
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Lexicogrammar Approach to Analyze Response Strategies to Apology in English Conversations

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| ABSTRACT

The acts of apologizing and responding to apology are common activities in communication since using only either of these two crucial speech acts cannot itself establish fully effective communication. This article aims to examine response strategies to apology that are used in English romance and family films and find out the lexico-grammatical realizations of response utterances in English conversations. This article was qualitatively designed with the support of the researchers' observation of the films' scripts extracted from English films, subsequently the researchers' description of the data collection into separate categories. The results of this study revealed that English film characters were more likely to accept than reject apologies. Direct positive comments were favoured by the English, with indirect positive responses coming in second.

| KEYWORDS

Apology responses; English conversations; lexicogrammar; realization; strategies

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1. Introduction

It could be widely understood that the act of apology responding occurs after the act of apologizing; therefore, these two speech acts play an important role in conversations and have inter-related relationships with each other. Many researchers have so far investigated a speech act of apologizing in the light of pragmatics, cross-cultural, intercultural, or sociopragmatics. Awedyk (2011) found out that Norwegian tended to employ direct strategies more often than other apology strategies. This result seems to be in accordance with Trang (2017), who investigated why students at the University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang (UFLS-UD) apologized, and which apology strategies were employed. Regarding the latter, *direct strategies* were most frequently used, followed by *a promise of forbearance* and *accounts*, respectively. However, according to Huwari (2018), the apology strategies taken advantage of the most by Jordanian and Asian students were *account* and *compensation*, but not *direct strategies*. Different researchers have different viewpoints on apology strategies.

Compared to a number of previous studies on apology strategies, those related to response strategies in general and those to apologies, in particular, seem to be much fewer. Bennett and Dewberry (1994) discovered that the interlocutor often felt obligated to forgive an offender who apologized and therefore contributed to the relationship's survival. In reality, apologizers seldom reject apologies across cultures (Bennett and Earwaker, 2001). While there is etiquette advice and information for non-native English speakers on how to respond to apologies in English, there is relatively little research on how English speakers actually respond to apologies, and in particular, the types of responses and expressions interlocutors use in responding to apologies (Adrefiza and Jones, 2013). They discovered that *acceptance strategies* were utilized by a majority of people in both languages; however, rejections were more common. It was possible that in hypothetical settings, participants felt freer to reject apologies than they would in real-life partnerships, where rejecting an apology could have harmed the relationship.

There have been few studies on apology response strategies that were carried out to investigate the response strategies but not lexical, grammatical realizations of utterances contain response strategies. Therefore, the article "*A Lexicogrammar Approach to*

Response Strategies to Apology in English” was pursued with the aims of figuring out strategies in response to apology and clarifying the lexicogrammar realizations of response utterances in English conversations. There are four research questions that should be explored to achieve the article’s aims.

1. What are response strategies to the apology which are taken advantage of in English conversations?
2. How often do response strategies to apology appear in English conversations?
3. What are lexical grammatical realizations of apology response utterances in English conversations?
4. How often do lexical grammatical realizations appear in English conversations?

2. Literature Review

Responses to apologies occur when the apologizees respond to the apologizers. Homes (1990, 1995) categorized response strategies to apology into 4 separate groups at the macro level and 15 subcategories at the micro-level. They are acceptance (absolution, thanking, advice or suggestion, request, expression empathy, and expressing emotion), *acknowledgment* (absolution plus, warning or threatening, and evaluating), *evasion* (minimizing, deflecting, and shift on blame), and *rejection* (blaming and complaining, asking for compensation, and refusal).

According to Nguyễn Quang (2002), the function of the responding speech act is regarded as an illocutionary act of response utterances. Responses can be divided into positive responses and negative ones. *Positive responses* satisfy the purpose of the apologizing speech act and the needs of the apologizer in apology utterances. It is possible to view that the introductory dialogue and its positive response form a preferred adjacency pair. Whereas the negative response goes against the target of the introductory dialogue, which means it does not satisfy and does not meet the apologizer's apology. Together with the apology utterances, negative response creates a dispreferred adjacency pair. Many linguists consider grammar and lexis to be separate concepts; however, Halliday (2013) described lexicogrammar, also known as lexical grammar, as a word that emphasizes the interdependence of vocabulary or lexis and structure or grammar.

