

**Key words:** APOLOGIES, APOLOGY STRATEGIES, APOLOGY TYPOLOGY, AUSTRALIAN LEARNERS OF ITALIAN, EMAILED APOLOGIES

**ES** Este estudio examina las estrategias elegidas por discentes australianos de italiano en las disculpas enviadas por e-mail. A través de un Discourse Completion Task modificado (actividad de finalización del discurso), 42 participantes produjeron un total de 317 e-mails. Este artículo presenta una tipología adaptada de disculpas en italiano enviadas por e-mail que, aunque tomada de la literatura precedente, se ha adecuado para que fuera más pertinente al proyecto. Se observa que el acto de disculpa del alumnado australiano de italiano se constituye de dos elementos principales: la disculpa y la reparación; este último es facultativo, pero se suele incluir. Además, se pueden utilizar estrategias de soporte antes o después de uno de los dos componentes para consolidar la fuerza ilocutiva del acto de disculpa. El análisis también ha demostrado que, por un lado, es posible identificar una estructura amplia del acto lingüístico, y por otro, el acto de disculpa es un fenómeno complejo cuya realización es altamente variable.

**Palabras claves:** DISCULPAS, ESTRATEGIAS PARA DISCULPARSE, TIPOLOGÍA DE DISCULPAS, DISCENTES AUSTRALIANOS DE ITALIANO, DISCULPAS POR E-MAIL

**IT** Questo studio esamina le strategie usate da apprendenti australiani di italiano per la formulazione di scuse in italiano inviate via e-mail. Attraverso un Discourse Completion Task modificato (attività di completamento del discorso), 42 partecipanti hanno prodotto un totale di 317 email. Questo articolo presenta una tipologia adattata di scuse in italiano inviate via e-mail che, pur attingendo dalla letteratura precedente, è stata adeguata per essere più attinente al presente progetto. Emerge che l'atto di scusarsi prodotto dagli studenti australiani di italiano è costituito da due elementi principali: la scusa e la riparazione; nonostante quest'ultimo sia facultativo, viene di solito incluso. Inoltre, strategie di supporto possono essere impiegate prima o dopo una delle due componenti per consolidare la forza illocutoria dell'atto di scuse. L'analisi ha anche dimostrato che, se da un lato, è possibile identificare un'ampia struttura dell'atto linguistico, dall'altro, l'atto di scusarsi è un fenomeno complesso la cui realizzazione è altamente variabile.

**Parole chiave:** SCUSE, STRATEGIE PER SCUSARSI, TIPOLOGIA DI SCUSE, APPRENDENTI AUSTRALIANI DI ITALIANO, SCUSE VIA EMAIL

## 1. Introduction

Pragmatics is a dynamic field, particularly within the context of second language acquisition. In this context, it is essential to gain an understanding of how learners perform language and the pragmatic strategies they use to achieve particular speech acts. Through an analysis of emailed apologies elicited from a group of 42 intermediate and advanced Australian learners of Italian, this paper presents a typology of apologies in email communication.

As will be further discussed in the following section, the performance of apology strategies can vary across linguistic and cultural groups. This paper focuses on establishing a typology for the descriptive analysis of the emails produced by these learners of Italian, and on identifying the apology strategies within this data. Accordingly, the paper responds to the research question: *What moves and strategies are used by learners of Italian to accomplish emailed apologies?*

In doing so, this paper presents some preliminary results of a larger project<sup>1</sup> which explored the speech act of apology in the understudied context of Italian language learning in Australia. In this larger project, which was a pilot study for the author's current doctoral project, 317 apology email responses were elicited from learners of Italian through a written Discourse Completion Task (henceforth, DCT). This data was used to develop a typology of apologies, with reference to typologies formulated by other scholars in previous studies of apologies, and a descriptive analysis of these apologies was then conducted. Although apologies were mentioned in Bettoni and Rubino's (2007) work on responses to complaints, they have not been extensively investigated from an Italian–Australian perspective, either in the context of comparing Australian English to Italian or in the context of examining the use of Italian language within Australia. My research seeks to fill this gap by studying apologies within the context of Italian language acquisition in Australia (the results are discussed both in the present article and in Walker, 2017). Exploring this perspective not only sheds light on the act of apology, in that a new group of apologisers are investigated, but also, given the context of Italian language learning, may offer insights and reflections upon language acquisition and pedagogy.

This introductory section 1 of the paper has provided a brief overview of the research; section 2 will present in more detail the background for the study and the findings of relevant previous research. The methodology adopted in my research will then be described (section 3), followed by my findings (section 4). The findings will detail the typology, as well as some further information about how the strategies within this typology were performed by participants. The typology is included in the findings section rather than in the methodology section, because the typology was developed in response to the research question established for this paper. In section 5 of this paper, these findings will be discussed in relation to previous literature, before I discuss the implications (section 6) and conclusions (section 7) of my research. Finally, the limitations of my research will be explored and avenues for further research will be suggested in section 8.

## 2. Background to the study

### 2.1. Theorizing apologies

The study of apologies originates from Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979) which is seminal within the pragmatic field. Speech Act Theory describes how utterances function as acts that have an impact in the world and that influence our relationships with others. Essentially, in using words, we *do* things and put actions in motion.

In a number of studies, apologies are defined as speech acts which function to repair or maintain relationships between interlocutors after the speaker has violated a social norm (Businaro, 2002; Cheng, 2017; Jones & Adrefiza, 2017; Martínez-Flor & Beltrán-Palanques, 2014; Trosborg, 1987). As such, apologies aim to restore order and/or harmony in a relationship or interaction (Kasanga & Lwanga-Lumu, 2007). These definitions therefore seem to focus on apologies as post-event acts; however, it is important to recognise that apologies may also be made in anticipation of a possible offence, as demonstrated by Davies, Merrison, & Goddard (2007) and Wyatt (2014).

Apologies are one of the most culturally sensitive acts (Suszczyńska, 1999). While some apology strategies may be universal, there is much variation in how they may be performed by speakers of different languages, and the frequency, intensification of, and conditions for apologies can vary to a great extent across

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper presents some findings from an honours research project conducted at the University of Sydney under the supervision of Professors Ahmar Mahboob and Antonia Rubino. I thank them very much for their guidance throughout the research. This honours project has served as a pilot study for my current doctoral research, which is being conducted at the University of Sydney under the supervision of Professor Antonia Rubino and Dr. Caroline Lipovsky.

languages and cultures (Cohen & Olshtain, 1985). Speakers of different languages often use different ranges or combinations of strategies to perform speech acts (Bataineh, 2013; Cheng, 2013; Hill, 1997; Ogiermann, 2008). Hence, in the case of my research, it was necessary to reconsider existing typologies of apologies in the particular context of the data collected, that being Italian language as used by students in Australia.

Culturally specific norms are not limited to oral communication; rather, they extend to all forms, verbal and nonverbal, and the diverging expectations of language learners and native speakers can be a source of intercultural miscommunication (Alcón Soler, 2013a, 2013b; Chen, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). Email communication is a diverse medium that lacks formalised customs and models (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007, p. 60; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2001, pp. 135-136; Chen, 2006, p. 35), and this variability can cause exasperation when combined with learners' lack of language proficiency or cultural understanding. Negotiation of the email form is therefore a very rich area of pragmatic study, and differences between the email styles of Italian and British university students has been demonstrated (Sciubba, 2010). Furthermore, email communication in the academic sphere is increasingly being explored, as email has become a key method of communication between students and academic staff that often replaces face-to-face communication (Alcón Soler, 2013b, p. 26; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, p. 81; Pagliara, 2019, p. 151).

While this article concerns itself with presenting a typology rather than with analysing specific realisations or enactments of language, there are several key theories which have influenced my research and therefore must be acknowledged. Firstly, speech act studies often reference Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987 [1978]), which describes how speakers navigate the performance of speech acts, especially those which are potentially socially threatening, such as requests, complaints, and apologies. While other scholars, including Grice (1989) and Leech (1983, 2014), have also presented frameworks for the analysis of polite and/or effective communication, it is Politeness Theory which is drawn upon in my research. Additionally, the discussion of previous studies of apologies in sections 2.2 and 2.3 makes reference to Goffman's (1967 [1955], 2003) theory of *face*. This term refers to the positive social value one gains in an interaction, enacted through the verbal and nonverbal actions which interlocutors use to express an evaluation of the communicative situation and of the individuals participating in that situation. Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) argue that face is universal to all cultures, and that while the term *positive face* refers to one's desire to be appreciated and approved of by others, *negative face* refers to one's desire to be free and unimpeded by others (pp. 61-62). Speech acts that in some way pose a threat to the face wants of any interlocutor are termed *face-threatening acts* (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson, 1987 [1978], p. 65).

## 2.2. Studies of apologies in Italian and English

Although the fields of cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics are vast, to my knowledge, there have been no studies which have specifically investigated apologies as performed by Australian learners of Italian. Studies which have focused on Italian apology performance—which have been conducted outside of the Australian context—have principally investigated oral apologies and have demonstrated that native speakers of Italian tend to favour the explicit apology strategies of asking for forgiveness or pardon and expressions of regret (Nuzzo, 2007; Trubnikova, 2017). Explicit apologies are also common in apologies made by native speakers of Australian English (Jones & Adrefiza, 2017) and other variants of English including Canadian English (Frescura, 1995, p. 87). However, despite this similarity, native speakers of English and Italian demonstrate some variation in how they perform this strategy. Among native English speakers the explicit apology expression most often used is *I'm sorry* (Holmes, 1990; Trosborg, 1995; Wyatt, 2014) and intensifiers such as *very*, *so*, *really*, *terribly*, or *awfully* are often used to strengthen this expression. However, as has been noted by other scholars (Bettoni & Rubino, 2007; Frescura, 1995), the Italian language possesses a much wider range of explicit apology expressions than the English language. More specifically, the most common verbs whereby an explicit apology might be expressed in English are *to apologise*, *to be sorry*, *to pardon*, *to excuse*, *to forgive* and *to regret*. In contrast, the Italian language possesses a much longer list of verbs which express explicit apology—*rincrescere* and *rammaricarsi*, for example, may both be translated as “to regret.” Furthermore, in Frescura's (1995, pp. 87-88) comparison of English and Italian apologies, English speakers used only four apology expressions, while the range of expressions used by the Italian speakers was much wider and diverse, eight examples being offered by the author.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The expressions included in Frescura's (1995, pp. 87-88) list of examples were: *mi spiace/dispiace* (“I am sorry”), *sono desolato/mortificato/spiacente* (“I am mortified”), *non ho parole per scusarmi* (“I have no words to express how sorry I am”), *mi scuso* (“I apologize”), *Le/ti chiedo scusa* (“I request your forgiveness”), *non posso che scusarmi* (“I cannot do

Apologies have also been investigated in the context of email communication, as in my research. In comparing emails written by native speakers of British English to other examples of written and spoken communication, Hatipoğlu (2004) found that explicit apologies performed in emails were more likely to follow the form and content conventions of written apologies than spoken apologies. For example, a lower number of modifiers was used than those used in spoken English, and the modifiers which were used in the emails were not those commonly found in speech (Hatipoğlu, 2004). This therefore supports the relevance of a typology that describes the specificities of written apologies.

