Constructing apologies: Reflexive relationships between apologies and offenses

John Heritage [a], [*], Chase Wesley Raymond [b], Paul Drew [c]

[a] Department of Sociology, University of California, UCLA, 375 Portola Plaza, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA
[b] Department of Linguistics, University of Colorado, Hellems 290, 295 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309, USA
[c] Department of Language and Linguistic Science, University of York, York YO10 5DD, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Goffman (1971) proposed that apologies are, or at least should be, proportional to the offenses they are designed to remediate. In a previous quantitative study (Heritage & Raymond 2016), we found mixed support for such a principle of proportionality. The present article aims to unpack some of the difficulties encountered in that largely positivistic analysis, by adopting a constitutive approach to the design, deployment, and negotiation of apologies in sequences of interaction. We begin by examining cases of self-correction, in which participants can be seen to be orienting to the (in)appositeness of apology formulations to deal with particular offenses. We then offer an in-depth comparison of two cases involving what is ostensibly the 'same' virtual offense, but in which the stance of the apologizer in each is quite different. After discussing three possible approaches to the divergence between these two cases, we conclude by arguing that the principle of proportionality is best conceived of as a normative structure to which participants orient even in the context of departing from it, thereby providing for its maintenance. Data come from everyday conversation amongst American and British speakers of English.

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1. Introduction

What is the relationship between an apology and the offense it addresses? A simple response to this question was offered by Goffman (1971:116), to the effect that apologies are, or at least should be, proportional to the offenses they are designed to remediate. Goffman's principle of proportionality is of course a norm of politeness that can be understood, in principle at least, as a method of matching the extent of redress to the extent of the face threat of a previous action (Brown and Levinson, 1987).[1] Sociolinguists and scholars in the field of politeness theory have long documented variables influencing departures from this norm, including social distance and power, social class and status, gender and so on (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Ogiermann, 2009). The present study will also be concerned with departures from the norm of proportionality but, in keeping with its focus on the local implementation of the norm, it will address orthogonal processes through which the norm is upheld and reinforced notwithstanding the recurrence of departures. It may thus be considered as a reflexive treatment of the departures and exceptions that the sociolinguistics literature addresses within a broadly positivistic style of research.

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* Corresponding author.
  E-mail addresses: Heritage@ucla.edu (J. Heritage), Chase.Raymond@Colorado.EDU (C.W. Raymond), paul.drew@york.ac.uk (P. Drew).
[1] In this paper we do not generally consider the case of prospective apologies that Goffman referred to as 'requests'.

Goffman's claim of proportionality is somewhat easier to make than it is to substantiate. From a theoretical perspective, the offering of an apology, and its particular format, are products of what might be regarded as layers of considerations, both about whether an apology is due, and about the form an apology should take. The first consideration is whether there is an offense to be addressed, or whether for instance the potentially apologizable incident was merely a misfortune to which no moral fault should be attributed. Interactants can clearly arrive at different positions on this constitutive issue: virtual offenders may not perceive an offense, or having perceived it may wish to avoid its acknowledgment. Offended parties may perceive offense, and indeed may absolve an offender, without any offense being otherwise acknowledged by the offender (Drew and Hepburn, 2016). Finally, recipients of possible offenses may respond to apologies, as in (1) below, by denying the fact of an offense altogether.

```
(1) [Rahman:(14):2]
 1  Vera:   I'm sorry yih had th'm all o[n you [ J e n n y ] like that]
 2  Jenny:                             [.hhh  [↑Oh  don't] be  s i l]ly=
 3  Jenny:  =No: that w'z lovely it w'z a nice surpri[:se
```

A second consideration is whether the offender should acknowledge agency in the commission of the offense, and perhaps expand this into a recognition of responsibility and culpability for the offense (Lazare, 2004). Third, should the offender work to mitigate (or accentuate) the offense, through characterizations of harm, or of responsibility, or culpability? All three layers of assessment are involved in judgments of the proportionality of apologies to the offenses they address, and all are implicated in the interactional processes we describe here.

Further difficulties arise in scaling potentially face threatening acts (which Goffman termed 'virtual offenses'). These are after all local social events whose significance is likely to be highly variable both in terms of social context, and in terms of the differences in their interpretation by particular social actors. Similarly the linguistic resources deployed in apologies vary considerably, especially when considered cross-linguistically and cross-culturally. For example, noting that Russian speakers require an acknowledgment of responsibility as an essential component of an apology, Ogiermann (2009) observes that "I'm sorry" is understood as a simple expression of regret and as insufficient to count as an apology — an observation that does not generally hold for English speakers.

In an earlier paper (Heritage and Raymond, 2016), we investigated Goffman's hypothesis with a corpus of apologies from everyday conversation using statistical tests of association. The results of this investigation were decidedly mixed. On the one hand, there was broad support for Goffman's notion, insofar as minor virtual offenses (especially those involving self-correction) were associated with minimal apology formats that did not acknowledge agency in the offense (e.g., bare *Sorry*). On the other hand, however, when we attempted to establish associations between more elaborate apology formats and the offenses they addressed, the results were inconclusive. The previous paper was originally conceived as the first of two, designed to explore distinctive approaches to the analysis of social norms. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the difficulties that our previous approach encountered, and to sketch some alternatives.

2. Testing Goffman's principle of proportionality

Following Goffman, the initial investigation by Heritage and Raymond (2016) was premised on a single dimension of variation, the principle of proportionality: 'the larger the offense, the more extensive the apology'. To assess the operation of this principle, we began by creating measures of the virtual offense and of apology formats. In analyzing offenses, we distinguished between those that were *local* and *endogenous* to the interaction (such as self-correction, delays in response, interrupting a co-participant, etc.) which we conceived to be comparatively minor, and offenses that were *distal* and *exogenous* to the interaction itself (such as refusals of requests, missed obligations, previous or subsequent impositions, etc.) which we conceived to be more substantial. As a measure of the extensiveness of the apology, we hypothesized a cline from the most minimal explicit apology (a bare *Sorry*) through the explicit acknowledgment of agency (*I'm sorry*), to what we termed *expanded apologies*, which included naming the offense and/or accounting for it (Holmes, 1990; Owen, 1983; Robinson, 2004) (see Table 1).[2]

Table 1
Taxonomy of apology formats.

Unexpanded Apologies
Bare "Sorry"
"I'm sorry"
"I'm [intensifier] sorry" (e.g., "I'm terribly sorry")
Expanded Apologies ("Sorry +")
"I'm sorry" + Named Offense
"I'm sorry" + Account
"I'm sorry" + Named Offense + Account

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[2] We did not use the entire range of apology formats identified by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) because two of them (offers of repair or remedy; and expressions of forbearance) were either absent or very infrequent.

According to our hypothesis, more substantial virtual offenses should generally receive more extended apologies, as in (1), repeated below. Here, Vera's son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren arrived at her house while she was out, and a neighbor, Jenny, entertained them at her house until Vera returned. In this call, Vera offers an expanded apology for the unexpected imposition of her family.

```
(1) [Rahman:(14):2]
 1  Vera:    I'm sorry yih had th'm all o[n you [ J e n n y ] like that]
 2  Jenny:                              [.hhh  [↑Oh  don't] be  s i l]ly=
 3  Jenny:   =No: that w'z lovely it w'z a nice surpri[:se
 4  Vera:                                            [Y(h)]e:[s:: ih
 5  Jenny:                                                  [An' they
 6  Jenny:   look so well.the children theh go:rg[e o u s]aren't they.]
 7  Vera:                                        [D'you  ]know theh-  ]
 8           'Ee w'z- They w'r ez good ez go:ld,
```

Vera's apology includes both an overtly agentive apology (*I'm sorry*), in addition to a characterization of the offense (or 'apologizable') as "yih had th'm all on you Jenny like that", conveying her understanding of the visit as an imposition (Cirillo et al., 2016; Fatigante et al., 2016; Margutti et al., 2016). This case, then, illustrates the general hypothesis that Goffman proposed: a bigger virtual offense should receive a more substantial apology, though it may be noted that Jenny's response (lines 2–3) strongly denies the existence of an offense, and thus by extension the necessity of an apology.

