

Apologizing in Academic Emails

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Date: Monday Oct. 30, 2006

Time: 12:00

Location: 212 Ross Hall

Abstract

Apologies in discourse are theoretically rich, with the potential for helping us better understand social interaction; yet, we still have an incomplete understanding of how they work. Though arguably frequent in both oral and written discourse, apologies have been the focus of relatively few studies overall and even fewer in written communication.

The goal of this study is to examine apologies in written discourse, specifically those sent by email in an academic setting. The project draws on a database of more than 400 email apologies collected over 3 years and coded for the relative gravity of the offense in addition to features of sender and recipient, including age, gender, status, and proficiency in English.

I will share representative samples of the data, describe features of email apologies relative to sociolinguistic variables, compare findings with those of other studies, and discuss some of the interesting research problems involved in collecting and analyzing apologies.