Moreover, in an intercultural context, Cheng's (2013) study of spoken and emailed apologies performed by native and non-native speakers of English evidenced a vast degree of differentiation in how apologies were formulated by these two groups, demonstrating that native and non-native performance of emailed apologies can be a salient area of cross-cultural speech-act investigation.

Furthermore, previous studies focusing on other speech acts performed in Italian and English have presented some relevant findings. Studies investigating reactions to complaints have demonstrated that native speakers of Italian and native speakers of English often use similar or the same strategies but with different frequencies (Bettoni & Rubino, 2007; Frescura, 1995). Moreover, it has been noted that Anglo-Australian native speakers of English and native speakers of Italian in Italy differ in both the type of speech acts chosen to react to complaints and the directness of these speech acts: Anglo-Australians more frequently admit responsibility for the offence than their Italian counterparts and tend to be more attentive to the negative face of the interlocutor while the Italians are concerned more with their own face (Bettoni & Rubino, 2007). Similarly, Frescura (1995) found that Canadian English speakers are more likely to use strategies which support the face of the hearer, such as offering compensation, while native Italian speakers prefer strategies which support their own face, such as denial of guilt. However, while these findings regarding reactions to complaints are certainly relevant to the study of apologies, they do not specifically investigate the performance of apologies.

Although the existing research presented above explores cross-cultural language variation, it is also important to note that variation may also exist among native speakers of a language and that not all individuals of one linguistic or cultural group will perform a given speech act in the same way (Schneider & Barron, 2008), as there can exist linguistic variations within a language or cultural group, as well as individual variation. Such is true of both verbal and written communication. While this paper does not discuss in depth individual variation in apology performance, in presenting a typology of apologies, this is an important consideration to keep in mind when investigating cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics.

Aside from the studies discussed above, there is still relatively little literature which has focalised or touched on studying apologies in the Italian language, much less apologies in Italian as performed in emails. The findings presented in this article are the preliminary results of a pilot study which seems to be the first study to investigate apologies as performed by Australian learners of Italian. This article further investigates a data set which has been presented in previous work (Walker, 2017); while the first publication arising from this pilot study explored the politeness norms with which learners of Italian engaged in composing emailed apologies (Walker, 2017), the present article presents a different aspect of the analysis of the same data set. Specifically, this paper is concerned with the pragmatic moves and strategies used by Australian learners of Italian<sup>3</sup> to achieve emailed apologies, and with presenting a typology of these apologies. This typology, detailed in Section 4.1 of this paper, will shed light on how Australian learners of Italian accomplish emailed apologies, which can in turn provide valuable insights into second language acquisition for language teachers.

### **2.3. Previous typologies of apologies**

Apologies are complex acts; as established above, they may be performed pre- or post-offence, may be performed using a variety of strategies, and can vary significantly across languages and cultures. The relationship between the form and function of apologies is dynamic and a vast range of utterances may be used to achieve apology performance (Coulmas, 1981; Lakoff, 2015).

Over time, scholars have presented a number of typologies of apologies, most of which incorporate both explicit and implicit apology strategies. It should be noted that while most scholars have not defined the

---

anything else except apologize"), *mi scusi/scusami/mi perdoni/perdonami* ("forgive me"), and *La/ti prego di scusarmi* ("I beg you to forgive me").

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the term *Australian learners of Italian* refers to domestic students enrolled in Italian language courses at an Australian university. The term *domestic student* is used by Australian universities to refer to students who are citizens or permanent residents of Australia.

term *strategy* and different terms arise across the literature (including *sub-formula*, *sub-category*, *semantic strategy*, and *semantic formula*), in this paper, two terms will be used: *move* and *strategy*. A move is a broad semantic function which can be achieved by strategies, which are phrases or sentences whereby a speech act is achieved. This distinction will be further discussed in Section 4.1. of this paper.

Owen's (1983) typology of apologies identifies three distinct utterances whereby the speech act can be achieved:

- *apology, apologies* or *apologise*
- *sorry*, and
- *I'm afraid* + sentence pro-form.<sup>4</sup>

However, apologies are much more diverse than what Owen's typology suggests. The above phrases are not in fact necessary for apology performance, as other scholars have identified other more implicit types of apologies, discussed below, which do not incorporate any of these three utterances.

In their own typology, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) identify two main types of apologies: those which are achieved by explicit expressions of apology using illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs<sup>5</sup>), and those which are achieved by utterances which relate to the necessary conditions for an apology. Specifically, these conditions are: i) that the speaker did or did not do something; ii) that the speaker is perceived as being in breach of a social norm; and iii) that which was/was not done by the speaker causes some form of harm or offence to the hearer (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 206). In this second type of apology, there are multiple strategies whereby the apology may be performed, for example, accepting responsibility or offering repair for the offence.

In a similar vein, Cohen and Olshtain developed a typology of five apology strategies which were adopted in the influential Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) and in numerous other studies (including Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Cohen, Olshtain, & Rosenstein, 1986; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981, 1985, 1994; Olshtain, 1983; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983, 1990). These strategies, often used in combination with each other in what is termed a *speech act set* (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983), are:

- explicit expression of apology (e.g., *I'm sorry*)
- explanation or account of the situation (e.g., *there was a traffic jam*)
- acknowledgement of responsibility (e.g., *it's my fault*)
- offer of repair (e.g., *let me make it up to you by replacing it*), and
- promise of forbearance, or non-reoccurrence (e.g., *it will never happen again*).

Some scholars have adopted the above typology (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Suszczyńska, 1999; Yu, 2010), while others have adapted or expanded it to better describe their own data sets, as I have. For example, while Lipson (1994) drew upon both Owen's (1983) typology and that of the CCSARP in her analysis of apologies, Trosborg (1995) extended the CCSARP's typology to include three additional strategies: *does not take on responsibility*, *minimizes the degree of the offence*, and *expresses concern for the hearer*.

On the other hand, scholars such as Nuzzo (2007) have formulated more unique typologies arising from the data collected in their own projects, with some reference to previous works (e.g., Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Trosborg, 1995). When analysing role-play data collected from learners of Italian, the apology strategies identified by Nuzzo (2007) were:

---

<sup>4</sup> The sentence pro-form refers to an utterance which is contextually dependent, and which complements the phrase *I'm afraid*, adding semantic information about the situation which adds to the remedial nature of the utterance (Owen, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> IFIDs are routinised and formulaic expressions which usually include a performative verb, such as *I'm sorry* or *I apologise* (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 206).

Table 1  
*Apology strategies identified by Nuzzo (2007)*

Term used by Nuzzo	English gloss	Example (Nuzzo, 2007)	English translation
<i>ammissione di colpa</i>	admission of guilt	<i>mi son dimenticato il libro</i>	I forgot the book
<i>evento negativo</i>	negative event	<i>si è rovesciato addosso un po' di caffè</i>	some coffee was spilled on them (singular)
<i>espressione di rincrescimento</i>	expression of regret	<i>mi dispiace</i>	I'm sorry
<i>giustificazione</i>	justification	<i>c'è stato un ritardo della metrò</i>	The metro was late
<i>mancanza di intenzionalità</i>	lack of intent	<i>non l'ho fatto apposta</i>	I didn't do it on purpose
<i>offerta di risarcimento</i>	offer of repair	<i>glielo raccolgo</i>	I will pick it up
<i>richiesta di perdono</i>	asking for pardon	<i>mi scusi</i>	excuse me
<i>verifica di gravità</i>	verification of the gravity of the offence	<i>è un grosso problema?</i>	Is it a big problem?

Although the existing typologies discussed in this section are relevant to the data collected in the present project, they did not exactly correspond to the written apologies elicited from the Australian learners of Italian. For example, while some of the strategies outlined in existing typologies were present in my data, they were used by participants differently from how they were by participants in other studies; hence, these strategies have a different structural positioning in the typology that I present in this paper.

One of the reasons for these differences in strategy usage may be that the type of data used to develop these existing typologies differs from the data which I have collected in my research. The typologies discussed above were used to codify either spoken apologies or a written elicitation of what one would hypothetically say to apologise; in contrast, this paper analyses written apologies in the context of a medium of real written communication by email. In addition, my data was elicited specifically from non-native speakers and included eight particular scenarios (outlined in Section 3.1 and detailed in Appendices 3 and 4) which were not specified in the above-mentioned research. Therefore, while previous typologies were considered and drawn upon in the interpretation of data, modifications had to be made to identify a typology which more closely reflected i) the apologies elicited in this particular project, and ii) the ways in which the participants of this project constructed and combined apology strategies.

### 3. Methodology

This paper aims to answer the following research question: *What moves and strategies are used by learners of Italian to accomplish emailed apologies?* In doing so, written data was collected through a modified written DCT, which was designed to elicit emailed apologies. The process of data collection and the methods of analysis will be discussed in this section of the paper, and the typology of apologies resulting from this research will be presented in the findings (Section 4).

#### 3.1. The discourse completion task (DCT)

The DCT involved four scenarios that were designed to be plausible for participants, all of whom were studying Italian as a second language in Australia. Briefly, the scenarios involved: having to cancel a work meeting; being unable to participate in a group presentation at university; being unable to pay rent on time; and accidental theft (as in Figure 1). The full DCT is included in Appendices 3 and 4.