By contrast, apologies for local endogenous virtual offenses such as repair (on which, see also Robinson, 2006) are routinely formatted in minimal terms, as in the following case (2). Here, Giles replaces the word "promotion" with "concessionary payment", post-facing (Schegloff, 2013) the repair operation with a minimal "Sorry" (line 4). As in other cases of self-repair, the apology addresses the virtual offenses associated with breaking the progressivity of the turn or sequence and a momentary misrepresentation of the subject under discussion.

```
(2) [Anderson:CC:B:3]
 1  Giles:   So this makes it even worse.
 2           So what we're saying then, is [that=
 3  Mark:                                  [mghh
 4  Giles:   =this promotion this concessionary payment.=Sorry.
 5           (.) You- you've used it in two terms.
 6           .hhh The [concessionary payment .hh is a .hh chunk=
 7  Mark:             [Yes.
 8  Giles:   =of money .hhh that is split equally,
 9           (.) uh over the two year pe:riod,
```

According to the principle of proportionality, it would not seem appropriate to design an apology for this sort of self-repair with a more elaborate format like *I'm sorry that I misspoke*. And indeed, in our corpus we did not encounter any local virtual offenses of this sort that were apologized for in such an overbuilt way. Table 2 summarizes our typology of virtual offenses.

Table 2
Typology of virtual offenses.

Local Offenses
Endogenous to the interaction
Commonly arising out of problems with speaking,
hearing or understanding the talk
Also include exogenous contingencies that invade the production
or coherence of contributions to talk, or arrest its progressivity.
Distal Offenses
Consist of matters that are handled within the talk, but concern
past or future conduct that is construed to be problematic
(e.g., failing to meet past obligations, or declining future ones)

2.1. Analytical problems

While we were able to operationalize the nature of 'larger apologies' in terms of both offense and apology format, we found that many contextual features of the interaction complicated any straightforward association between the two. For example, a relatively extensive apology such as *I'm terribly sorry I forgot your birthday last week*, which might seem appropriately built for the lapse in question, might not come out in this form because the depiction of the lapse (e.g., *I forgot your birthday last week*) might have been stated earlier, leaving only *I'm terribly sorry* in the apologizing turn. This is in fact what happens in (3) in which Pam has asked Vicky to work some extra hours on Thursday. Vicky's refusal, citing an alternative obligation (line 1), begins prior to the segment reproduced here and concludes at line 9.

```
(3) [Erhardt:8:Alt:1-4]
 1  Vicky:   I: have a: class Thursday.
 2           (0.9)
 3  Vicky:   a:nd
 4           (0.2)
 5  Pam:     O[k a : : ]y.
 6  Vicky:    [yihknow,]
 7           (.)
 8  Vicky:   every Thursday .hh thou:gh starting December seventeenth
 9           I won't.hh
10           (0.8)
11  Pam:     ↑Oka:y,
12  Vicky:   Ok[a:y?
13  Pam:       [We:ll then thanks anyway.
14  Vicky:   Yeh I'm sorry [P a m,]
15  Pam:                   [Oh w'l] it's not yer problem.=
16  Vicky:   =Yeh it woulda been better if (.) see: (.)
17           I tr- I called you on Tuesday yesterday.
18  Pam:     A-ha:h,
```

Given that the refusal and its account have been fully articulated earlier, Vicky produces a more minimal *I'm sorry* apology in line 14. Although this apology is apparently fully accepted at line 15 (Robinson, 2004), on its occurrence it nonetheless represents a departure from the proportionality model that we operationalized.

In other cases, reverse difficulties may emerge. For example, a major explication of an ostensibly minor apologizable might be required because the contingency that gave rise to the virtual offense may need to be explained to the recipient. In such instances, a 'larger' apology would be generated. For instance in (4), Lesley has been summoned to the phone by a third party, but has arrived later than expected. After greeting the caller, she immediately apologizes for the delay using a substantially expanded apology format which includes both a naming of the apologizable, as well as an account for the delay (lines 3—6/8).

```
(4) [Field:1:8:1]  ((Modified standard orthography))
 1  Lesley:  Hello:,=
 2  Mum:     =(Hello),
 3  Lesley:  I'm sorry tuh keep you, I've jus' been stickin:g
 4           .h something on thee front a' thee: uhm
 5           cooker. .h because:: uh: (.) the top a' the
 6           knob fell off.
 7  Mum:     Oh: I see[:,
 8  Lesley:          [A:nd uh I've got (.) UHU dripping down the cooker.
 9  Mum:     eu:kh hih-hih-hih
10           (1.0)
11  Lesley:  How are you:?
12  Mum:     Oh fine thanks love,
```

These kinds of contingencies effectively obscured any possibility of displaying the principle of proportionality as a simple linear association between the respective 'severity' of virtual offenses and apology formats.

Our analysis was further contaminated by the clustering of local virtual offenses within the domain of repair. The self-corrections involved in repair can vary from minor mis-sayings (as in (2)) to retreats from significant faux pas involving mistakes about the gender of an interlocutor or the age of a child (e.g., Heritage and Raymond, 2016: 16—17). Notwithstanding this variability, we treated all expressions of regret (e.g., *Sorry* or *I'm sorry*) associated with actions commissioned by the speaker as *de facto* apologies. We asserted this view in line with Robinson (2006), who argues that the apology-based format (*I'm sorry?* or *Sorry?*) communicates a stance that trouble responsibility belongs to repair-initiators, rather than to their addressees, and in the spirit of Goffman's view of 'virtual offenses' — "worst possible readings of an action that maximize either its offensiveness to others or its defaming implications for the actor himself" (Goffman, 1971: 108). Accordingly we do not agree with Rieger's (2017: 561) suggestion that repair be excluded on the grounds that it may not involve offenses that are specifically moral.

However the inclusion of cases of repair among the local virtual offenses complicated our analysis of the proportionality principle in the following way. Since at least one aspect of virtual offenses associated with repair concerns the break in progressivity that repair involves, more expanded apologies would themselves expand the initial break in progressivity, thereby compounding the virtual offenses committed. Arguably, therefore, the minimized apology formats associated with repair are mandated by the repair context, rather than being simply associated with the minimal nature of the virtual offenses involved.

In sum, while we were preoccupied with the investigation of apologies packaged within a single turn, data such as excerpt (3) above suggested that a more realistic approach to apologies would take into consideration the fact that they are spread across sequences of actions. Finally, we neglected the broader allocation of responsibilities and obligations that emerges when larger sequences of action and their context are taken into account. For example, in (3) above, the sequence is initiated by Pam's request that Vicky pick up extra hours at work, a request that Vicky's schedule apparently obliges her to reject. Having placed her in this bind, Pam incurs an obligation to minimize the nature of the virtual offense and its impact on her plans, which she does when she says "Oh w'l it's not yer problem." (line 15). These and other factors necessitated a recon-ceptualization of how the 'seriousness' of a given virtual offense was analytically operationalized, to which we now turn.

In the remainder of this paper, we describe a range of cases in which mismatches and recalibrations of apologies occur, illustrating the participants' orientations to the principle of proportionality. Subsequently, we compare two cases in which ostensibly the 'same' virtual offense is addressed in very different ways by the apologizing party, and use them to consider different approaches to conceptualizing and analyzing the operation of the principle in everyday life.