This article applied the taxonomy for apology response strategies (ARSs) developed by Holmes (1990, 1995) to examine response strategies to apology in English conversations. In order to find out the lexical, grammatical realizations of apology response utterances, the researchers applied the approach of lexicogrammar proposed and developed by Halliday (2013) and response patterns by Nguyễn Quang (2002).

3. Methodology

Anguera (2018) confirmed that qualitative research identifies and describes features of language usage and provides real occurrences of a particular phenomenon. By contrast, in quantitative analysis, linguistic features are classified and counted, and statistical models are constructed to explain the observed facts. This article is qualitative research with the support of the quantitative.

3.1. Data Collection

Subtitles and scripts of films in English were the two sources of data collection. Films have been produced since 2015, which means the data represent the most updated ways of responding to apology; and keeping up with the tendency of communication. These films were chosen because they have a number of everyday conversations among members of the family, friends, lovers, strangers, colleagues, and so on, with many examples of apologies and responses in different contexts. The conversations were extracted from scripts and subtitles in romance and family films. There were 557 conversations in English consisting of apology response utterances.

3.2. Data Analysis

After selecting 557 utterances of apology responses in English conversations, the researchers observed and analyzed each utterance to decide which subcategory of response strategies it belonged to thanks to the apology response strategy taxonomy by Homes (1990, 1995), and then grouped the utterances to response patterns developed by Nguyễn Quang (2002), and then in order to clarify its lexicogrammatical realization based on the lexicogrammar approach which was explored by Halliday (2013).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Response Strategies to Apology in English Conversations

Regarding the response strategies, the researcher applied the ARS taxonomy proposed by Homes (1990, 1995) to examine what ARSs the characters from romance and family film contexts often utilized when communicating in English. This ARS taxonomy comprises four groups such as *acceptance*, *acknowledgment*, *evasion*, and *rejection*.

From the exchanges extracted from English conversations in film scripts and film subtitles, the researcher found out that in some situations, the apologizees did not say anything to make a response to the apologizers; by contrast, also in some different cases, the apologizees tended to take advantage of several ARSs to respond the apologizers. The researchers named the former *no response* and the latter *mixed apology response strategy*. Especially, *no response* was not added to Table 1 since this table illustrates the ARSs, and this paper investigated only the verbal responses. However, in the next section of investigating the sequence of pragmatic acts of apologizing and apology responding, the strategy of no response was considered. The *mixed apology response strategy*, therefore, appeared in Table 1 as a new type of ARS. A glimpse at Table 1 given below revealed the data about the frequency of ARSs in English conversations extracted from scripts and subtitles of romance and family film contexts.

Table 1. Frequency of apology response strategies to apology

No.	Apology response (AR) strategies	Macro levels	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Acceptance	Absolution	95	17.06
		Thanking	26	4.67
		Advice/suggestion	29	5.21
		Request	45	8.08
		Expressing empathy	14	2.51
		Expressing emotion	0	0
		Formal	7	1.26
		216	38.79	
2	Acknowledgement	Absolution plus	61	10.95
		Formal Plus	2	0.36
		Warning/threatening	12	2.15
		Evaluating	37	6.65
		112	20.11	
3	Evasion	Minimizing	15	2.69
		Deflecting	8	1.44
		Shift of blame	31	5.56
		54	9.69	
4	Rejection	Complaining	19	3.41
		Asking for compensation	89	15.98
		Refusal	57	10.23
		165	29.62	
5	Mixed apology response strategy		10	1.8
		Total	557	100