All scenarios were set in Italy, thereby requiring participants to draw upon cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatic knowledge. DCT prompts were presented in Italian, with translation of some potentially challenging words provided in English, and participants were required to complete the DCT in Italian. The scenario prompts are included in Italian (as provided to participants in the DCT) and in English (as translated for this article) in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4, respectively.

Each of these scenarios involved two variations in which the situation was the same, but in which participants were asked to address their emails to interlocutors who differed with respect to their social distance and status in relation to participants. The goal was to explore the impact of these social variables upon the students' speech act performance, as it has been argued that certain sociological variables are vital in the process of understanding FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987 [1978], p. 74). However, these variables will not be

analysed in this paper due to space constraints. Nor did these social variables seem to influence the typology presented in this paper, which aims to represent the whole corpus of emails elicited in this research.

As the DCT required each participant to respond to two variations of four scenarios, each DCT elicited a total of eight individual email responses. Appendix 1 provides a table including each of these four scenarios and the interlocutors specified in each variation, along with the DCT instructions and all DCT prompts provided to participants.

Each of these was elicited by a prompt describing the situation and providing space for the participant to write their email, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

You have just returned to Sydney after visiting a friend and his mother for several months in Verona. When unpacking, you discover two of their chargers caught up amongst your own.

If you were to write an email to your friend, what would you write?

Please write your email below, using as little or as much space as you feel to be necessary:

---



---



---



---



---

Figure 1. English translation of a DCT prompt (Walker, 2017)

The task was completed in class and linguistic aids such as dictionaries were not used, to ensure that the language use of the participants reflected their own linguistic ability. The time allocated for the task was approximately an hour.

The possibility of opting out of responding to individual scenarios was offered to participants through the inclusion of a “I would not write an email” option following each DCT prompt. This was to account for the reality that in authentic interactions, individuals may choose to avoid performing speech acts (Kuchuk, 2012), particularly in the case of those which, like apologies, are face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987 [1978]). In addition, not all participants might consider an email to be necessary in all the DCT scenarios presented. However, in only 19 emails (out of a total of 336 DCT responses) did participants choose this opt-out option; this suggests that most participants did deem email communication to be necessary in most scenarios, and that these scenarios were therefore plausible.

One of the common criticisms of DCTs as a method of data collection is that the elicited data is ultimately unnatural and unrealistic (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Brown, 2001; Golato, 2003; Sasaki, 1998). This claim is not unfounded, as traditional DCTs require participants to respond to a prompt by *writing* what they would ideally *say* in a given situation (for example, in the following studies: Bataneh & Bataneh, 2006; Hong, 2011; Tanaka, Spencer-Oatey & Cray, 2008; Trubnikova, 2017). Hence, the purposeful methodological decision to elicit responses in email form was made to increase the reliability of the data collected through the DCT. As email communication is already a written form of communication, this particular concern regarding DCTs was minimized. Such modified DCTs have also been used in other studies to investigate discourse in technologically mediated communication; for example, Nuzzo and Cortés Velásquez (2020) administered a modified DCT which elicited text messages rather than spoken dialogue.

### **3.2. The participants**

A total of 42 individuals participated in the DCT. All participants were Australian students currently enrolled in intermediate or advanced (B1 to C1<sup>6</sup>) Italian language courses at a large public university in Australia. Learners at the beginner level were not invited to participate, as they would likely experience difficulty in completing the DCT.

Although there was some differentiation in proficiency across the participant groups, the syllabus documents for each participant group indicated that the students should have sufficient knowledge of Italian to complete the DCT task. Specifically, the language outcomes listed in the syllabus of each of the language classes invited to participate listed grammatical and lexical categories that would allow participants to construct emails fulfilling the DCT requirements. Furthermore, no clear correlations were observed between the level of language class in which participants were enrolled and the structure of the apologies they performed, the length of their emails, or the grammatical correctness of their writing. Hence, the language class to which participants belonged did not emerge as an influential variable in this study.

At the end of the DCT, participants also completed a brief demographic questionnaire for the purpose of data analysis. Most participants were between the ages of 18 and 25, with two participants reporting ages over 25. A total of 35 participants were female, and only 7 were male; however, literature demonstrates that gender imbalance within language courses is quite common, as the numbers of female enrolments and language teachers both tend to be higher than the male counterparts in secondary and tertiary language courses, both across Australia and internationally (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2016; Carr & Frankcom, 1997; Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Kissau & Salas, 2013; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2007), and therefore this gender imbalance could not be avoided.

While not all participants were Anglo-Australian (a range of backgrounds were self-identified in the demographic survey), and 13 participants reported Italian heritage through either parent(s) or grandparent(s), cultural and linguistic background of family members did not seem to be a meaningful factor in explaining Australian learners' linguistic choices, as there was no correlation between demographic background and apology construction. Nor did participants' age or gender seem to influence the written data elicited. Hence, these demographic factors are not considered in the analysis presented in this paper.

### **3.3. Analysis of the data**

As the DCT required each of the 42 participants to produce eight emails, and there were 19 instances in which participants opted not to write an email in response to a DCT prompt, a total of 317 emails are included in the data analysis in this paper.

Once collected, the DCT data was reviewed, and preliminary notes were taken regarding which moves and strategies appeared to be present in the data set. This initial coding process was exploratory, in that I attempted to apply the previous typologies already discussed in this paper (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Lipson, 1994; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Nuzzo, 2007; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Owen, 1983; Trosborg, 1995) to my own data to ascertain which of these strategies were in fact present in my data set. At this stage, notes were also taken as to how strategies were structured and combined in the elicited data.

Following this exploratory process, the typology presented in Section 4.1 of this paper was drafted and then finalised, and participants' elicited emails were then coded for analysis.

All participants' emails and excerpts included in this paper have been transcribed as they were written by participants, except for several minor changes including grammatical and orthographical corrections. Any errors in phrasing or expression have been retained in order to accurately represent participants' language use. This is to facilitate ease of reading while maintaining the voice of the participants. Likewise, in order to accurately represent the expressions formulated by participants in Italian, the exact grammatical accuracy of the English translations has at times been compromised to more accurately reflect the meaning of the original Italian texts.

## **4. Findings: How were the emails structured?**

As with any written medium of communication, there are certain conventional elements which are typically included in email communication—specifically, the opening salutation, the body of the email, and the signing off. While each of these elements carries important linguistic information, only the body of emails

---

<sup>6</sup> According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001).

elicited from participants will be considered in this paper, as it is within this section that apology acts are performed. The elements which were omitted from analysis were the opening and the closing. The former includes greetings, titles and names, for example, *Cara Signora [cognome]* (“Dear Mrs [surname]”) and *Buongiorno Matteo* (“Good morning, Matteo”). The closing includes routinised phrases such as *Kind regards* and signoffs consisting of the name of the writer of the email.

As the goal of this paper is to identify the moves and strategies used by learners of Italian in performing emailed apologies, this section will present the typology of apologies developed in my research. First, an overview of this typology will be provided and then each component will be explored in more detail with reference to how strategies were used by participants.

Although existing typologies can be incredibly useful in the consideration of one’s own data, the direct imposition of one of these frameworks onto a new data set is not necessarily effective or useful. In the case of this project, several relevant typologies were initially consulted for the analysis of data (e.g., Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Cheng, 2013; Nuzzo, 2007; Trosborg, 1987, 1995). However, these had been developed to codify and describe data which differed to that which was collected in this project, both in regard to the type of data itself and the context of data collection. Hence, it was necessary in my research to decide upon an adapted typology which could accurately and thoroughly describe emailed apology performance by Australian learners of Italian. It is this typology which is presented and discussed in this paper.

The existing typologies of apologies introduced in this paper each outlined a series of strategies which could be used individually or in combination with each other to perform an apology. While many of these strategies were also found in the data used in this paper, it emerged that they could be grouped into two distinct actions which participants could perform in their emails. Each of these moves had a specific goal: either to establish the apology (the apology move), or to seek repair (the repair move). These two distinct actions in apology emails have been termed *moves*.

While the apology move established apology by acknowledging or accounting for the fact that an offence had occurred, the function of the repair move was to follow through by proposing or initiating remedial action in response to the offence. Each of these moves could contain several strategies for accomplishing the overall goal.

In other typologies, specifically in the CCSARP (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), and in both Trosborg (1995) and Nuzzo (2007), repair has been included as an apology strategy which could be used as an alternative to or in combination with other apology strategies. This suggests that the repair functions in a similar way to these other strategies.

The email data collected in my research, however, revealed that the repair move could in fact be quite elaborate and include multiple clauses. In addition, the repair was often structurally separate from other apology strategies; for example, it could occur in a separate sentence or paragraph comprising the apology move. However, the repair move never occurred alone, and therefore is part of the speech act of apology, rather than a separate speech act. Indeed, even in existing typologies of apologies, repair has been included as an apology strategy (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Nuzzo, 2007; Trosborg, 1995), and identified as an element which can be common to other face-threatening acts, for example cancellations (Nuzzo & Cortés Velásquez, 2020).

Supportive strategies, such as expressing thanks or concern, were identified external to the two moves and were used in the construction of the email to strengthen the apology act. These were coded separately from the apology and repair moves, as they did not occur in isolation and could be used in any order and number prior to or following an apology or repair move. In addition, a supportive strategy itself could not address the offence; rather, supportive strategies mitigated the offence through attempting to appease the offeree or reducing the severity of the offence.

The diagram below represents the structure of the apology act and the different levels which exist within this act, according to the data collected.

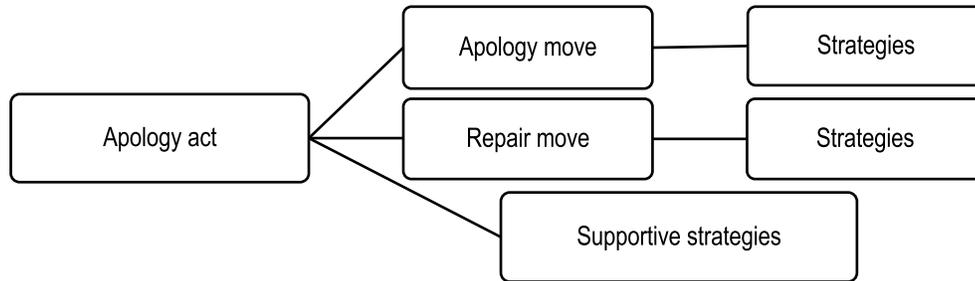


Figure 2. Overview of the apology act

Of these two moves, only the apology was necessary for the performance of an apology act. When included, the repair move always followed the apology. Although uncommon, a second apology move, or a reprisal of the apology move, could also follow the repair move. Supportive strategies could be used in any position outside of the two moves. This may be represented as:

$$apology\ act = (supportive\ strategy +) apology\ move (+ supportive\ strategy) (+ repair\ move) (+ supportive\ strategy) (+ apology\ move) (+ supportive\ strategy)$$

In this formula, the brackets denote optional elements. This formula represents all apologies collected in this research. To provide an example of how this structure was enacted in emails, a participant example has been provided below (Example 1, English translation provided in Appendix 5). To the right of the email, I have annotated the strategies performed in the email, and on the far right, the moves have been noted.

