

Press Representations of Successful Public Apologies in Britain and France

Clyde Ancarno

Public apologies are one of the most prominent examples of migration of a speech act from the private to the public sphere and are now used in a range of public settings. Considering the role of public apology processes and the near absence of research into their presence in the media, studies targeting media representations of public apologies are particularly timely. This paper investigates press representations of successful public apologies: over 250 apology press uptakes (i.e. reactions to public apologies in the press) were examined. They were taken from popular and/or quality British and French newspapers. The aim is to explore the conditions of success (felicity) of public apologies, as represented in two different media cultures, and to propose a model capable of accounting for the overt conditions of success assigned to public apology speech acts in the texts under scrutiny. For this purpose the analysis focused on explicitly evaluative metapragmatic comments.

1. Introduction

Considering the evolution of public apologies and their coverage in the media, there is a wide range of ways in which linguists may examine this phenomenon. The present paper adopts a clear pragmatic focus, insofar as it looks at the conditions of success (or felicity conditions) of public apologies, namely those necessary for the successful use of the speech act in question. Being rooted in pragmatics, the concept of felicity conditions is an area of research which has received a lot of attention. Aijmer (1996), for example, suggests that a key felicity condition of apologies is that apologisers take responsibility and regret committing the offending act. This is echoed by Fraser (1981), who considers that the apologiser has to both admit responsibility for committing the offending act and to express regret for the offence caused by doing this act. Austin (1962), who first put forward the notion of felicity condition, distinguished between ‘essential’, ‘sincerity’ and ‘preparatory’ conditions. This was applied to apologies by Owen (1983), also including an emotional element (i.e. sincerity). The conditions he identifies for apologies are summarised below:

Preparatory condition

Rule (1). The act A specified in the propositional content is an offence against the addressee H.

Rule (2). H would have preferred S's not doing A to S's doing A and S believes H would have preferred S's not doing A to his doing A.

Rule (3). A does not benefit H and S believes A does not benefit H.

Sincerity condition

S regrets (is sorry for) having done A.

Essential condition

Counts as an expression of regret by S for having done A.

For Cunningham (1999), the issue of sincerity is at the heart of public apology processes. If sincere and accepted as such by the recipients, a public apology is successful. A significant aspect of emotions in public apologies, however, is that they are not (and cannot) always be genuinely felt by the public figures who apologise. This typically applies to historical apologies, where the public apologiser is perhaps more concerned with the display of emotion rather than genuinely felt emotions. Some scholars (e.g. O'Neill 1999; Gerstbauer

2005) have argued that the apologiser's sincerity and genuineness – the display of remorse, regret, repentance, guilt, contrition – play a lesser role in public apologising as compared to private apologising. Felicity conditions have also been studied from a philosophical perspective. For example, Davis (2002: 169) identifies a paradigm underlying the practice of public apologising and describes three 'prerequisites' (felicity conditions) for a successful or 'consummate' apology: (i) the consummate apologiser should believe he has transgressed; (ii) he should feel self-reproach; (iii) he should be disposed to avoid transgression. The third element, also referred to as 'promise of forbearance' (as in Olshtain's 1989 apology speech-act set), is mentioned recurrently in the apology literature, although it tends to be considered as a peripheral felicity condition.

Public apologies are sometimes defined as an essentially moral act (e.g. Nobles 2003). In some ways this implies that apologisers perceived as adhering to the moral standards of society are likely to enhance the felicity chances of their apologetic performance and to reduce the likelihood of their apology being rejected. On the other hand, public figures who seek social inclusion in the way they perform, deliver and frame their apologies, may be enhancing the felicity chances of their apologies (cf. Cunningham 1999).

Two distinct ways of accessing the felicity conditions of public apologies can be distinguished: firstly, through analysts' interpretations of what was said by a public figure when apologising; secondly, through media uptakes, that is media representations of what successful apologies are construed to be. This paper adopts the latter approach, since most people access public apologies almost exclusively through the media. It also considers such critical discourse concerns as the impact of explicitly evaluative stance-taking and investigates how explicit comments implicate overt felicity conditions by examining the apologiser's inferred intention.