3. Data and methods

In this paper, we draw on a collection originally assembled by Gail Jefferson for a summer school workshop in Odense, Denmark in 2003 (see Drew et al., 2016). Jefferson made a systematic collection of "Apologies and 'Apologizables'" from all the then-available US and UK telephone call corpora (totaling over 200 cases), to which one of the current authors added further examples for the research which has resulted in this study (see also Cirillo et al., 2016; Drew and Hepburn, 2016; Fatigante et al., 2016; Galatolo et al., 2016; Heritage and Raymond, 2016; Margutti et al., 2016; Pino et al., 2016). In developing this paper and its predecessor, we have not encountered significant distinctions between the American and British data.

4. Repaired and re-calibrated apologies

In what follows, we make the case for regarding the 'seriousness' of a (virtual) offense or transgression as not so much an intrinsic property of the conduct itself (that is, the conduct that is being treated as an offense), but rather as an emergent property of the reflexive construction or format of the apology, and of the interaction with the apology recipient. So that whereas before our proposal of proportionality between offense and apology rested on an attempt at developing an objective, intrinsic and 'measurable' level of severity, we are now revising that account in light of the ways in which participants *construct* 'severity' *reflexively*, through such features of the design of the apology as its agentive expression, its extent or protractedness, its overt representation of the offense, and its inclusion of an account. This relationship of proportionality between the design of the apology and the severity of the offense is, we suggest, in the first instance something to which participants themselves orient, in constructing an apology to be proportional to their assessment of the severity of the offense.

The norm of proportionality is visible (to the analyst, at any rate) only indirectly, in the design features we have begun to explore in the previous section. However, speakers' orientations to the 'seriousness' of an offense are manifest, and come to the interactional surface, in cases in which they adjust or re-calibrate the design of an apology, to select a form that they take to be more appropriate than the initially chosen form, *to their assessment* of the level of severity of their transgression.

However, even before we come to consider such adjustments to or (self-)corrections of apologies, it is worth bearing in mind that the matter of whether or not an apology is relevant may already be the focus of divergent assessments between participants about whether someone's conduct amounted to a transgression at all, and hence whether an apology was due. Drew and Hepburn (2016) showed that in cases of 'absent' apologies, in sequences in which an apology is *not* offered, an 'offended party' may treat an apology as having been due, thereby treating the other's conduct as a transgression for which an apology would have been appropriate. The non-provision of an apology is tacitly an indication that the other treats their (own) conduct as not requiring an apology. Here is an example for illustration:

```
(5)   [Rahman:1:2:1] (Jessie phones her optician)
 1  Desk:    Hello Goodwin,
 2  Jessie:  Ehm good morning. eh it's Missiz Cha:ndra here, I ca:lled in on
 3           Thursday: to see: if uh I c'd make en appointment t'see Mister
 4           Fortis,
 5           (1.2)
 6  Jessie:  An', I haven't heard anything 'n I w'z wond'ring if: uh:m
 7           (Mister Fortis c'd see me) one day next week.
 8           (0.8)
 9  Desk:    Uh:m I'll j's check iz diary c'n you hold a minute (eh [please).
10  Jessie:                                                          [Yes,

           ((ca 9 lines omitted, receptionist asking for caller's name))

19           (7.0)
20  Fortis:  Hello:::,
21  Jessie:  Hello?
22  Fortis:  I tried tuh ring you on: Thursday evening.=b't I couldn' get'ny
23           reply::.
24  Jessie:  Oh dea:r. ehh hnh[h
25  Fortis:                   ['T's alright [Now?
26  Jessie:                                 [·hhh
27           (·)
28  Fortis:  [uh::
29  Jessie:  [eh Yes.
30  Fortis:  When dihyou wan'tuh come in Monda:y?
```

Jessie's account in lines 2—6 of trying to make an appointment with her optician, culminating in "I haven't heard anything," is formulated as a complainable matter (on which, see Drew, 1998; also Sacks, 1992, Vol. 2: 45—6, 151, 438, 441). When the optician (Fortis) comes to the phone, he straightaway informs Jessie that he tried to contact her, but *couldn't get any reply*, indicating that he did what he had been asked to do; the implication therefore is that the 'failure' was Jessie's, not his (not that 'there was no reply' but that 'I *couldn't get* any reply'). Jessie's response, "Oh dea:r" (line 24), treats this as a misfortune; she does *not* admit to any wrongdoing. Nevertheless Fortis's response in line 25 absolves her of a wrongdoing (highlighted), thereby treating an apology as having been due. Thus while Jessie was content to treat the outcome as a misfortune, Fortis treated it as the product of a failure on her part, making it explicit by absolving her of that failure. In brief, in seeming to grant absolution in line 25, Fortis oriented to a 'missing' apology, and hence the two participants differed as to whether Jessie's conduct amounted to a transgression (for this and more, see Drew and Hepburn, 2016).

In the following example, taken from an out-of-hours helpline call to a doctor's surgery (Drew, 2006), a husband is calling about his wife, whom he describes as *doubled up in pain* (line 1 onward). At the end of this fragment, the caller asks the doctor to visit, despite his wife's reluctance (first half of line 10), beginning with a form that suggests he was going to say *I'm afraid I've got to call you out*, which he adjusts in his self-correction to *I'm sorry but I've got to call you out*.

```
(6)    [Out-of-hours calls to doctor:1:2:15]
 1  Clr:    It's- the wife. An'- she's- doubled up in pain.hh
 2  Doc:    Yes,
 3  Clr:    An'- I mean- really in pain. ˙hh Now she's swe'in, ˙hh she's
 4          sick every ten minutes,
 5          (1.0)
 6  Doc:    Ri:ght,
 7  Clr:    An'- I (haven' got a clue) what's wrong.
 8          (0.4)
 9  Doc:    Wha[t did-
10  Clr:       [She didn'('e) wantin' a doctor, ˙hh but- I'm afraid I'm-
11          I'm sorry, but I've got af:- call ya out.
```

In the self-correction through which he constructs an apology (*I'm sorry*, line 11), the caller comes to treat his imposing on the doctor (i.e., asking him to visit during the evening) as an *apologizable* matter, and thereby as transgressive.

Until now we have considered two examples in which the issue is whether or not some conduct is to be treated as apologizable at all, and hence whether or not an apology should or will be forthcoming. Nonetheless, it is in speakers' adjustments to the design of their apologies that their orientation to the appropriate format for, and extent of, the apology comes to the interactional surface, and is most visible (see Drew, 2013). In this next example, there is no question that Philip treats his own conduct—being *a bit vague* (line 6)—as remiss and therefore apologizable. Here he adjusts the extent of the apology to be appropriate to his assessment of the nature of the transgression. He begins his apology in line 6 by seeming to use the *I'm sorry* form—that is, the form that would be appropriate to an offense that was exogenous to the interaction. Through the self-corrections in line 6, he cancels that form, and substitutes instead the agentless version—*Sorry (to be a bit vague)*—thereby selecting a more minimal design that is appropriate to an endogenous offense. The context here is that Lesley is trying to find out from Philip if two plants she and her husband had bought for him were delivered along with the other items that he himself had ordered, and he doesn't know.

```
(7) [Field:X(C)1:1:3:10-11]
 1  Philip:  I'll have a look I an' see if there's anythin:g uh (1.0) on
 2           the ticket though I don't know'f there would be: but uh anyreh
 3           I c'n look't the pla:[nts I'll see if they're ] there an']˙hh
 4  Lesley:                       [ e eYe : s   ↓ y e s .] F i n e .]
 5  Lesley:  [Oka_:y]
 6  Philip:  [I'M UH] (·) I suh- sorry t'be a bit va:[gue I'm
 7  Lesley:                                          [That's alright don'
 8           worry Philip=
 9  Philip:  =It w'z e-this heap, 'n I just
10           ˙hwhh[hhh I just sorta: ü-sorted th'm out=
11  Lesley:       [Yes.
10  Philip:  ='n put th'm in sorta safekeepin[g cuz um::[:
11  Lesley:                                  [Yes.      [It w'z ↑fortunate
12           we rang up when they were ↑coming to you ↑any↓way ↑wasn'↓it.
13  Philip:  Yehheh.
```

The self-correction through which Philip adjusts the form of his apology is evidence for his orientation to the normative character of the association between the form and extent of the apology, and whether the offense is endogenous or exogenous to the interaction.