Example 1. Sample participant email

Elicited email	Sub-strategy	Move/strategy
Cara [nome],	Opening	
Al primo posto, devo ringraziarle di nuovo della sua ospitalità incredibile. Il mio soggiorno a Verona è stato meraviglioso e l'amicizia della sua famiglia è stata una gran parte di quell'esperienza indimenticabile.	Expressions of thanks and politeness	Supportive strategies
Sono appena arrivata a casa e ho scoperto che purtroppo ho preso due dei suoi caricabatterie con me.	Statement of fact	Apology move
Chiedo i suoi scusi per questo sbaglio!	Explicit expression of apology; Lack of intent	Apology move
Penso che sia ottimo se glieli mando subito. Vado all'ufficio postale oggi pomeriggio.	Expression of repair	Repair move
Ma in ogni caso credo che probabilmente staste cercando ovunque quelle cose e dunque vorrei dirle che hanno fatto un gran viaggio con me!	Expression of concern	Supportive strategy
Mille grazie per tutto e mi dispiace quel errore	Expression of thanks; Explicit expression of apology	Supportive strategy; Apology move
Con affetto, [nome]	Closing	

In this example, the *expressions of thanks/politeness* which are used to orient the response are very elaborate. The apology which follows then includes several strategies: a *statement of fact*, an *explicit expression of apology*, and an expression of *lack of intent*. The repair move is then followed by two more supportive strategies, an *expression of concern* and an *expression of thanks*. Finally, before the closing, another *explicit expression of apology* is used to strengthen the force of the apology sequence.

This paper will now discuss in more depth each of the moves identified above and the strategies which could comprise these moves, as well as identifying similarities and differences with my typology and existing typologies.

#### 4.1. The apology move

The apology move consists of five strategies which can be used in combination with each other, like the strategies identified in the apology speech act set (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). The five strategies identified in my data are as follows:

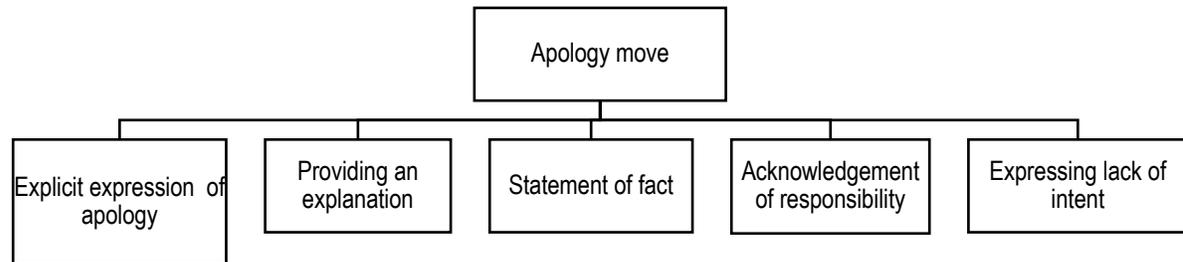


Figure 3. Structure of the apology move

Like previous typologies presented in this paper, the structure above accounts for both *explicit expressions of apology*, as well as other implicit means of apologising, namely: *providing an explanation*, *statement of fact*, *acknowledgement of responsibility*, and *expressing lack of intent*. While the above structure is very similar to that presented by Olshtain and Cohen (1983), two strategies have been added: *statement of fact* and *expressing lack of intent*. These were adapted from Nuzzo (2007), as they were also used by the Australian learners of Italian in the present study.

While *expressing lack of intent* is a close translation of Nuzzo's term *mancanza di intenzionalità*, the terminology of the *statement of fact* differs from the terminology of the *negative event* identified by Nuzzo. The terminology was modified to more clearly capture the type of utterance that this strategy comprises. As described by Nuzzo, the term *evento negativo* refers to the speakers' statement that an offence (a 'negative event') has occurred without taking responsibility for this event. In the case of Trubnikova's (2017) analysis of apologies performed in Italian, the term *nominazione dell'atto* is adopted for this strategy, and like the English term *statement of fact*, this term makes clear that when performing this strategy, participants factually and objectively stated what had occurred.

Of the five apology strategies identified, the *explicit expression of apologies* was the most frequently used, appearing in 272 emails. *Providing an explanation* was also relatively frequent, being performed in 190 emails, while all other apology strategies were used in fewer than 100 emails, as in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Strategies of apology used in the corpus*

Supportive strategy	Number of emails including this strategy
Explicit expression of apology	272
Providing an explanation	190
Statement of fact	95
Acknowledgement of responsibility	42
Expressing lack of intent	26

This article will now provide more detailed descriptions of each of these five strategies, including examples from the corpus.

##### 4.1.1. Explicit expression of apology

These expressions are routine formula and include an illocutionary force indicating device, or IFID. This is a conventionalised and formulaic expression usually involving the use of a performative verb. In English, these include: *to be sorry*, *to excuse*, *to apologise*, *to forgive*, *to regret* and *to pardon* (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 290). Equivalent IFIDs in Italian include, for example, *scusarsi*, *perdonare*, *dispiacersi* and *chiedere scusa*. This

apology strategy was present in all the typologies mentioned above. Examples from the data are found in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Examples of explicit expressions of apology*

Example from the data	English translation
<i>Mi dispiace</i>	I'm sorry
<i>Scusa</i>	Excuse me (informal) <sup>7</sup>
<i>Mi scusi</i>	Excuse me (formal)
<i>Scusami!</i>	Excuse me! (informal)

*Explicit expressions of apology* can be modified. Modifiers are added to the explicit apology utterance and are used to alter its illocutionary force. Two types of modification were identified in the data, *intensification* and *reiteration*, and these are presented with examples in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Modifiers of explicit expressions of apology*

Type of modification	Description	Examples from the data	English translation
Intensification	Adjectives and adverbs which strengthen the force of the explicit expression of apology.	<i>Mi dispiace tanto</i>	I'm <u>really</u> sorry
		<i>Mi dispiace sinceramente</i>	I'm <u>sincerely</u> sorry
		<i>Scusa un sacco!</i>	<u>Very</u> sorry!
Reiteration	A phrase whereby the repetition of the explicit expression of apology is overtly stated.	<i>Mi dispiace di nuovo</i>	I'm sorry <u>once more</u>
		<i>Mi dispiace ancora</i>	I'm sorry <u>again</u>

Modification has been discussed in previous typologies of apologies. In particular, *intensification* is a modifier which has been commonly acknowledged in the literature (Márquez Reiter, 2000: 54; Nuzzo, 2007: 166; Trosborg, 1995). In this typology, I also include *reiteration* as another form of modification, as this strategy served a function which differed from that of intensification.

A comparison of all emails produced by participants made clear that, across the data set, the *explicit expression of apology* was by far the most common strategy used by participants in the apology move. As illustrated in Table 2, 272 of all email responses (out of 317 responses in total) included the strategy at least once. The total number of *explicit expressions of apology* across the data set was 345, hence it was not uncommon for participants to use this strategy more than once within a single email. Across all types of apology strategies in both the apology move and the repair move, as well as the supportive strategies, the explicit expression of apology was used by participants with the most frequency and repetition.

Participants particularly favoured the use of the explicit apologies *dispiacersi* and *scusarsi*, and both intensifiers and markers of reiteration were often used as modifiers. While a comparison of learner data to native speaker control groups was not within the scope of the preliminary research presented in this paper, these results align with the aforementioned findings of other scholars that *I'm sorry* is the most common explicit apology expression performed by native speakers of English and that modifiers are often used by English speakers to strengthen explicit apology performance (Holmes, 1990; Trosborg, 1995; Wyatt, 2014). Therefore, based on this small comparison, it seems that even when writing in Italian, the Australian learners lean towards some norms of English communication, and it would be valuable to investigate this more deeply in further research. For example, data collected from native speakers of Italian could offer further insights into whether this is a case of positive or negative pragmatic transfer.

#### 4.1.2. Providing an explanation

Like in Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) typology of apology strategies, this strategy involves providing an account of why the offence occurred. In Nuzzo's (2007) typology, these explanations are termed *justifications*

<sup>7</sup> In the English translations provided in this paper, "(formal)" has been used to indicate instances of formal pronouns and conjugation of verbs in Italian, while "(informal)" indicates the use of informal pronouns and verbal conjugation.

(in Italian, *giustificazioni*). In providing an explanation, reference may be made either to personal or external factors. In using this strategy, participants offered reasoning or causes for the offence which went beyond the information provided in the DCT prompt to which they were responding. The first two examples below evidence a personal explanation (in this case, illness), while the third and fourth refer to external factors.

Table 5  
*Examples of providing an explanation*

Example from the data	English translation	Scenario <sup>8</sup>
<i>Oggi, mi sento veramente male, e devo andare dal dottore</i>	Today, I feel really ill, and I need to go to the doctor	Group presentation
<i>Sfortunatamente sono malato quindi non sarò in classe per fare la presentazione</i>	Unfortunately, I am ill therefore I won't be in class to do the presentation	Group presentation
<i>Sto viaggiando e non riuscirei a pagarti in tempo</i>	I am travelling and won't be able to pay you (informal) in time	Unpaid rent
<i>Non ho lavorato molto questa settimana<sup>9</sup></i>	I did not work much this week	Unpaid rent

*Providing an explanation* was the second most frequent strategy in the apology move, appearing in 190 of the emails elicited from participants. The length of explanations can be variable, and some of the explanations in the corpus were therefore more elaborate than others.