Research into public apologies is in a relatively early stage, though apology research has had to branch out (e.g. into the field of business studies and international relations). Considering the paucity of discourse-led studies on public apologies (with the exception of Jeffries 2007) and the amount of media debate these have engendered, the discursive construction of public apologies surely deserves greater attention than that received so far.

2. Data and methodology

The term *apology*, as employed in this paper, refers to complete apologies, partial apologies and refusals to apologise interchangeably. Apologies are therefore understood to be any apologetic speech act or act of contrition treated as an instance of apology in the press.¹ This definition also acknowledges the degree of compliance of apologies with the situation at hand, particularly in the case of public apologies that are represented as a refusal to apologise by one newspaper but as a successful apology by another.

The corpus used for this analysis comprises 268 public apology press uptakes: 207 from British and 61 from French newspapers. The texts considered are hard-news reporting articles, that is articles where the objective voice of the reporter, rather than his/her subjective voice, is expected to prevail (Iedema et al. 1994). The uptakes cover a total of 34 different news stories: 26 in the British and 21 in the French subcorpus (13 are common to both subcorpora). They were published between 1 July 2006 and 30 June 2007 in the newspapers listed in Table 1.

The excerpts used to access overt representations of the felicity conditions of public apologies are passages where newswriters' evaluative stance is perceptible. Thus I extracted from the newspaper articles all explicitly evaluative metapragmatic comments, i.e. passages where newswriters explicitly attempt "to influence/negotiate how an utterance is or should

¹ This can be linked to the interesting issue of equivocality, insofar as a partial apology may be seen as equivocal and a complete apology as unequivocal. The degree of equivocality is sometimes mentioned in apology press uptakes.

have been heard or try to modify the values attributed to it” (Jaworski et al. 1998: 4). These are utterances where newswriters indicate to the reader how public apologies should be interpreted based, for example, on their wording or the performance of the public figure. Explicitly evaluative metapragmatic comments (henceforth, explicit comments) were examined to shed light on how the media foreground what successful public apologies are.

BRITISH	FRENCH
<i>The Daily Mirror/The Sunday Mirror</i> (tabloid)	<i>Le Monde</i> (broadsheet)
<i>The Guardian/The Observer</i> (broadsheet)	<i>L’Humanité</i> (broadsheet)
<i>The Independent/Independent on Sunday</i> (broadsheet)	<i>Le Figaro</i> (broadsheet)
<i>The Times/The Sunday Times</i> (broadsheet)	<i>Libération</i> (broadsheet)
<i>The Daily Telegraph/The Sunday Telegraph</i> (broadsheet)	<i>Aujourd’hui en France</i> (near tabloid)
<i>The Daily Mail/The Mail on Sunday</i> (middle-market tabloid)	
<i>The Sun</i> (tabloid)	

Table 1. Newspapers included in the corpus.

A close linguistic examination was conducted of the discourse displayed in these explicit comments to discover the extent to which press representations of public apologies are indicative of particular ideological positioning(s). The view adopted here that our access to public apologies is nearly always mediated and that media representations of public apologies reflect ideological positions is influenced by critical discourse analysis. Apology press uptakes are perceived as indicators of media dominance in public apology processes. In other words, like Bell and Garrett (1998), Philo (2007) and Cotter (2010), to name but a few, this paper is interested in the discursive processes that shape the news. Discourse is understood as a linguistic/semiotic construction of one social practice from a particular perspective within another social practice (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). The media texts investigated in this paper are thus considered to reflect existing ideologies, while also contributing to construct new ones or to transform existing ones, affecting apologies and more broadly the ‘discourse of accountability’ (see Buttny 1993).²

The effect of political inclination on news reporting was not considered, owing to the limited size of the corpus and to the fact that researchers (see Jaworski 1994; Bednarek 2006) have questioned the traditional view that media discourse varies in accordance with the political leaning of newspapers and their affiliation with the popular or quality press.

3. Explicit comments

The explicit comments in the corpus were found to have a bearing on individual as well as general public apologies, as illustrated by the examples below. Thus (1) communicates views on public apologies in general, whereas (2) focuses on Blair’s apology for the Slave Trade.