The characters tended to directly accept the apologies since *acceptance* was the most frequently used AR, illustrated by its highest percentage at 38.79% with 216 times; by contrast, *mixed apology response strategy* was the least one due to the total numbers observed at 1.8% with 10 times. There was a big differentiation of more than 20 times of the top as opposed to the bottom. The second highest belonged to *rejection* of 29.62%, with 165 times which was nearly 1.5 times lower than the first rank of *acceptance*. The other two left were *acknowledgment* and *evasive*, which comprised 20.11% (112 times) and 9.69% (54 times), respectively. The only missing apology strategy at the macro level was *expressing emotion* in *acceptance* in *acknowledgment*. The examples in the following section highlight the use of response strategies in English by the apologizees to the apologizers in some particular contexts, which satisfied the description in the scope of this thesis.

4.1.1. Acceptance

According to Margaret, Jennifer, and Joanna (2015: 87), acceptance is "the act of agreeing with something and approving of it." Accepting the act of apologizing in English conversations tended to cover 7 separate sub-categories such as *absolution*, *thanking*, *advice/suggestion*, *request*, *expressing empathy*, *expressing emotion*, and *formal* at a different rate of use. As can be clearly seen from Table 1, *absolution* ranked the top at 17.06% (95 times), which was more than twice as much as the second-highest of *requests* at 8.08% (45 times). The other two ARs of *thanking* and *advice/suggestion* were in the region of 5% (4.67% and 5.21%, respectively). According to the ARS taxonomy by Homes (1990, 1995), *expressing emotion* is one of the sub-categories in *acceptance*; however, the researcher had no record of this type. Apparently, *formal* was at the bottom with the least frequently used at 1.26% with 7 times, which was exactly twice lower than *expressing empathy* at 2.51% with 14 times.

(Example 1). The Professor: *Sorry I can't give it back to you today.*
Student: *Well, well, okay, Sir. Then, I will come back to you. Umm when should I come to you again?*

By saying "okay," the student as the apologizee tended to understand why the professor could not give him the feedback of his writing assignment.

(Example 2). Freddie: *I don't believe that I did that to you. I'm terribly sorry.*
Julie: *Thanks. At least, you say sorry, not like the other ones.*

In the conversation above, Julie said thanks to Freddie when he apologized to her to show that she appreciated the willingness to say sorry to Freddie.

4.1.2. Acknowledgement

Turning to the *acknowledgment* strategy where the researcher recorded 4 types out of 7 in total. Standing at the peak of this type, *absolution plus* (10.95%) was 30 times, 5 times, and 1.5 times higher than the least of *formal plus* (1.26%), the second least of *warning/threatening* (2.15%), and the second-highest of *evaluating* (6.65%), respectively.

(Example 3). Erik: *Sorry I didn't tell you about this.*
Julie: *It's OK, but remember to tell me later. I'm kind of busy right now.*

In this strategy, together with the use of markers OK, okay, or alright, the apologizees also asked the apologizers to do something to repair the offense.

(Example 4). Mye: *I am sorry that I didn't submit the assignments on time.*
Teacher: *Submit your assignments right now. If not, you will get bad marks.*

This strategy was recorded when the apologizees required the apologizers to amend their mistakes or else there would be punishment or something that could be not as good as the apologizers expected.

4.1.3. Evasion

Evasion is "the act of avoiding somebody or of avoiding something that you are supposed to do" by Margaret, Jennifer, and Joanna (2015:315). This ARS comprises of three sub-categories where the *shift of blame* was reported to be used at 5.56% to be the most, followed by *minimizing* at 2.69% to be the second top and *deflecting* at 1.44% to be the least.

(Example 5). Colleague 1: *I'm sorry, I lost your pen.*
Colleague 2: *Hey! It's nothing, just a pen.*

The apologizees wanted to minimize the severity of the offense caused by the apologizers.

(Example 6). Thomas: *Hey Kimmese, listen! I have to apologize to you for(incomplete sentence)*
Julie: *Oh, Thomas, forget about it.*

The apologizers caused the offense and tried to say sorry to the apologizees for offenses; however, the apologizees would prevent them from apologizing.