#### 4.1.3. Statement of fact

In stating the facts of what has occurred, the offender acknowledges the incident or event which has caused offence. However, this statement does not acknowledge the offender's responsibility in causing the offence. Nor does it include any information outside of that which is provided in the DCT prompt. While acknowledging that the offence has occurred, the *statement of fact* does not attempt to account for or explain this offence in any way. Examples from the corpus include:

Table 6  
*Examples of statements of fact*

Example from the data	English translation	Scenario
<i>Non posso pagare il pagamento per questo mese in tempo</i>	I can't pay the payment for this month in time	Unpaid rent
<i>Non posso incontrare questo pomeriggio</i>	I can't meet this afternoon	Cancelled meeting

*Statements of fact* appeared in only 95 emails and thus were used with much less frequency than the two previously discussed strategies in the apology move, possibly because this strategy reflected information already included in the DCT prompt.

#### 4.1.4. Acknowledgement of responsibility

In this strategy, the composer explicitly assumes responsibility for having committed the offence and acknowledges that they are at fault. They therefore go beyond simply acknowledging events and instead place themselves as the actor who has committed the offence, as underlined in the examples below. This strategy was also present in previously discussed typologies (including Nuzzo, 2007; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Included here to provide context for the explanations.

<sup>9</sup> The scenario to which this refers is not being able to pay rent on time. In Appendix C, this scenario is titled *Affitto non pagato* (in English, "Unpaid rent").

Table 7  
*Examples of explicit acknowledgements of responsibility*

Example from the data	English translation	Scenario
<i>Ho realizzato che ho portato due dei vostri caricabatterie con me a Sydney</i>	I realised that I brought two of your (plural) chargers with me to Sydney	Accidental theft
<i>Non ho soldi, ho dimenticato</i>	I don't have money, I forgot	Unpaid rent

The explicit acknowledgement of responsibility was not a common strategy across the corpus, appearing in only 42 emails. Interestingly, it was the only apology strategy which was never used more than once in any single email.

#### 4.1.5. Expressing lack of intent

Finally, one can also make clear that the offence was not committed intentionally by expressing their lack of intent in committing the offence, a strategy also present in Nuzzo's (2007) data. Examples from participants' emails include:

Table 8  
*Examples of expressing lack of intent*

Example from the data	English translation	Scenario
Non so come sono finiti insieme ai miei ...	I don't know how they ended up with mine ...	Accidental theft
Per sbaglio	By mistake	Accidental theft

This was the strategy used with the lowest frequency, as only 26 responses included expressions which demonstrated the composer's lack of intent in committing the offence.

#### 4.2. The repair move

The repair move is less variable and less complex than the apology move, as it consists of only one possible strategy, the *expression of repair*. In this strategy, one makes implicit or explicit offers of or requests for reparation after an offence has been committed. Hence, the term *expression of repair* was adopted in my typology, rather than *offer of repair* which was included in other aforementioned typologies (e.g., Nuzzo, 2007; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983), as "expression" is a much broader term and therefore encompasses a wider range of utterances, as were present in the data.

What this reparation consists of may be specified or unspecified, and like explanations for the offence, some participants' attempts at repair were more elaborate than others. Regardless of whether participants phrased repair through requesting action from the interlocutor or by offering action themselves, these attempts at reparation were coded as one strategy, as the overall outcome was an attempt at reparation. Examples from the corpus include:

Table 9  
*Examples of expressions of repair*

Example from the data	English translation	Scenario
<i>Pago subito con l'affitto per il prossimo mese anche</i>	I will pay immediately, with the rent for the next month as well	Unpaid rent
<i>Ve lo mando per posta subito</i>	I will send it to you (plural) <sup>10</sup> via post immediately	Accidental theft
<i>Possiamo incontrarci un'altro giorno?</i>	Can we meet another day?	Cancelled meeting
<i>È possibile di incontrarci un altro giorno? Avrò tempo dal lunedì al giovedì la prossima settimana.</i>	Is it possible to meet another day? I will have time from Monday to Thursday next week.	Cancelled meeting

<sup>10</sup> In English translations, "(plural)" indicates plural pronouns. In unmarked instances, pronouns are singular.

The inclusion of *expressions of repair* was very common. Of all strategies in the data set, this strategy appeared most frequently across the corpus, as 285 emails included an *expression of repair*. However, this strategy was repeated less often than the *explicit apology expressions*, as the total number of instances in the corpus was only 292.

Despite the fact that the repair move was not essential to the structure of the apology act, most participants preferred to include an *expression of repair* in their emails. This therefore indicates that repair was perceived by many participants as an important element of the apology act structure. Indeed, overall, across the two moves, the three apology strategies most frequently used by participants across the corpus were the *explicit expression of apology*, *expression of repair*, and *providing an explanation*. These also happened to be the strategies which were most often used in combination with each other within a single email.

### 4.3. Supportive strategies

Several supportive strategies external to both the apology and repair moves were also identified. As the name suggests, these strategies serve to strengthen the apology act. The data indicated that any number of supportive strategies may be used in any order prior to or following either an apology move or a repair move.

Four supportive strategies were identified in the data, and they are all included in Table 10, with a description and examples.

Table 10  
*Supportive strategies external to the apology and repair*

Supportive strategy	Description	Example(s) from the data	English translation
Expressions of thanks or other politeness remarks	Expression of thanks, compliments, or other expressions which indicate a move towards the restoration of balance/harmony.	1. <i>Grazie mille per invito alla sua casa</i> 2. <i>Sono così fortunata per avere te nella mia vita</i>	1. Thank you very much for the invitation to your (formal) house 2. I am so fortunate to have you in my life
Expressing concern for or justification of the offended party	Explicit concern for the feelings or wellbeing of the offended party, or an expression of understanding of the fact that the offended party has taken offence. This includes expressions which verify the gravity or impact of the offence.	1. <i>Mi rendo conto che questo non fa bene e che sarà impatto piani che lei ha per il suo giorno</i> 2. <i>Spero che non sia un grande problema</i>	1. I realise that this is no good and it will impact the plans that you (formal) have for your (formal) day 2. I hope that it isn't a big problem
Minimizing the degree of offence	The offence is minimized, either by being presented as being insignificant or unimportant, or by questioning the preconditions of the offence.	1. <i>Ho un piccolo problema</i> 2. <i>Per favore ricordisi che non ho mai dimenticato a pagare prima di oggi!</i>	1. I have a little problem 2. Please remember that I have never forgotten to pay before today!
Promise of forbearance	A promise that the offence will not occur again in the future or that the behaviour of the offender will improve in future.	<i>Promesso che non succedere da nuovo ...</i>	I promise that it won't happen again ...

While there are some similarities between the strategies presented above and the previously presented typologies presented by other scholars, there are also differences. The *promise of forbearance* was included as one of Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) five apology strategies; however, in the data for the present project, *promises of forbearance* were not used alone by participants as a sole apology strategy. Instead, *promises of forbearance* were used only when another apology strategy had been used in the same email and therefore these were coded as supportive strategies rather than as apology strategies in and of themselves. This may be due to the fact that emailed apologies are usually explicit, possibly because there may be less

shared context between writer and recipient of the email than there might be with interlocutors of an oral interaction.

*Minimizing the degree of offence* and *expressing concern for or justification of the offended party* were also present in Trosborg's (1995) and Nuzzo's (2007) analytical frameworks; however, in Nuzzo's framework, the latter is termed *verification of the gravity of the offence*. However, while Trosborg's typology treated both of these as apology strategies and Nuzzo treated the latter as an apology strategy, in my typology, they are supportive strategies which are external to the apology and repair moves. This is because their function did not align with the function of either of the moves, and these strategies were always used in combination with one or more strategies in the apology and/or repair move(s). Hence, these strategies were used to modify the force of the apology act, rather than to enact the apology itself.

In addition to these three strategies adapted from previous literature, the data also evidenced a prevalence of *expressions of thanks or other politeness remarks*, which was by far the most frequently occurring supportive strategy. These expressions of thanks were not accounted for by other typologies; however, their frequency in the data indicated that this mitigative supportive strategy was valuable in building rapport and supporting the apology and repair moves.

Table 11  
*Participants' use of supportive strategies*

Supportive Strategy	Number of Emails Including this Strategy
Expressions of thanks or other politeness remarks	53
Expressing concern for or justification of the offended party	25
Minimizing the degree of offence	11
Promise of forbearance	2

As Table 11 demonstrates, *expressions of thanks or other politeness remarks* were favoured above the other supportive strategies, appearing in 53 of the emails. Several emails also included multiple instances of this supportive strategy. *Expressions of thanks or other politeness remarks* could comprise multiple clauses and was therefore quite elaborate at times; therefore, there was variation in how this strategy was realised.

*Expressions of concern for or justification of the offended party* was less common, appearing in only 25 emails within the corpus. These were similar to Nuzzo's (2007) *verification of the gravity of the situation* (*verifica di gravità*); however, the term *expressions of concern for or justification of the offended party* was used to more accurately represent the types of expressions performed by the participants.

The other two strategies were used with even lower frequency. There were 11 instances of *minimizing the degree of offence* and two of the *promise of forbearance*. Unlike the other two more frequent supportive strategies, neither of these was ever used more than once by a participant in a single email.

#### 4.4. Quantitative summary

In summary, the strategy most frequently performed by participants was the *explicit expression of apology*, which was closely followed by the *expression of repair*. Hence, it seems that explicit apology and repair are key elements of emailed apologies. To a lesser degree, participants often *provided an explanation*, indicating that this too is a popular apology strategy.

Table 12 demonstrates all occurrences of all apology strategies in the data. It illustrates both the number of email responses which included each strategy at least once ("Number of responses") and the total number of times that each of the strategies was present in the whole data set, including multiple instances of the one strategy within a single response ("Total number of instances").