In this next example (8), a store assistant adjusts and upgrades her *I'm sorry* apology in line 7 by adding the intensifier *real*, to *I'm real sorry* and further adds an account for her rejection (*we're jis' swamped with (daasiss)**). In doing so, she acknowledges a more serious or significant harm to the customer, Greta, than might have been conveyed through the comparatively more minimal *I'm sorry*.

```
(8)  [TCII(a):24:1-2]
 1   Greta:    Dih you have any tux shirts: um: used ones fer sale,
 2             (·)
 3   Store:    ·hh Ah what size wouldju need.=
 4   Greta:    =Fifteen'n a half thirty fou:r.
 5   Store:    Fifteen enna half fou:r ↑Jista moment please.
 6             ((ca 45 seconds))
 7   Store:    I'm sorry Ma'm we wouldn't at this ti↓:me.
 8             (0.3)
 9   Greta:    hhOhhh:::m mh[m::::.
10   Store:                 [I'm ril sorry we're jis' swamped with (daasiss)*
11   Store:    a:nd ah [(                      )]
12   Greta:            [Yeah I kno:w. The cleaners] just lost ar shi:rt.
13   Store:    [Oh:: (                        )]
14   Greta:    [En I've gotta have it fer tih]morruh mo:rning.
15   Store:     Well ↑why don'tchu come in en rent ↓one.
```

In this case, the upgraded apology is likely prompted by the customer's stretched *oh* receipt at line 9 (Local, 1996; Thompson et al., 2015), which implicates that her difficulty is more consequential than it may have originally appeared (see lines 12/14).

Finally, on the theme of subsequent self-corrections through which speakers adjust the seriousness they are attributing to the transgressive nature of their conduct, or the conduct of the other, here is an intriguing example of three apologies delivered in close succession. The scenario is that Dana has telephoned her boyfriend, who had telephoned her home late the previous evening. Each had been out the previous evening with different groups of friends. Gordon telephoned after returning home rather the worse for drink, but Dana was still out, and her mother answered the phone. His call had disturbed Dana's mother because she had expected Dana to be home some time before. In response to Gordon's *How are you?* in line 11, Dana first answers that she is *Okay* (line 13), a response that intimates an as yet unspoken problem (Jefferson, 1980; see also Pillet-Shore, 2003). Subsequently she retracts that in line 18 (note the *actually* in turn-initial position; Clift, 2001: 266).

```
(9a)  [Field:88U:1:4:1-3,9-11]
 1   Gordon:   Hello:,
 2             (0.4)
 3   Dana:     Hello where'v you been all morning.=
 4   Gordon:   =·hh HELLO!  ·h Uh:m (0.3) ·tlk I've been: (·) at a
 5             music workshop.
 6             (·)
 7   Gordon:   ·t·hhhh[h
 8   Dana:            [Oh:.
 9   Gordon:   In Ansford.
10             (0.6)
11   Gordon:   How are you.
12             (0.5)
13   Dana:     I['m okay
14   Gordon:    [·tplk
15             (·)
16   Gordon:   ·pk Good,
17             (0.5)
18   Dana:     Actually I'm no[t but (·) the(h)re we go:,=
19   Gordon:                  [·hhh
20   Gordon:   =·hhhh ehhhhe:hh ·hh But (·) yih (·) you are but you're not,
21             ·hh[h ((sniff)) Hey listen I'm sorry about last ni:ght, ·hmhh
22   Dana:        [(Right)
23   Dana:     [Mm:,
24   Gordon:   [·km·tch I didn't think your mum would go (0.5) ·pt·k
25             over the top,hh
26             (0.3)
27   Dana:     Ah:.
28   Gordon:   ·hhhhhhhh[h
29   Dana:              [Mm:,
30             (0.5)
31   Dana:     Well I said Geoff w'z ill.
```

It will be noticed that Dana's opening turn—*where've you been all morning*—is built as an "accusatory question" (Heritage, 1998: 305), both in terms of its construction, implying Gordon's unexpected unavailability (Schegloff, 1988) as well as its positioning so early in the call (Schegloff, 1986); so she was already orienting to some shortcoming on Gordon's part. After a fairly explicit indication that Dana is *not (okay)*, Gordon launches an apology for *last night* (line 21). It is noticeable that he frames it (with *hey listen*) as disjunctive from the previous sequence (Sidnell, 2007), and thus as disjoined from, and not occasioned by, Dana's previous expression of displeasure. The apology itself includes a rather vague and allusive reference to his virtual offense (phoning late, drunk, upsetting Dana's mother), which he does not specify. Furthermore he attributes some of the difficulty that arose to Dana's mother *going over the top* (lines 24–25).

Quite evidently Dana is not satisfied with Gordon's apology; her brief acknowledgements at lines 23, 27, and 29 (Gardner, 1997), followed by her reporting that she'd made up a story explaining why Gordon phoned so late (to tell her that Geoff was ill, line 31) hearably decline to accept Gordon's apology (Robinson, 2004). And by 'hearably', it seems that this is hearable to Gordon, who only a little later tries again to apologize, thereby orienting to Dana's lack of absolution as keeping the apology sequence open. Between their interchange in example (9a) and this next excerpt, (9b), Dana complains bitterly about her friends having ignored her silent appeals to go home the previous evening, after which she returns to the story she fabricated to cover for Gordon having telephoned so late at night.

```
(9b)   [Field:88U:1:4:1-3,9-11]
44 Dana:      Um  [if I'd said (.) Gordy rang=
45 Gordon:       [.k hhhhhhh
46 Dana:      =up to see if I['d come over tomo[row
47 Gordon:                    [.tlk          [.tch .tchla[k
48 Dana:                                                 [it wouldn't
49            'v: gone down too well.
50 Gordon:    ihNo well (.) I didn't think she'd uh (.) she'd panic
51            but I'm sorry about that.
52            (.)
53 Dana:      Well you see it's bec'z I use to get rung up at
54            really late times
55            (0.3)
56 Dana:      ·hhh An' I use t'be rung up at sorta like quarter to one
57            'n (·) it really frightened mother when it happened again
58            c'z it wasn't very nice.
```

After Dana explains that she told her mother a story to let him off the hook, Gordon apologizes again, though without much adjusting or upgrading his apology; the only changes are to substitute the deictic *that* for the equally indexical *last night*, and to refer to Dana's mother's reaction as "panic" rather than "going over the top". At the same time Gordon continues to use an apology form that elides his agency in the offense, and by extension his own responsibility or culpability for it; instead he continues to attribute the problem to Dana's mother (lines 50—51) as the one who "panicked". Just as there was little change to Gordon's apology, so too there is little change to Dana's response; she does not even acknowledge Gordon's apology, except perhaps in an embedded way when explaining why her mother panicked (lines 53—54/56-58). They talk for quite a bit longer, after which Gordon apologizes for a third time.

```
(9c)   [Holt:88U:1:4:1-3,9-11]
191 Gordon:   so I-I ca(h)lled.hh .hllh An' your mother wz there an' I said
192           ↑We:ll i-you know (0.2) if you c'd get 'er t'phone when she
193           comes in .pklktklmplk .t.hhhh=
194 Dana:     =[°hOhh: God,°]
195 Gordon:   =[° b u t ° m]-m-:-m
196 Dana:     .hhhh h I wz havin' a mass fi:t.=
197 Gordon:   =°.sk-k-k[l-plk°
198 Dana:            [°(thought)° Oh my God,h ·hhh 'n I couldn't work out
199           what on earth had happened.
200 Gordon:   ·nhh-·hh·hh
201 Dana:     hAn' well oh: dear.
202           (0.3)
203 Dana:     So I w'z really having fits.
204 Gordon:   Ohh hI'm so(hh)rry it [ w'z   p r o b l-  it  w'z  ]
205 Dana:                          [ (You  really  made)  me a ] blo:b.=
206 Gordon:   =It w'z a bad mo↑:ve. ·pk· k[ ·hh [· khhhh
207 Dana:                               [It wa[:s.
208 Gordon:   I w'z out of my brain at the ↓tihhme ahhnywahhy.↓hhh[hh
209 Dana:                                                         [I
210           thou-[:ght so.
211 Gordon:        [·hmhhhh ·tlak I r- (0.2) ·kn °hh° ·pl I w'z pissed.
212           hhmhhh ·ptchlklah ↓pishhed.h ·plk · k· khhhh °sozzled.°
```