4.1.4. Rejection

Rejection is the fourth category of ARSs, including *complaining*, *asking for compensation*, and *refusal*. With 15.98%, *asking for compensation* had the largest proportion with 89 times of use. It had a big differentiation of more than 4.5 times higher than the least of *complaining* at 3.41%; whereas *refusal* at 10.23% was threefold in comparison with *complaining*.

(Example 7). Thomas: *I did it again. So sorry.*
Julie: *How careless of you!*

The apologizees made comments on the personalities of the apologizers, which could be the reason for the offense.

(Example 8). Thomas: *I apologize for the damage.*
Julie: *Yeah, you have to buy me another one.*

The apologizers asked the apologizees to compensate for what they had done to the apologizees, which may cause serious damage.

4.1.5. Mixed Apology Response Strategy

The apologizees uttered expressions of several different ARSs regarded as a *mixed apology response strategy* to show their attitudes of either accepting, refusing, acknowledging, or evading. The occurrence of this ARS accounted for 1.8% with 10 times. There were two trends in using this apology. The apologizees could employ some ARSs in one turn or in several different turns, as illustrated below.

(Example 9). The Rider: *Oops, Sorry, sorry, sorry. I didn't mean it at all.*
 First Response: *Excuse me! Look, there is a scratch on my motorcycle. Umm, I think you can help me to fix the scratch.*

In this example, the apologizee decided to choose *deflecting of evasion* when he explained the consequence of the offense and then *asked for compensation* to fix the scratch. By contrast, there were two turns of the apologizees to respond to the apologizers in the next conversation among the passengers on the plane. He or she used *advice or suggestion* in the first response and then *absolution* in the final response.

(Example 10). The passenger: *Oops, I'm so sorry. Are you okay?*
 First response: *Oh yeah, you can take your bag to the place up there.*
 The passenger: *Well, everywhere is full, I'm afraid.*
 Final Response: *It's alright. Everything is alright.*

4.2. Lexical Grammatical Realizations of Response Utterances in English Conversations

When looking at lexical grammar realizations, the researchers based on the theory of positive and negative speech act of responses by Searle (1969) to find out the possible lexical grammar there could be. Response utterances can be categorized into four different patterns, including *direct positive responses (DPR)*, *indirect positive responses (IPR)*, *direct negative responses (DNR)*, and *indirect negative responses (INR)*. *Direct positive responses* were used if the apologizees wanted to accept the apologies from the apologizers explicitly thanks to the occurrence of *yes, OK, okay, alright, and it's alright*; whereas the apologizers employed indirect positive responses including *never mind, no problem, it's nothing, not at all* and so on to accept the apologies from the apologizers implicitly. Negative responses were taken advantage of by the apologizees in case they would like to refuse the apologies from the apologizers. *Direct negative responses* included *no, I can't, I will not, I can't forgive you*, and so on, while *indirect negative responses* may comprise of *sorry or I'm sorry*. One more pattern explored from the data collection was the *mixed responses* since the apologizees combined both positive and negative responses. It could be the combination between direct and indirect positive responses or direct and indirect negative responses, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