- (1) [Delarue for aggressive behaviour – Le Monde 03.04.07]
L’art consiste à s’excuser au bon moment. Franchement, carrément. [The skill consists of apologising at the right time. Frankly, explicitly]
- (2) [Blair for slavery (negative evaluation/explicit criticism) – The Guardian 01.12.06]
Given his reputation for saying sorry at the drop of a hat, it is interesting to note that *he has hardly ever actually apologised for anything. He claimed to have apologised for the lies about WMD in Iraq, for which he is widely held responsible, but never actually uttered the penitent words. He did say sorry for the Bernie Ecclestone scandal, in which it was alleged that his government exempted formula-one motor racing from its ban on tobacco sponsorship in return for a donation to the*

2 It is worth noting that public apologies have been perceived as a means to avoid accountability. Coicaud and Jönsson suggest that they can replace accountability or act as a “low form of accountability” (2008: 88).

Labour party, but at the same time vehemently denied the allegation. So his only full-fledged apology was for nothing at all.

In the corpus, explicitly evaluative stance-taking appears to be very limited. This may be predicted from the predominantly fact-focused, as opposed to opinion-focused, articles in the corpora (as in Bednarek 2006 and Iedema et al. 1994). There were 28 explicit comments in the British subcorpus but only five in the French subcorpus. This can partly be attributed to the smaller number of newspaper articles in the French subcorpus but also indicates a lower frequency of public apologies in the French media. Moreover, the comments in the French subcorpus showed interesting features which are presented in the next section.

3.1. French subcorpus

All but one of the five explicit comments in the French subcorpus appear in an article published in *Le Monde* on the Pope's first public apology for his remarks on Islam (the other one concerns French celebrity Jean-Luc Delarue's apology for assaulting staff aboard a plane). The article in *Le Monde* includes metacommentary on the phenomenon of public apologising as a whole. These draw attention to the paradoxical nature of public apologies and are used to convey a negative uptake of the Pope's apology. Indeed, *Le Monde* claims that the Pope should not apologise because he is innocent. This is illustrated in (3), which alludes to another apology that the newswriter thinks should be given. It refers to Martine Aubry's (female French politician) failure to apologise to Ségolène Royal (female candidate at the French presidential elections in 2007) for suggesting that her body shape would not allow her to win the elections. But public figures also use apologies to attend to the apologisee's face as well as their own face. An instance of this speaker-supportive perspective on apologies is found in Davies et al. (2007).

The view that a speaker may benefit from public apologies is particularly clear if we compare (3) and (4), which are taken from the same article. The former emphasises how apologies can attend to the apologisee's face, while the latter emphasises how apologies can attend to the apologisee's face.

- (3) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam (reference to Aubry's failure to apologise) – *Le Monde* 19.09.06]
Présenter des excuses reviendrait pourtant à se présenter sous un meilleur jour. [To apologise would nonetheless cause her to present herself in a better light]
- (4) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam (general comment on apologising) – *Le Monde* 19.09.06]
Présenter ses excuses sert à dénouer une crise. C'est un art difficile parce qu'il oblige à ravalier sa superbe. [To present one's apologies is a means to end a crisis. It is a difficult art which involves showing humility]

There are also references to apologies with the intent to avoid sanction or jail, illustrating the media's disapproval of public apologies used by apologisees for their own benefit. This is clear in relation to the lenient sanction Jean-Luc Delarue received after his apology for his aggressive behaviour on board a plane (5):

- (5) [Delarue for aggressive behaviour – *Le Monde* 03.04.07]
Ce geste [reference to the apology delivered by Delarue] a visiblement atteint son but. Jean-Luc Delarue, passible d'une peine d'un an d'emprisonnement pour avoir mordu un steward, en avoir injurié un autre et s'être laissé aller à des gestes déplacés sur une hôtesse de l'air, s'en est tiré avec une peine symbolique : un stage de citoyenneté de trois jours. Un tarif allégé ! [This act [reference to the apology delivered by Delarue] seems to have reached its aim. Jean-Luc Delarue, who could have been jailed for one year for biting a steward, insulting another and having inappropriate acts toward a stewardess, got out of it with a symbolic sentence: a three-day citizenship course. A light tariff!]