Table 12  
*Summary of strategies across the corpus*

Move/ Strategy	Sub-strategy	Number of Responses	Total Number of Instances
Apology	Explicit expression of apology	272	345
	Providing an explanation	191	190
	Statement of fact	96	95
	Explicit acknowledgement of responsibility	42	42
	Expressing lack of intent	26	28
Repair	Expression of repair	285	292
Supportive strategies	Expressions of thanks or other politeness remarks	53	58
	Expressing concern for or justification of the offended party	25	28
	Minimizing the degree of offence	11	11
	Promise of forbearance	2	2

## 5. Discussion

The email data elicited in this project was used to present a typology of emailed apologies as performed by Australian learners of Italian. As established in Section 2 of this paper, the use of speech act strategies can change across language and cultural groups, and even within these groups, variation may exist. What this paper therefore offers is a particular snapshot of language use: Italian L2, as used by Australian university students. The typology thereby outlined in this paper, drawing upon other studies in the field and existing typologies of apology performance, was adapted with the aim of presenting a typology which is consistent with and adequately represents the performance of apologies by all participants in the project, and by extension, of the Italian L2 speakers within this particular context. In doing so, the paper answered the research question: *What moves and strategies are used by learners of Italian in accomplishing emailed apologies?*

All apology speech act sets performed by participants involved an apology move. This apology move was comprised of any one or a combination of five explicit and implicit apology strategies – namely, *explicit expression of apology*, *providing an explanation*, *statement of fact*, *explicit acknowledgement of responsibility* and *expressing lack of intent*. Any of these strategies could be used either in isolation or together with any of the other strategies of the apology move. The most common strategy was the *explicit expression of apology*, which was often modified to increase its strength. What is important to note here is that the apology move could be achieved even without an explicit IFID being used, demonstrating that the apology is indeed a varied speech act.

While not essential, most apology acts also involved a repair move. This was achieved through an *expression of repair*, indicating that remedy is a key element of apology structure, a finding which aligns with the previously established characterisation of apologies as acts which restore harmony in interactions and thereby maintain relationships (Businaro, 2002; Cheng, 2017; Jones & Adrefiza, 2017; Kasanga & Lwanga-Lumu, 2007; Martínez-Flor & Beltrán-Palanques, 2014; Trosborg, 1987).

In addition to the apology and repair moves, the apology act may include a number of supportive strategies. These are not vital to the structure of the apology act but can be included in the apology act at any point to strengthen the illocutionary effect of the apology and therefore mitigate the offence.

Drawing upon previous literature and demonstrating some similarities to existing typologies considered in Section 1.2, the adapted typology of apologies offered in this paper includes some key differences. The apology move structure presented in this paper, although largely modelled on Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) typology of apologies, also incorporates two strategies identified by Nuzzo (2007) and Trubnikova (2017), the *statement of fact* and *expressing lack of intent*. My typology also offers a distinction between two types of IFID modification, *intensification* and *reiteration*, as a means of more specifically analysing the ways in which participants achieved *explicit expressions of apology*.

Furthermore, the *promise of forbearance*, rather than being included as an apology strategy (as in Olshtain & Cohen, 1983), was instead identified in my typology as a supportive strategy. This was also the case for the strategies of *minimizing the offence* and *expressing concern for or justification of the offended party*, which Trosborg (1987) categorized as stand-alone apology strategies, but which I treat as supportive strategies

instead. The reason for this is that each of these strategies, although present in my data, were never used on their own to achieve an apology. Rather, they were always used in support of other identified apology strategies, and were therefore characterised as supportive strategies. The difference in how these strategies were used by participants of other studies and in my study may be due to the nature of the communication – in a single email, the speech act stands alone and may be more explicit, while in face-to-face communication or even a longer email exchange, this may not be the case.

While non-existent in previous typologies of apology, the *expression of thanks/politeness* was identified in my typology as a supportive strategy. As email communication can be more structured and formal than oral speech and *expressing thanks/politeness* can be a formulaic strategy used in emails to establish rapport. This supportive strategy is particularly relevant to the context of email communication, a medium which had not been explored by previous studies considered in this research.

In adapting typologies of apologies as presented in the literature and in presenting a typology which reflects the data collected in my research rather than imposing an existing typology on the data, this paper presents a typology of apologies that reflects the particular context of the Italian language as performed by Australian learners of Italian.

The wide variety of apology strategies identified in the data signifies that it is possible for written apology performance to be quite elaborate and complex. Indeed, within the structure of the typology discussed in this paper, there was a deal of variation in how apologies were achieved by participants. The emailed apology act can contain multiple elements which may be arranged in numerous ways, and the data demonstrates that the structure of the apology act in email communication is quite flexible. In addition, the length and elaboration of the elicited emails varied greatly, suggesting that there is no single or concrete structure for apology performance – indeed, these are factors which could be determined by the individual communication preferences and styles of participants, which of course varies significantly. The question which therefore arises is whether certain apology strategies might be more or less effective in achieving apology, which is one of the concerns of my current doctoral research. At this point, what is clear is that written apology performance by Australian learners of Italian is very varied, as noted by other aforementioned studies of apology performance (see Section 2 and Cohen & Olshtain, 1985; Coulmas, 1981; Lakoff, 2015; Suszczyńska, 1999).

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1. Implications for research**

As established throughout this paper, while some apology strategies may be universal, a great deal of variation can affect how they are performed. Therefore, it is essential to reconsider and reevaluate speech act performance and structure as new data is collected, as the reconsideration of speech act typologies may reveal more than the unquestioned imposition of existing typologies onto this new data. Such reevaluation can reveal greater diversity in language use across languages, cultures, and contexts, and is therefore very valuable.

As a pilot study of apologies in the context of Italian language learning in Australia, the research presented in this paper and in Walker (2017) is a steppingstone in understanding L2 apology performance in a new context. As such, there is scope for further research within this space, as further discussed in Section 8, and I am also continuing this research in my doctoral studies.

### **6.2. Implications for practice**

The process of reassessment and learning mentioned above can also be valuable in the pedagogical context. The typology outlined in this paper offers a means of understanding how Australian learners of Italian construct apology emails. This provides a benefit to Italian language teachers in that the typology can be a means of analysing learners' construction of apology emails—and indeed, typologies of other speech acts can be used to analyse other text types.

Such typologies can then be used to identify strengths and possible areas of improvement in learners' written work, and can also be used in student feedback to help learners to understand elements of texts and which strategies should be included in certain text types. In addition, such typologies may be used to explicitly teach language learners how to perform speech acts.

Hence, through developing stronger understandings of how learners of a language use that language, those involved in language education can gain insight into how to support the learners' development of pragmatic knowledge. This is particularly true if one can compare the language use of these learners to that of native speakers, the anticipated benefit of which is further discussed in Section 8 of this paper.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper presents insightful findings regarding the performance of emailed apologies by Australian learners of Italian. The typology of apologies presented in this project, formulated from the data collected with reference to previous typologies, represents written apology performance in the intercultural and second language context. While it draws upon typologies presented by other scholars, the typology offered in this paper is adapted to the analysis of apologies as performed in email communication by Australian learners of Italian.

As my data demonstrates, the speech act of apology can be achieved in various forms. Apology structure is particularly flexible in the context of a longer text such as an email, and this allows for the formulation of an apology sequence which is unique. Specifically, while the emails composed by the participants adhered to the general structure of an apology move followed by an optional repair move, the specific strategies chosen to accomplish each of these moves and the supportive strategies which were performed varied in expression, order, and number. Thus, the emailed apology is of great investigative interest, especially in the area of pragmatics.

This flexibility of apology performance suggests that, particularly in the context of language acquisition and second language use, interlocutors should be aware of the diverse strategies whereby apologies may be performed. This diversity is also important to address in the pedagogical context. Research currently being undertaken by the author extends upon the findings of this pilot study and extrapolates upon these themes by i) comparing the apology performance of learners of Italian to native speakers of Italian and Australian English, and ii) investigating how different apology strategies performed in student emails are received by recipients. It is hoped that this further research will provide a deeper understanding not only of apology structure, but also of the impact of apology communication, and that research into the impact of apology communication may provide insights regarding, and have implications for, the way in which apologies are taught to learners of Italian.

## 8. Limitations of the study and opportunities for further research

As a pilot study, this paper offers valuable methodological and analytical considerations for further research, though it does have some limitations. As with any data elicitation process, there are task effects which may have influenced the decisions made by participants. The main effect to acknowledge is the fact that not all apology strategies can be used in all situations. This is true, for example, of *expressions of repair*, the necessity of which can vary significantly depending on situational variables (Trosborg, 1995). The type of repair which may be suggested for an offence is very much contingent on situational factors. The use of some supportive strategies is also contextually bound; one cannot, for example, promise to never again fall ill and therefore to never again miss a day of class (an example of a *promise of forbearance*). This variability indicates that, at least in regard to some elements of their emails, participants' constructions of the apology act were influenced by the DCT prompt to which they were responding; therefore, this research can present apology act performance only in relation to particular scenarios, rather than a broad overview of all possible apologies in all possible contexts.

In the same line, a possible avenue for future research could involve comparing participants' emailed apologies to oral apologies performed in similar contexts. This would allow for an investigation of how similarly – or differently – Australian learners of Italian perform verbal and written apologies. Hatipoğlu's (2004) findings suggest that explicit apologies would be performed differently in verbal and written forms; however, investigating the comparison may also reveal whether the typology presented in this paper is specific only to written communication, or whether it might account for both written and oral communication.

Another limitation to acknowledge is that each individual, regardless of cultural and linguistic factors, may favour certain apology strategies above others. This individual variation was not accounted for in this paper. Other scholars have investigated such variables in retrospective interviews conducted after written data collection (e.g., Chen, 2015; Cheng, 2013; Frescura, 1995; Lipson, 1994), but this was outside the scope of the research presented in this paper. Such interviews are a key element in my current doctoral research, as they provide insight into participants' linguistic choices and thereby allow for a more holistic exploration of the structure of written apologies.

A further extension on this research will be the comparison of apologies performed by Australian learners of Italian to native speakers of both Italian and Australian English. Such analysis will provide benchmarks of comparison which may reveal just how closely the apology performance in Italian of Australian

learners of Italian aligns with both Italian and Australian English. This comparison of learner performance with native speaker control groups forms another aim of my current doctoral research project, and it is expected that the analysis of emailed apologies across these three participant groups will provide much more revealing insights into learner apology construction.