Although he retains the *I'm sorry* format in his third apology (line 204), this time it is *oh*-prefaced (Heritage, 1984a, 1998, 2002; Pino et al., 2016). Gordon then adds an admission by overtly characterizing the offense as a *bad move* (line 206), which itself was upgraded through a self-correction to delete the qualifier *probably* (line 204). After a confirmatory response from Dana in line 207 ("It wa:s"), Gordon goes on to describe himself as 'out of his brain at the time' (line 208 et seq.). In response to this more elaborate apology, Dana becomes slightly more forthcoming, and though she continues to explain that she *used to get these phone calls (which were) really upsetting* (data not shown), she does so in a considerably more conciliatory tone.

In this case, across a series of apologies, Gordon eventually adjusts the weight and orientation of his apologies in reaction to Dana's withholding of absolution so as, by the end, to accept responsibility for his virtual offense and to account for its perpetration. It is only after this third version of the apology that Dana moves on to more explicitly contextualize her mother's concern (data not shown), and the focus on the previous night's events as an offense comes to a conclusion.

5. Two case studies

The preceding section illustrated that participants actively orient to the design of apologies as appropriately fitted—or not—to the virtual offenses they aim to remediate. In what follows, we explore this link between offense and apology in more depth through a comparison of two ways of dealing with what are ostensibly the 'same' virtual offenses.

The context of these cases is that Lesley, the leader of a local voluntary organization, is calling various friends and associates to establish whether they will be joining her at an upcoming meeting of the organization. The data below present successive calls to two women in the late afternoon before the meeting. As it will turn out, neither woman plans to attend the meeting, and neither has called to advise Lesley of this. Objectively, then, the two virtual offenses (not attending, and not notifying Lesley) involved in each call are 'identical'. However, the stance taken toward the offenses is dramatically different in each call.

In the first call (10), Lesley phones her close friend, Joyce. Having identified and greeted Joyce (Schegloff, 1986), she immediately proceeds to inquire about Joyce's attendance at the meeting (line 2). After a slight delay, Joyce's response is categorically negative (line 4). At this stage, Joyce has not acknowledged that her response involves any kind of offense. She has not apologized either for her decision not to go, nor for the fact that Lesley has had to call her to establish this decision; nor has she accounted for either of these virtual offenses. Following Lesley's registration of this decision ("No↓:."; line 5), which leaves the way open for the provision of an account, or an apology, or both (Raymond and Stivers, 2016), Joyce simply reiterates the decision (line 6) in overlap with Lesley's acknowledgment. Following the silence in line 7, Joyce reasserts the decision for a third time before acknowledging the offense by initiating an apology in line 8. It is noticeable that Joyce's apology lacks an explicit agent, a format that, as we have seen, is generally used to address the most minimal virtual offenses, and also glosses the offense simply as "that" (Margutti et al., 2016), thereby avoiding its explicit characterization.

```
(10)  [Field:C85:4:1-2] ((Modified standard orthography))
01    Joy:     °(Eight four eight seven: six oh five)°
02    Les:     Oh hello Joyce are you going t'the mee↓ting t'ni:ght,
03             (0.2)
04    Joy:     .hhh No I'm not Lesley.
05    Les:     No↓:. O[kay then:,
06    Joy:            [↓No.
07             (0.4)
08    Joy:     No:, sorry about that
09             (0.3)
10    Les:     [ °Right then°  ]
11    Joy:     [I: think I'm un]able to make that one:,
12             (0.4)
13    Les:     ↓No.
14             (0.3)
15    Les:     I don't think it'll be very ↓well supported,
16             (0.2)
17    Joy:     You don:'t
18    Les:     No.=Are you going t'North Cadbury,
19             (.)
20    Joy:     Eh:m I ↓might.
21             (.)
22    Les:     Y[es.
23    Joy:      [It's ub-i-it's: I'm not sure, b't ih-if I wen:t out
24             at a:ll  hh it would be: to North Cadb'ry of
25    Joy:     cou[rse °(c]z)°
26    Les:        [e↓Yes.]Are you not feeling very [we:ll,
27    Joy:                                         [°(        )°
28             (.)
29    Joy:     No I'm alri:ght,
30             (.)
31    Les:     Yes.
32             (0.6)
33    Joy:     °Ye:s I'm alright,°
34    Les:     °Oh:.°  hh Yi-m- You ↓know I-I- I'm boiling about
35             something hhhheh[heh  hhhh
```

Following a further gap (line 9), Joyce provides a pro forma account with "I: think I'm unable to make that one:,", which offers no substantive explanation for her nonattendance, and is merely registered by Lesley after a gap with "↓No." (line 13). Throughout this sequence, Lesley's stance is one that leaves open opportunities for Joyce to expand her rejection, but without overtly soliciting it. Nonetheless, Joyce does not volunteer any further information about her decision. Subsequently, Lesley makes two increasingly explicit efforts to elicit an account from Joyce (lines 18 and 26), neither of which is successful. Indeed, following Lesley's inquiry at line 26 ("Are you not feeling very we:ll,"), Joyce responds with an entirely unelaborated "No I'm alri:ght," (line 29), which she repeats virtually verbatim (line 33) following yet another opportunity to enlarge on this response (lines 30—32).

In this case, Joyce takes a stance toward her emerging virtual offense that consistently minimizes its status as an offense, and effectively avoids acknowledging that her decision requires any account or explanation. Moreover, her apology, as we have seen, is minimal, agentless, and substantively unspecified. All three of these elements index a stance which treats the virtual offense involved as insignificant and unworthy of anything but the most minimal form of apology. In terms of explanation, Joyce repeatedly passes over opportunities to volunteer the basis for her nonattendance in contexts where such explanations would have been relevant and appropriate. This resistance to accountability becomes more overt when Joyce simply blocks Lesley's attempts to furnish candidate explanations for her absence, in each case pushing toward sequence closure. It may be added that, in contrast to the next case we show, Joyce neither apologizes nor accounts for what may be understood as an additional virtual offense, namely the failure to call and notify Lesley (Drew and Hepburn, 2016). Subsequently, Lesley abandons the topic altogether and launches a story-telling (lines 34—35).

In our second case (11), things turn out very differently. As in the previous example, two virtual offenses are potentially in play: (i) Myra does not intend to go to the meeting, and (ii) she has not called to inform Lesley of that fact. Contrary to the prior case, Myra and Lesley are much less familiar with one another. This is evident in the fact that Lesley self-identifies (line 3) rather than relying on other-identification to achieve recognition (Schegloff, 1986), and that she does so with both first and last names, thereby not relying on her first name alone as a recognitional reference (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1996). After a 0.6-s pause and an initiation of repair in line 5, Lesley reissues this self-identification in the same format (line 7), this time with the rising intonation that is characteristic of try-marked referential expressions (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979).