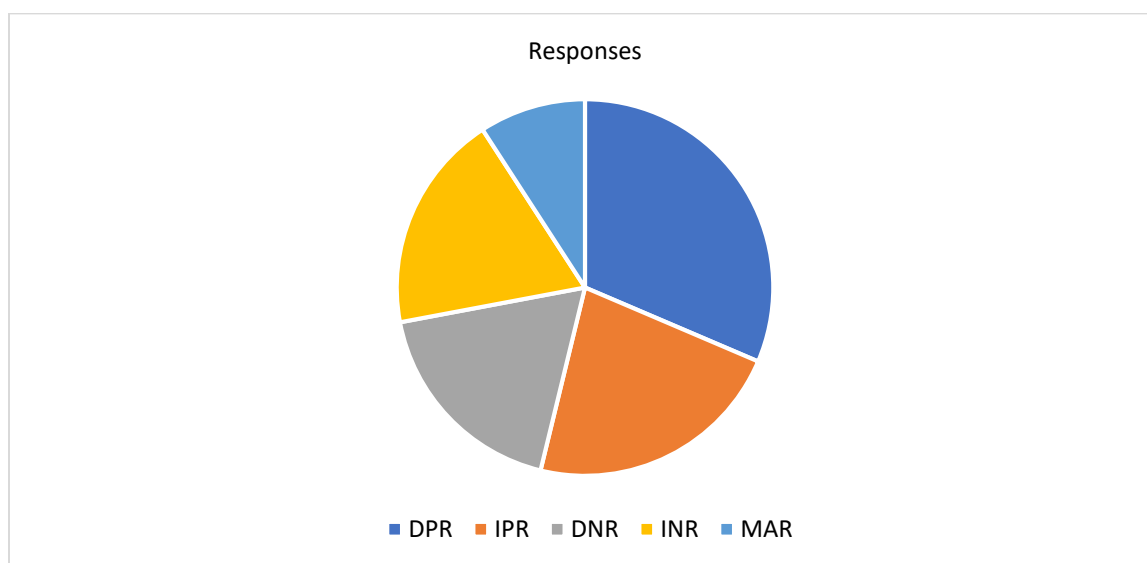


Figure 1. Distribution of response patterns in English Conversations

It can be seen that English people preferred using *direct positive responses* the most of 112 times at 31.02 %, followed by the second-highest of the *indirect responses* of this kind at 22.99% with 83 times. On the contrary, *negative responses* experienced a higher proportion of the *indirect responses* at 18.56% compared to the *direct ones* at 18.01%. The two kinds of negative responses saw quite the same proportion at around 18%. Standing at the bottom was *mixed apology responses* at 9.42%, which was more than 3 times lower than the top of *direct positive responses* at 31.02%.

To make it more specific, *direct positive responses* include the occurrence of 7 different realizations namely [Oh, yes], [Yes, please/sure], [Yes, you can/ could], [OK/ Okay/ Okey], [It's OK/ Okay/ Okey], [Alright], [It's alright]. The same number of realizations of *direct negative responses* was also recorded with the occurrence of [No, I can't/ couldn't], [No, (explanation)], [I will not], [I'm afraid I can't], [I can't forgive you], [I can't forgive that Clause], and [I can't forget that Clause]. Although the frequency of *indirect negative response* was more than *mixed apology response strategy*, it had fewer realizations of only 2 including [Sorry], and [I'm sorry] compared to the latter at 3 including [No, I'm sorry, I can't/ couldn't], [I'm sorry that I can't forgive you], and [Oh, yeah. It doesn't matter, you know]. Ranking the second belonged to the occurrence of *indirect positive responses* of 5 realizations, namely [Never mind], [No problem], [No, not at all], [It's nothing], and [It doesn't matter].

5. Conclusion

This study found out that the English film characters had a tendency to accept the apologies more than to reject the apologies. The *acknowledgment* and *evasive* were much less frequently used. What's more, they did not prefer using a *mixed apology response strategy*. In terms of *acceptance*, *absolution* ranked at the top, which was followed by *request*, and *formal* stood at the bottom. Regarding *rejection*, *compensation* was most frequently used, much higher than the least of *complaining*. Last but not least, the apologizees used a mixture of apologies response tactics to demonstrate their attitudes of accepting, refusing, acknowledging, or evading. This apology was used in two different ways. Some ARSs could be used by the apogogizees in one round or in numerous turns.

The English people preferred *direct positive responses* the most, followed by *indirect positive responses* in second place. Negative responses, on the other hand, had a higher proportion of indirect than direct responses. The two types of negative responses were used in a similar way. Standing at the bottom elicited mixed responses. To make it more specific, *direct positive responses* and *direct negative responses* shared the same number of 7 realizations. Subsequently was the used second-highest rank of *indirect positive responses* of 5 realizations. The *mixed apology response strategy* and *indirect negative response* had only 3 and 2, respectively.

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