## References

- Alcón Soler, Eva (2013a). Mitigating e-mail requests in teenagers' first and second language academic cyber-consultation. *Multilingua*, 32(6), 779–799. <http://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2013-0037>
- Alcón Soler, Eva (2013b). Pragmatic variation in British and international English language users' e-mail communication: a focus on requests. *Revista española de lingüística aplicada*, 26(26), 25–44.
- Austin, John Langshaw (1962). *How to do things with words: the William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Clarendon Press.
- Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2016). Year 12 subject enrolments. <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/year-12-subject-enrolments>. Accessed 4 March 2019.
- Bataineh, Rula Fahmi (2013). On congratulating, thanking, and apologizing in Jordanian Arabic and American English. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*. <http://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr32/bataineh.html>
- Bataineh, Ruba Fahmi, & Bataineh, Rula Fahmi (2006). Apology strategies of Jordanian EFL university students. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38(11), 1901–1927. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2005.11.004>
- Beebe, Leslie M., & Cummings, Martha C. (1996). Natural speech act data versus written questionnaire data: How data collection method affects speech act performance. In Susan M. Gass & Joyce Neu (Eds.), *Speech acts across cultures: Challenges to communication in a second language* (pp. 65–88). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bettoni, Camilla, & Rubino, Antonia (2007). Reacting to complaints: Italians vs Anglo-Australians. *Studi Italiani di Linguistica Teorica e Applicata*, 3, 483–498.
- Biesenbach-Lucas, Sigrun (2007). Students writing emails to faculty: An examination of e-politeness among native and non-native speakers of English. *Language Learning & Technology*, 11(2), 59–81. <http://www.lltjournal.org/item/2574>
- Biesenbach-Lucas, Sigrun (2006). Making requests in e-mail: Do cyber-consultations entail directness? Towards conventions in a new medium. In Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, J. C. Félix-Brasdefer, & Alwiya S. Omar (Eds.), *Pragmatics and Language Learning*, 11, 81–107. National Foreign Language Resource Center, University of Hawai'i.
- Biesenbach-Lucas, Sigrun, & Weasenforth, Donald (2001). E-mail and word processing in the ESL Classroom: How the medium affects the message. *Language Learning & Technology*, 5(1), 135–165. <http://www.lltjournal.org/item/2344>
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, House, Juliane, & Kasper, Gabriele (1989). CCSARP coding manual. In Shoshana Blum-Kulka, Juliane House, & Gabriele Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: requests and apologies* (pp. 273–294). Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, & Olshtain, Elite (1984). Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics*, 5(3), 196–213. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/5.3.196>
- Brown, James D. (2001). Pragmatic tests: Different purposes, different tests. In Kenneth R. Rose & Gabriele Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 301–325). Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, Penelope, & Levinson, Stephen C. (1987 [1978]). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.

- Businaro, Barbara (2002). Lo scusarsi tra convenzione e conversazione. *Studi Italiani di Linguistica Teorica e Applicata*, 31(3), 471–502.
- Carr, Jo & Pauwels, Anne (2006). *Boys and foreign language learning: real boys don't do languages*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230501652>
- Carr, Jo & Frankcom, Carolyn (1997). Where do the boys go: The problematic LOTE gender agenda. *Australian Language Matters*, 5(4), 12–13. <https://doi/10.3316/ielapa.980504430>
- Chen, Chi-Fen E. (2006). The development of e-mail literacy: From writing to peers to writing to authority figures. *Language Learning & Technology*, 10(2), 35–55. <https://doi.org/10125/44060>
- Chen, Yuan-shan (2015). Chinese learners' cognitive processes in writing email requests to faculty. *System: An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*, 52, 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.04.020>
- Cheng, Dongmei (2013). *Student-instructor apologies: How are they produced and perceived?* PhD Dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, Social Science Premium Collection.
- Cheng, Dongmei (2017). “Communication is a two-way street”: Instructors’ perceptions of student apologies. *Pragmatics*, 27(1), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.27.1.01che>
- Cohen, Andrew D., & Olshtain, Elite (1981). Developing a measure of sociocultural competence: The case of apology. *Language Learning*, 31(1), 113–134.
- Cohen, Andrew D., & Olshtain, Elite (1985). Comparing Apologies Across Languages. In Kurt R. Jankowsky (Ed.), *Scientific and humanistic dimensions of language* (pp. 175–184). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Cohen, Andrew D., & Olshtain, Elite (1994). Researching the production of second-language speech acts. In Elaine E. Tarone, Susan M. Gass, & Andrew D. Cohen (Eds.), *Research methodology in second-language acquisition* (pp. 143–156). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cohen, Andrew D., Olshtain, Elite, & Rosenstein, David S. (1986.) Advanced EFL apologies: What remains to be learned? *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 62, 51–74. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.1986.62.51>
- Coulmas, Florian (1981). “Poison to your soul.” Thanks and apologies contrastively viewed. In Florian Coulmas (Ed.), *Conversational routine: Explorations in standardized communication situations and prepatterned speech* (pp. 69–91). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, Bethan L., Merrison, Andrew J., & Goddard, Angela (2007). Institutional apologies in UK higher education: Getting back into the black before going into the red. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior, Culture*, 3(1), 39–63. <https://doi.org/10.1515/PR.2007.003>
- Economidou-Kogetsidis, Maria (2010). Cross-cultural and situational variation in requesting behaviour: Perceptions of social situations and strategic usage of request patterns. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42(8), 2262–2281. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.02.001>
- Economidou-Kogetsidis, Maria (2011). ‘Please answer me as soon as possible’: Pragmatic failure in non-native speakers’ e-mail requests to faculty. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(13), 3193–3215. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2011.06.006>
- Frescura, Marina (1995). Face orientations in reacting to accusatory complaints: Italian L1, English L1, and Italian as a community language. In Laurence F. Bouton (Ed.), *Pragmatics and Language Learning* (pp. 79–104). Division of English as an International Language, Intensive English Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Goffman, Erving (2003). On face-work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Reflections: The Society for Organizational Learning Journal*, 4(3), 7–13. <https://doi.org/10.1162/15241730360580159>

- Goffman, Erving (1967 [1955]). On face-work. In Erving Goffman (Ed.), *Interaction ritual: Essays in face-to-face behavior* (pp. 5–45). Anchor Books.
- Golato, Andrea (2003). Studying compliment responses: A comparison of DCTs and recordings of naturally occurring talk. *Applied Linguistics*, 24(1), 90–121. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/24.1.90>
- Grice, Herbert P. (1989). Logic and conversation. In Herbert P. Grice (Ed.), *Studies in the way of words* (pp. 22–40). Harvard University Press.
- Hatipoğlu, Çiler. (2004). Do apologies in e-mails follow spoken or written norms?: Some examples from British English. *Kalbu Stujijos*, 5, 21-29
- Hill, Thomas (1997). *The development of pragmatic competence in an EFL context*. PhD Dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Holmes, Janet (1990). Apologies in New Zealand English. *Language in Society*, 19(2), 155–199. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500014366>
- Hong, Wei (2011). Refusals in Chinese: How do L1 and L2 differ? *Foreign Language Annals*, 44(1), 122–136. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2010.01123.x>
- Jones, Jeremy F., & Adrefiza (2017). Comparing apologies in Australian English and Bahasa Indonesia: Cultural and gender perspectives. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 13(1), 89–119. <https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2016-0033>
- Kasanga, Luanga A., & Lwanga-Lumu, Joy C. (2007). Cross-cultural linguistic realization of politeness: A study of apologies in English and Setswana. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior, Culture*, 3(1), 65–92. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1994.32.1.19>
- Kissau, Scott & Salas, Spencer (2013). Motivating Male Language Learners: The Need for "More Than Just Good Teaching". *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 16(1), 88–111. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/CJAL/article/view/21055>
- Kuchuk, Alexandra (2012). *Politeness in intercultural communication: Some insights into the pragmatics of English as an international language*. PhD Dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Lakoff, Robin T. (2015). Nine ways of looking at apologies: The necessity for interdisciplinary theory and method in discourse analysis. In Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton, & Deborah Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 290–308). Wiley Blackwell.
- Leech, Geoffrey N. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.
- Leech, Geoffrey N. (2014). *The pragmatics of politeness*. Oxford University Press.
- Lipson, Maxine. (1994). Apologizing in Italian and English. *IRAL: International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 32(1), 19–40. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1994.32.1.19>
- Márquez Reiter, Rosina (2000). *Linguistic politeness in Britain and Uruguay: A contrastive study of requests and apologies*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Martínez-Flor, Alicia, & Beltrán-Palanques, Vicente (2014). The role of politeness in apology sequences: How to maintain harmony between speakers. *Estudios de Lingüística Inglesa Aplicada*, 14, 43–66. <https://doi.org/10.12795/elia.2014.i14.03>
- Nikitina, Larisa & Furuoka, Fumitaka (2007). Language classroom: A "girls' domain"? Female and male students' perspectives on language learning. Paper presented at the 5th Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures and Cultures (MICOLLAC), Subang, Selangor, Malaysia. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED508640>
- Nuzzo, Elena (2007). *Imparare a fare cose con le parole: richieste, proteste, scuse in italiano lingua seconda*. Guerra.
- Nuzzo, Elena, & Cortés Velásquez, Diego (2020). Canceling last minute in Italian and Colombian Spanish: A cross-cultural account of pragmalinguistic strategies. *Corpus Pragmatics*, 4, 333–358. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41701-020-00084-y>