At line 11, Lesley initiates her inquiry: "↑Are you thinkin:g of comin:g t'the meeting t↓'night". In contrast to Lesley's question to Joyce ("Are you going t'the mee↓ting t'ni:ght,"; line 2 of excerpt (10)), the directionality of the verb "coming" may suggest a proprietary relationship to the meeting that was not expressed in the design of Lesley's question to Joyce, while its more mitigated, indirect form is marginally less imposing.

Myra launches her response in line 12 with "D'you know", which may index a motivation to communicate a decision that is independent of Lesley's question (cf. Clayman, 2013), and is compatible with her subsequent "I w'z gun' to ring you in a short while", the tense and aspect of which describes the previously existing intention to call and, in possible further exoneration, characterizes the intended action as imminent (Raymond, 2019). Sandwiched between these two components of her response is the first of several apologies. In this case the apology format includes an overtly expressed agent and the intensifier "terribly". While it is possible that this apology was designed to preface an upcoming declination (to attend the meeting), its position within these two turn components renders it hearable as an apology for not having called sooner and thereby addressed to one of the two virtual offenses in play.

```
(11a) [Field:C85:3] ((Modified standard orthography)), part 1
01   Myr:  two eight?
02         (0.2)
03   Les:  Oh hello:, uhm  hh Lesley ↑Field ↓he:re?
04         (0.6)
05   Myr:  Sorry?
06         (.)
07   Les:  Lesley [Fie:ld?
08   Myr:         [↑Oh hell↓o hell↓o[: °Lesley yes sorry°
09   Les:                           [Hello,
10         (.)
11   Les:  ↑Are you thinkin:g of comin:g t'the meeting t'↓night
12   Myr:  D'you know I'm: terribly ↓sorry. I wz gun' to ring you
13         in a short while  hhh I've had a phone call fr'm ↓Ben,
14         he's down in Devon. 'n he's not gun' to get back
15         t'night,  hh[hh
16   Les:              [Ye[s.
17   Myr:                 [An' Mummy's goin' t'this khh-(.) ku-uh:m
18   Les:  that[k-[yes of cou:rse I]think my husband's goin't'that=
19   Myr:      [ca[r o l  conce:rt.]
20   Les:  =too↓:.=
21   Myr:  =I'm dreadf'ly sorry,[ it's hhh ]
```

Myra's next several turn components describe contingencies that, in conjunction with childcare obligations, will inferably prevent her from attending the meeting: Her husband is unexpectedly delayed on a business trip (lines 13—15), and her mother already has plans to attend a carol concert (lines 17/19). Without overtly stating the upshot of this information, Myra renews her apology in line 21, this time with the intensifier "dreadfully" and now hearably for her implied inability to attend, the second of the two virtual offenses in play.

Lesley's response in line 22 is a form of absolution "That's ↑alri:ght" that is matched to the emphatic nature of Myra's apologies: Syntactically it is non-minimal (Fox and Thompson, 2010), and intonationally it embodies a breadth of pitch movement that intensifies the absolution being performed (see Thompson et al., 2015). Notwithstanding this, Myra continues by complaining about her husband's unreliability, connecting this particular instance of being unable to attend with other recurrent difficulties in doing things "in the evenings" (lines 23/25/27/29). After an affiliative response from Lesley (lines 28/30), Myra renews her apology yet again in line 32, again using an expanded format by incorporating an overt agent and the prosodically upgraded intensifier "dreadf'ly". Lesley's responsive multiple "No no" again offers absolution, this time by resisting the progress of the apology (Stivers, 2004) and, by implication, its necessity.

```
(11b) [Field:C85:3] ((Modified standard orthography)), part 2
21   Myr:  =I'm dreadf'ly sorry,[ it's hhh ] hones]tly ah-ah- this=
22   Les:                       [That's ↑al]ri:ght]
23   Myr:  =is why: I (.) almost gave up doing ev(h)rything khh
24   Les:  [Yes.
25   Myr:  [(       ) in the evenings, bec[uz Ben is (.) well I'll=
26   Les:                                 [Yes.
27   Myr:  =not say he's unre↓liable I don't[mean that]b'y'know]wt=
28   Les:                                   [ Oh (we) ]k n o :w]hhh
29   Myr:  =I mean  hh[hhhhh
30   Les:            [This hap'n[s t'me ↓to]o
31   Myr:                      [U  h  :  m]
32   Myr:  Oh I'm dreadf'ly sorry ab[ou:t it I wz]ih-[in fac-
33   Les:                           [ N  o   n o ]   [(          )
34         (.)
35   Myr:  I've just been t'fetch Katherine f'm her piano l'sn I wz-
36         e-on the way back I wz thinking now how c'n I get round
37         ↓this. But I don't think I can Le[slie,
38   Les:                                   [No: not to ↑worry[:
39   Myr:                                                     [I'm
40         sorry- ↑can I↑ (.) join in as from sort'v: January
41         onward[(s
42   Les:        [Yes[ y o u-]y-you-di-you] ↑don't haf to ↓go to=
43   Myr:           [f'th'ne]w  y e a :r,]
44   Les:  every meeting, I[suppose li]ke the b-Evi↓kreech one˘
45   Myr:                  [N o : : - ]
46         (.)
47   Myr:  Ye:h no ih tha-:t's ri:ght. Th[at's how we use to=
48   Les:                                [Yes.
49   Myr:  =org'nize it b't th:↑ank you very m'ch f'r asking me
50         a[n : d  PLEASE]I uh I ↑am interested, but I(h)'m=
51   Les:   [↓Ri::ght then] (cz it)-
52   Myr:  =s:o(h)rry (h)abou(h)t t'ni(h)i[:ght.
53   Les:                                 [Ye::s that u-that dzn't
54   Les:  matter a[t a:ll.]°(      )°
55   Myr:          [ hehhh ]Alright=
56   Les:  =[O   k   a   y]
57   Myr:  =[thank you for] ↓ring[ing me]
58   Les:                        [ ↑BYE:]:[:,
59   Myr:                                 [Bye bye
```

Subsequent to this last apology sequence, Myra reports "j<u>u</u>st" (line 35) having gone to pick up her child Katherine (the one who will need the childcare), and her efforts to devise a solution to the problem of her competing obligations. Finally, in a turn component that is loaded with indices of dispreference (Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013), she announces "But I d<u>o</u>n't think I can Lesl<u>e</u>y," (line 36—37). This is the nearest that Myra comes to overtly stating that she will not go to the meeting, as is common in dispreferred responses of this sort (Drew, 1984).

Notably, after a further apology at line 39, Myra goes on to express her interest in the group at lines 40—41 (↑<u>can</u> I↑ (.) join in as from sort'v: January onward(s)), and subsequently uses contrastive stress on ↑<u>am</u> at line 50 to underscore her general interest in the meetings, notwithstanding her inability to attend the meeting in question (Schegloff, 1998; see also Raymond, 2017). With both actions, Myra apparently orients to her 'newcomer' status in the village, and to the fact that she does not yet have a 'track record' of reliable attendance at community meetings. She may thus face a reputational risk arising from non-attendance that Joyce does not face, and she makes considerable efforts to pre-empt negative conclusions from being drawn.

After yet another apology at line 50/52, and a further absolution at lines 53—54, the call closes following Myra's expression of thanks to Lesley for making the call, an expression that obliquely acknowledges once again her failure to have contacted Lesley earlier (see Clayman and Heritage, 2014).

5.1. Comparing the two apologies

As we have seen, both Joyce (Call 1) and Myra (Call 2) are vulnerable to having commissioned the same two virtual offenses: (i) Not attending the meeting, and (ii) not having called to inform Lesley of this. However, as a first observation, we can note that whereas Joyce only apologizes for not attending the meeting, Myra apologizes both for her nonattendance and for her tardiness in calling to inform Lesley, ultimately thanking Lesley for having called her. Thus the two women are divergent in their on-record recognition and acknowledgment of the virtual offenses potentially at issue.