- Ogiermann, Eva (2008). On the culture-specificity of linguistic gender differences: The case of English and Russian Apologies. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 5(3), 259–286. <https://doi.org/10.1515/IPRG.2008.013>
- Olshtain, Elite (1983). Sociocultural competence and language transfer: The case of apology. In Susan M. Gass & Larry Selinker (Eds.), *Language transfer in language learning* (pp. 232–249). Newbury House Publishers.
- Olshtain, Elite, & Cohen, Andrew D. (1983). Apology: A speech act set. In Nessa Wolfson & Elliot Judd (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition* (pp. 18–35). Newbury House.
- Olshtain, Elite, & Cohen, Andrew D. (1990). The learning of complex speech act behaviour. *TESL Canada Journal*, 7(2): 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v7i2.568>
- Owen, Marion (1983) *Apologies and remedial interchanges: A study of language use in social interaction*. Mouton Publishers.
- Pagliara, Francesca (2019). La codifica pragmatologica dell'atto della richiesta nelle e-mail degli studenti universitari italiani. In Elena Nuzzo & Ineke Vedder (Eds.), *Lingua in contesto: La prospettiva pragmatica* (pp. 149-168). AltLA.
- Sasaki, Miyuki (1998). Investigating EFL students' production of speech acts: A comparison of production questionnaires and role plays. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 30(4), 457–484. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(98\)00013-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(98)00013-7)
- Schneider, Klaus, & Barron, Anne (2008.) Where pragmatics and dialectology meet: Introducing variational pragmatics. In Klaus Schneider & Anne Barron (Eds.), *Variational pragmatics: A focus on regional varieties in pluricentric languages* (pp. 1–32). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Sciubba, Maria. E. (2010). Salutations, openings and closings in today academic emails. *Studi Italiani di Linguistica Teorica e Applicata*, 2, 243–264.
- Searle, John R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.
- Suszczyńska, Małgorzata (1999). Apologizing in English, Polish and Hungarian: Different languages, different strategies. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31(8), 1053–1065. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(99\)00047-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00047-8)
- Tanaka, Noriko, Spencer-Oatey, Helen, & Cray, Ellen (2008). Apologies in Japanese and English. In Helen Spencer-Oatey (Ed.), *Culturally speaking: culture, communication and politeness theory* (2nd ed., pp. 73–94). Continuum.
- Trosborg, Anna (1987). Apology strategies in natives/non-natives. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 11(2), 147–167. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(87\)90193-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(87)90193-7)
- Trosborg, Anna (1995). *Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints, and apologies*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Trubnikova, Victoriya (2017). 'Mi scusi per favore': Analisi pragmatica dell'interlingua di studenti russofoni. *Educazione Linguistica. Language Education*, 6(1), 53–81. <https://doi.org/10.14277/2280-6792/ELLE-6-1-17-4>
- Walker, Talia (2017). Politeness norms: A pilot study on the accomplishment of apologies by learners of Italian. *EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, 4(2), 28-48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21283/2376905X.7.95>
- Wyatt, Mark (2014). Saying sorry in advance for not turning up: A study of EFL teachers' text messages. *English Today*, 30(1), 48–54. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078413000564>
- Yu, Ming-chung (2010). Learning how to read situations and know what is the right thing to say or do in an L2: A study of socio-cultural competence and language transfer. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(4), 1127–1147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.09.025>

## Appendix A

DCT SCENARIOS AND INTERLOCUTOR VARIATIONS		
Scenario name	Description	Interlocutors
Cancelled meeting	While interning in an Italian firm, participants had scheduled a meeting, but were no longer able to attend	Fellow intern / boss
Group presentation	Participants were to present an assessment task in class the following day, but had fallen ill	Classmate / professor
Unpaid rent	Participants were living and travelling in Italy and were unable to pay their rent on time	Flatmate / landlord
Accidental theft	After having stayed with a friend and his mother in Italy, participants discovered that they had accidentally taken two chargers which were not theirs	The friend / friend's mother

## Appendix B

DCT INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS
<p>In this task, you will be asked to respond to four different situations via email. In each situation, there will be two versions of the situation. You are asked to complete <u>both</u> versions, totalling eight responses.</p> <p>All scenarios are set in Italy.</p> <p>The following task is written in Italian and challenging terms will also be provided in English.</p> <p>At the end of each, you will be asked to rate the scenario in regards to the social distance between yourself and your interlocutor, your interlocutor's status in relation to your own and the severity of your offence.</p> <p>In this task, the italicised terms are defined in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Social distance</i>: how well known the participants are to each other, ranging from strangers to intimates</li> <li><i>Status of interlocutor</i>: the degree of power held by the interlocutor, i.e. if their social position within the interaction is higher, equal to, or lower than the speaker</li> <li><i>Severity of offence</i>: the 'seriousness' of and extent of damage caused by the offence for which the apology is being offered</li> </ul> <p>You should respond to the eight scenarios as per the example below:</p> <p><u>Example Scenario:</u>  <i>You are not feeling well and so you will be absent from today's lecture. You know that the student who sits beside you will be attending and that she always takes detailed notes.            If you were to write an email to her, what would you write?</i></p> <p><u>Example Response:</u>  <i>Hi Elena,            Sorry to be a bother, but I wanted to ask you a favour. I won't be in class today because I'm sick, so I was wondering if you could send me your notes from today's lecture?            Thank you so much!            Jessica</i></p>

## Appendix C

### DCT PROMPTS (IN ITALIAN)

#### Appuntamento cancellato

A.

Mentre stai facendo uno stage (internship) in un'azienda italiana, organizzi di incontrare un altro stagista (intern) italiano alle due di pomeriggio. Però, non puoi più incontrarlo.

Se gli scrivessi un'email, cosa scriveresti?

B.

Mentre stai facendo uno stage (internship) in un'azienda italiana, organizzi di incontrare il tuo capo alle due di pomeriggio. Però, non puoi più incontrarlo.

Se gli scrivessi un'email, cosa scriveresti?

#### Presentazione

A.

Tu e una compagna di classe (classmate) state facendo un compito che deve essere presentato in classe domani, ma stai male e non riuscirai a essere in classe per fare la presentazione.

Se scrivessi un'email alla tua compagna di classe, cosa scriveresti?

B.

Tu e una compagna di classe (classmate) state facendo un compito che deve essere presentato in classe domani, ma stai male e non riuscirai a essere in classe per fare la presentazione.

Se scrivessi un'email alla tua professoressa, cosa scriveresti?

#### Affitto non pagato

A.

Mentre sei in Italia, condividi un appartamento con un'altra escursionista (backpacker) e devi pagare l'affitto (rent) ogni mese. La data per il pagamento è entro quattro giorni, ma stai viaggiando e non riuscirai a pagare il tuo proprietario (landlord) in tempo.

Se gli scrivessi un'email, cosa scriveresti?

B.

Mentre sei in Italia, condividi un appartamento con un'altra escursionista (backpacker) e devi pagare l'affitto ogni mese. La data per il pagamento è entro quattro giorni, ma stai viaggiando e non riuscirai a pagare la tua coinquilina (flatmate) in tempo.

Se le scrivessi un'email, cosa scriveresti?

#### Furto accidentale

A.

Sei appena tornato/a a Sydney dopo un periodo a Verona dove stavi a casa di un amico e di sua madre. Mentre stai disfacendo le valigie (unpacking), scopri due dei loro caricabatterie (chargers) insieme ai tuoi.

Se scrivessi un'email al tuo amico, cosa scriveresti?

B.

Sei appena tornato/a a Sydney dopo un periodo a Verona dove stavi a casa di un amico e di sua madre. Mentre stai disfacendo le valigie (unpacking), scopri due dei loro caricabatterie (chargers) insieme ai tuoi.

Se scrivessi un'email alla madre del tuo amico, cosa scriveresti?

## Appendix D

### DCT PROMPTS (IN ENGLISH)

#### Cancelled Meeting

A.

While completing an internship in an Italian firm, you agree to meet one of your Italian fellow interns at 2pm. However, you can no longer make it.

If you were to write an email to him, what would you write?

B.

While completing an internship in an Italian firm, you agree to meet your boss 2pm. However, you can no longer make it.

If you were to write an email to him, what would you write?

Please write your email below, using as little or as much space as you feel to be necessary:

#### Group Presentation

A.

You and a classmate are completing an assessment task which will need to be presented tomorrow, but you are ill and cannot make it to class to present.

If you were to write an email to your partner, what would you write to her?

B.

You and a classmate are completing an assessment task which will need to be presented tomorrow, but you are ill and cannot make it to class to present.

If you were to write an email to your professor, what would you write to her?

#### Unpaid Rent

A.

While in Italy, you are staying in an apartment and you must pay your rent monthly. The due date for next month's rent is in four days' time, but you have been travelling and won't be able to pay your landlord in time.

If you were to write an email to him, what would you write?

B.

While in Italy, you are sharing an apartment with another backpacker and you must pay your rent monthly. The due date for next month's rent is in four days' time, but you have been travelling and won't be able to pay your flatmate in time.

If you were to write an email to her, what would you write?

#### Accidental Theft

A.

You have just returned to Sydney after visiting a friend and his mother for several months in Verona. When unpacking, you discover two of their chargers caught up amongst your own.

If you were to write an email to your friend, what would you write?

B.

You have just returned to Sydney after visiting a friend and his mother for several months in Verona. When unpacking, you discover two of their chargers caught up amongst your own.

If you were to write an email to your friend's mother, what would you write?

## Appendix E

### ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF PARTICIPANT EMAIL

Dear [name],

First of all, I need to thank you (form.) once again for your (form.) incredible hospitality. My time in Verona was amazing and the friendship of your (form.) family was a large part of that unforgettable experience. I have just arrived home and have discovered that unfortunately I took two of your (form.) (phone)chargers with me. I ask your (form.) forgiveness for this mistake! I think that it would be best if I send them to you (form.) straight away. I'll go to the post office this afternoon. But in any case I believe that you (form.) were probably looking everywhere for those things and hence I would like to tell you (form.) they took a big journey with me!

Thank you very much for everything and I'm sorry for that error.

With affection,  
[name]

**Talia Walker**, University of Sydney  
talía.walker@sydney.edu.au

- EN** **Talia Walker** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Italian Studies at the University of Sydney, investigating the performance of apologies by learners of Italian at Australian universities. Her interests lie within the fields of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and language acquisition. In recent years, Talia held research and teaching positions at the Australian National University, the University of Sydney, and UTS College.
- ES** **Talia Walker** es estudiante de posgrado en el Departamento de Estudios Italianos de la Universidad de Sydney, donde se ocupa de la investigación sobre la formulación de disculpas enviadas por e-mail por los estudiantes de italiano en las universidades australianas. Sus intereses incluyen los ámbitos de la pragmática, de la comunicación intercultural y del aprendizaje de la lengua. En los últimos años, Talia ha ocupado puestos de investigación y enseñanza en la Universidad Nacional de Australia, la Universidad de Sydney y el UTS College.
- IT** **Talia Walker** è dottoranda presso il Dipartimento di Italian Studies dell'University of Sydney, dove fa ricerca sulla formulazione di scuse da parte degli studenti di italiano nelle università australiane. I suoi interessi includono gli ambiti della pragmatica, della comunicazione interculturale e dell'apprendimento della lingua. Negli ultimi anni, Talia ha ricoperto incarichi di ricerca e insegnamento presso l'Università Nazionale Australiana, l'Università di Sydney e l'UTS College.