Turning to the apologies themselves, quite dramatic differences in format are apparent between the two calls. While neither woman names the offense(s), Joyce's apology for not going to the meeting is agentless, lacks any form of intensification, and noticeably involves the withholding of an account. With regard to the second virtual offense (that is, not notifying Lesley), Joyce neither mentions, apologizes, nor accounts for this lapse. Myra's approach is completely different: (i) her apology for not attending the meeting includes an overt expression of agency, various intensifiers (both lexical and prosodic), and an elaborate account in the form of a narrative which directly addresses her nonattendance in terms of an inability to attend and which also indirectly mentions circumstances that have prevented her from calling sooner; and (ii) with regard to her failure to call and notify Lesley, Myra acknowledges her lapse (lines 11—12), presenting it as a deferral (lines 12—13), and finally accounting for the deferral in terms of a thought process that she herself was "just" (line 35) working through: "I wz thinking now h<u>ow</u> c'n I get r<u>ou</u>nd ↓this." (lines 36—37).

The apologies also exhibit remarkable differences in terms of timing and iteration. Joyce delays providing an apology until the third opportunity (having passed over earlier opportunities at lines 4 and 6). In line 8, after a further delay, she issues her minimal apology, and then passes on at least seven opportunities to provide an account (lines 11, 14, 16—17, 20, 23—24, 29, 33). Given the literature on accounts (Antaki, 1994; Heritage, 1984b; 1988; Raymond and Stivers, 2016; Robinson, 2016; Scott and Lyman, 1968), this is, by any standard, a significant pattern of withholding. There is no further re-issue of the apology. By contrast, Myra issues an apology in the first opportunity (line 12), and then renews her apology on four subsequent occasions (lines 21, 32, 39—40, 50/52).

Finally, with regard to the responses of the apology recipient, while Lesley withholds acknowledgment (line 9) of Joyce's minimal apology (line 8), she repeatedly provides absolution in response to Myra (lines 22, 33, 38, 53—54). These absolutions are designed to minimize or erase the virtual offense:

- "<u>That's</u> ↑<u>alri:</u>ght" (line 22)

- "<u>No</u> n<u>o</u> (   )" (line 33)

- "Ye:<u>:s</u> that u-that <u>d</u>zn't matter at a:ll. °( )°" (line 53-54)

A fourth act of absolution ("N<u>o</u>: not to ↑w<u>o</u>rry:"; line 38) directly addresses Myra's concern, and thus indirectly minimizes the virtual offense. These apology responses to Myra absolve her of the virtual offense with increasing force. This is manifested in terms of pitch, intensity, spread, and positioning, and also in increasingly explicit rejections of the assumed foundations from which the virtual offense is constructed (lines 42/44, 53—54).

These features of the virtual offenses, the apologies, and the recipient responses are summarized in Table 3 below:

Table 3
Summary of features of Calls 1 and 2.

	Call 1 (Joyce)	Call 2 (Myra)
Virtual offenses: 1. **Not going to meeting** 2. **Not having called**	1. Apologizes for not going to the meeting, but with no account 2. No apology or account	1. Apologizes for not going to the meeting and accounts for it in detail 2. Apologizes for not having called and accounts for it
Apology format: 1. **Not going to meeting** 2. **Not having called**	1. Minimal • Agentless • Not intensified • No account • Virtual offense not named 2. No mention; no apology	1. Non-minimal • Overt agent • Intensifier ("dreadfully" ×2) • Elaborate account • Virtual offense not named 2. Non-minimal: • Overt agent • Intensifier ("terribly") • Elaborate account • Virtual offense indirectly named
Apology timing	• Delayed • Singular	• Immediate • Multiple
Recipient responses	• Treats account as absent by pursuit • No absolution	• Multiple expressions of absolution • Absolutions increase in intensity across the apologies

All in all, these two apology sequences could scarcely be more different. Indeed, given that Joyce and Myra are ostensibly addressing the same two virtual offenses, the differences in their apologies are such as to threaten the principle of proportionality itself. How can a principle of this nature survive such blatant divergences in practice?

6. Three perspectives on the principle of proportionality

There are at least three positions that can be taken regarding the principle of proportionality: (i) The principle is an *ex post facto* lay rationalization of apology actions which has no status in fact, (ii) the principle is a statistical generalization which, like any other, includes many exceptions, and (iii) the principle is a constitutive norm for the interpretation of apologies and is protected from inductive disconfirmation by *ad hoc* secondary elaborations of belief. We will describe each of these in turn.

(i) According to the first position, which is supported by the partial failure of the statistical analysis in Heritage and Raymond (2016), there is in fact no stable relationship between the design of apologies and the 'objectively identical' weight of the virtual offenses they address. This position is supported at face value by our two examples in which a virtual offense of 'identical' weight is addressed with very differently formulated apologies. In this account, the objective character of offenses is 'privileged' as a way to underscore the variety of forms an apology can take, and hence the inapplicability of the principle as empirically unsupported. However, and alternatively, we could stress the objective character of apology formats as a way of documenting the variety of virtual offenses that a given format may be used to respond to. This position, however, is not well supported by the apology adjustments, described earlier, in which participants show themselves to be oriented to the principle and to be motivated to manage interactional issues arising from failures to implement it appropriately.

(ii) According to the second position, there is a general statistical relationship between the formulation of apologies and the weight of the virtual offenses they address. This position is supported by the partial success of our statistical analysis of proximal and distal virtual offenses in relation to apology formulations. According to this view, our last two cases are simply performance anomalies in which neither offender managed an appropriately designed apology. Notwithstanding the objectively 'similar' nature of the virtual offenses, Joyce's apology was too minimal while Myra's was over-built. Within this position, the principle functions as a statistical generalization or 'law': Insofar as this perspective has any interest in single cases (Schegloff, 1993; see also Clift and Raymond, 2018), it is only to the extent and in the ways that they support the generalization or are anomalous with respect to it. From the point of view of individual participants, 'failures' of the principle are understood as purely a matter of happenstance. To the extent that an academic proponent of this position is interested in anomalies, that interest would be limited to the observation that the accumulation of anomalies beyond a 'critical mass' might render the principle of proportionality into a 'noisy' or unreliable source of guidance. Such a position might also be congruent with a 'broken windows' theory of normative collapse: the accumulation of anomalies might erode the principle of proportionality to the point that it becomes non-viable. This 'distributional' perspective, with its focus on the 'general facts' of apology provision, is also at odds with the single case analyses in which participants are shown to engage in the active adjustment of apology formats in what is clearly a normative process (on which, see Drew, 2013).

(iii) According to the third position, to which we subscribe, the principle of proportionality is constitutive in how interactants evaluate apology formulations, or constructions. By constitutive, we mean that the relationship between a speaker's assessment of a virtual offense and the apology s/he constructs is unavoidably a part of the process in which apologies are formulated and received. According to this constitutive view, proportionality is less a matter of empirical outcome than it is a matter of the 'lens' through which apologies are inevitably considered as a matter of normative convention (see Wieder, 1974). From the point of view of the individual participant, therefore, whenever there is an apology, it

will be examined in terms of the operation of the principle. In those cases where proportionality is determined to have been fulfilled, the principle will be treated as upheld. However, in cases where there is a departure from the principle, participants (and observers) may adduce 'other reasons' for its 'failure', thereby reconstituting the normativity of the principle even while registering that the principle has been departed from.

For example, in case (10), in which Joyce's apology is limited to only one of the virtual offenses, and is delayed, reluctant, and minimal, an explanation might be found in Joyce's close friendship with Lesley. That is, it may be held that from Joyce's point of view, the offense is minor and, in view of her relationship with Lesley, a significant apology is perhaps unnecessary as the offense is unlikely to have adverse relational or reputational consequences. Indeed, this appears to be the case given that, despite the minimal character of Joyce's apology and the series of withholdings of an account, Lesley shifts topics to launch a story-telling in which she moves on to tell an adversarial story about a man they both dislike (lines 34—35 and beyond the data shown here). Such a telling, if it is to achieve the desired uptake from the recipient (Jefferson, 1978; Sacks, 1974; Stivers, 2008), depends in large part on the relationship between the two women, including shared knowledge of, similar negative experiences with, and general dislike of, the individual featured in the telling (see Bergmann, 1993: ch. 3; Holt, 1996; Heritage, 2011). Moreover, if such an account is on the right track, then more effusive apologies might be understood as indexing or even instantiating a more distant relationship (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In case (11), Myra's immediate, effusive, and repeatedly apologetic stance could index her position as a newcomer to the village and as having a concern with first appearances in her relationship with Lesley. Indeed, the fact that Myra goes out of her way to convey that her inability to attend tonight's meeting should not be taken as indicative of a more general lack of interest in participating in the group (lines 39—41 and 49—50) supports such an analysis.

So, in this interpretive scenario, Joyce's 'under-apologizing' and Myra's 'over-apologizing' are understood in terms of the overarching nature of their relationships with Lesley. Similar interpretive work might be implemented (by participants or observers) by reference to such characteristics of the individuals as personality, status, socialization, gender, and other features of identity. Regardless of the particular interpretation of any given instance though, the conceptions of 'under-apology' and 'over-apology' are nonetheless sustained by the principle of proportionality and simultaneously and reflexively sustain it: Although each case stands as an exception to the rule, each is nonetheless interpreted in such a fashion as to presuppose the rule and explain away departures from it (Garfinkel, 1967; Pollner, 1974, 1978, 1987). A substantial quantity of the sociolinguistics and politeness literature is, in effect, accomplice to these forms of local accounting.

7. Conclusion

From an external sociological point of view, the principle of proportionality can be regarded as part of normative social structure. From this viewpoint 'from without', the maintenance of the principle would seem to depend on the extent of conformity with its dictates. High levels of conformity would underwrite the extent to which the principle could be regarded by its users as a reliable and veridically predictive normative structure. From this perspective also, the extent of conformity to the principle could only be validated by measures operationalized from precepts deriving from linguistic and sociological research. In other words, the measure would have to be managed in terms of standards that are external to the specific situation of action in which the participants must act (Garfinkel, 1967). At the same time, classical sociological models (Parsons, 1951) argue that motivated compliance with the principle is a product of rewards and punishments in the course of socialization, and of the person's anticipation of sanctions in the event that the principle is departed from.

In this paper, we have attempted an alternative treatment of the principle of proportionality 'from within'. This has entailed looking at the production of apologies as situated actions that are fitted to specific contexts of interaction, and to the particulars of the virtual offenses commissioned. Accordingly, we examined specific aspects of turn and sequence organization in apology turns, looking at their repair by apologizers and their uptake by apology recipients—including methods that recipients have for showing that an apology is 'too much' or 'not enough'. Such an analysis may also involve the identification of elements in the talk that could serve as resources by which the participants can 'normalize' departures from the principle in an *ad hoc* fashion, thereby preserving the principle in the very context of apparent departure from it. Whether deployed by participants or social scientists, these elements of normative reasoning are perhaps the primary features that are implicated in the examination of apologies 'from within'.

A recurring theme in Sacks' lectures concerns the ways in which commonsense knowledge is somehow immunized from counter-examples and thereby, as he puts it, 'protected against induction'. In one of a number of passages on this topic, using the example of 'types of cars', Sacks observes that:

> [T]here are, for example, 'Mommy's cars' and 'Kids' cars.' And again, the phenomenon of 'Mommy's cars' is protected against induction. It isn't the case that if you think that a Pontiac station wagon is a Mommy's car, then if you see a kid driving one you say, "I guess I'm wrong." You see 'a kid driving a Mommy's car.' (Sacks, 1992:Vol.1: 394)

One could consider these categories as kinds of 'memes' and consider that their longevity may be a function of the extent and robustness with which their protection is maintained. Garfinkel (1967) identified *ad hoc* practices as one set of resources through which the coherence of practical reasoning and practical action is secured. Pollner (1974, 1975, 1987) described the interlocking array of practices through which society's members maintain their commitment to the existence of a jointly shared and objective world, drawing in part on Evans-Pritchard's (1937) famous discussion of the secondary elaborations of belief through which the Azande sustain their commitment to the existence of witchcraft and the efficacy of the 'poison

oracle' as a means of its detection. It is also the case that rules of conversational sequencing can be subject to elaborate defenses of this type (Heritage, 1984b: 209—212; 1987), and that this likely contributes to their longevity (for example, Boas, 2017).

Within the perspective taken here, 'protection against induction' will necessarily involve two components: (i) at the 'social level', protection will involve a general tendency for the rule to be 'observed' together with the operation of sanctions and adjustments in contexts where interactants find apologies to be wanting in proportionality; (ii) at the 'categorical level', protection will involve processes in which the rule is protected against induction by practices of secondarily elaborative reasoning that explain away discrepancies in ways that nonetheless reflexively uphold the principle itself. Viewed in this way, the visibility and maintenance of the principle are the product of a "vast amount of communicative, perceptual, judgmental, and other 'accommodative' work whereby persons, in concert, and encountering 'from within the society' the environments that the society confronts them with, establish, maintain, restore, and alter the social structures that are the assembled products of temporally extended courses of action directed to these environments as persons 'know' them" (Garfinkel, 1963: 187—88).

If our proportionality rule is one small element of normative social structure that is 'protected against induction', it is surely not the only one. Proportionality in absolutions (as occasionally noted in this paper), requests, and expressions of thanks and congratulations are surely other candidates for a similar rule, with similar processes of rule maintenance in place. Many other interactional rules are likewise candidates for parallel forms of constitutive analysis. While mid-20th century sociologists, such as Parsons (1951) and Merton (1957), invoked the psychological processes of adjustment and defense as explanations for the maintenance of normative frameworks, the argument of this paper is not fundamentally based on a 'hidden order' (Livingston, 2008) of special psychological mechanisms, but rather on the 'visible order' of practical reasoning which functions in a ceaseless process of social reproduction.

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Paul Drew (University of York, UK, and visiting professor Shanxi University China). My research focuses principally on the practices that constitute our interactional competences in ordinary social interactions. Co-edited (with Jorg Bergmann) a collection of Jefferson's papers on correction (*Repairing the Broken Surface of Talk*). Recent research includes recruitment of assistance in resolving the (mostly minor) difficulties of daily life (with Kobin Kendrick). Continuing research on medical interactions, currently in neonatology (conversations between parents of very premature babies) and the telephone delivery of therapy for people with anxiety and depression.

John Heritage is Distinguished Professor of Sociology at UCLA, USA. His research focuses on social interaction and its interface with social institutions, with particular reference to medicine and mass communication. His publications include *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology* (Polity Press, 1984), *Structures of Social Action* (co-edited with Max Atkinson, Cambridge University Press, 1984), *Talk at Work* (co-edited with Paul Drew, Cambridge University Press, 1992), *The News Interview: Journalists and Public Figures on the Air* (with Steven Clayman, Cambridge University Press, 2002), *Communication in Medical Care* (co-edited with Douglas Maynard, Cambridge University Press, 2006), and *Talk in Action: Interactions, Identities, and Institutions* (with Steven Clayman, Wiley Blackwell, 2010).

Chase Wesley Raymond is Assistant Professor of Linguistics at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His conversation-analytic research interests lie at the intersection of language and (different facets of) social identity, in both ordinary and institutional interaction, with a particular emphasis on grammar in interaction. Recent and forthcoming publications include articles in *Language*, *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, *Language in Society*, *Discourse Processes*, and the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*.