Another paradox is that observed in the article from *Le Monde*, namely the fact that in some instances public apologisees do not regret and even reject the interpretation that what they are

apologising for is an offence. In (6) the lead paragraph of the article suggests that this view is shared by the French media and might be responsible for the limited coverage of public apologies in France.

- (6) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam (general comment on apologising) – Le Monde 19.09.06]
Faut-il toujours *s'excuser* ? Ou présenter ses regrets ? *S'excuser* d'avoir dit ce que l'on a dit même si on continue de le penser ? Présenter ses regrets même s'il n'y a rien à regretter ? [Is it always necessary to *apologise*? To offer one's regrets? To *apologise* for what was said even if one carries on thinking it? To offer one's regrets even if there is nothing to regret?]

The other article identifying an explicit comment recalls the importance of timing and explicitness. The timing of public apologies is particularly relevant to historical apologies, which can be issued centuries after the offence occurred. This applies to Blair's apology for the Potato Famine (considered by *The Independent* of 2 June 1997 as the first apology expressed by British authorities), which regards an offence dating from the 19th century. Example (7) stresses the fact that public apologies are strongly time-related and need to be unambiguous.

- (7) [Delarue for aggressive behaviour – Le Monde 03.04.07]
L'art consiste à s'excuser au bon moment. Franchement, carrément. [The skill consists of apologising at the right time. Frankly, explicitly]

3.2. British subcorpus

In the British subcorpus, explicit comments appeared in 12 news stories.³ An important feature of the explicit comments in the British subcorpus is that they are used primarily to convey negative evaluations of apologies. These range from virulent to very subtle instances of criticism and thus play an important role in the presentation of unfavourable uptakes. The only evidence of positive evaluation in explicit comments is related to the Pope's apology for his remarks on Islam (8):

- (8) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam (positive evaluation) – The Daily Mirror 24.09.06]
I THINK the Pope should stop apologising. How many times does he have to say sorry to appease Muslim extremists?

In sum, these texts suggest that the 'news value' (Bell 1991) of negativity is explicitly preferred by newswriters in apology press uptakes. This confirms the status of negativity as the basic value in news discourse (see Bednarek 2006; Bednarek & Caple 2010 on the prevalence of negativity in environmental news stories in the Australian press). This may also highlight a correlation between explicit comments and negativity in the British subcorpus.

3.3. Formulation of apologies

When newswriters' assumptions about appropriate apology formulations are made explicit, it transpires that they believe public apologies should be conveyed by 'offers of apology' and that 'sorry-based expressions' are sometimes insufficient.⁴ Expressions of sorrow are portrayed as a way out of apologising, or more precisely of dealing with the consequences of an explicit apology. This is illustrated in the headline from *The Daily Telegraph* in (9) on Tony Blair's apology for the slave trade. Although this excerpt admittedly reports third parties' views, it echoes the unsupportive stance of the article it is taken from.

3 Big Brother for racism; Tony Blair for slavery; Blue Peter for phone-in issue; British Navy crisis; Bryan Ferry for anti-Semitism; Mel Gibson for anti-Semitism; Patricia Hewitt for issue concerning junior doctor; Mike Newell for sexism; the Pope for remarks on Islam; John Prescott for adultery; Bertie Ahern for donations; Zinedine Zidane for headbutt.

4 This distinction is based on Robinson (2004), who argues that 'explicit' apologies include Sorry-based units of talk (e.g. *I'm sorry*) and offers of apology, which Olshstein and Cohen (1983) termed 'illocutionary force indicating devices' (e.g. *I must apologise*).

- (9) [Blair for slavery (headline) – The Daily Telegraph 28.11.06]
Blair's deep sorrow for slavery '*is not enough*'. Critics say that Britain must pay a heavy price for its past.

Example (10) emphasises the fact that the historical apology under scrutiny required an 'unreserved' apology, which suggests that the felicity of explicit offers of apology is enhanced when modified by positively connoted lexical items (here *unreserved*). Considering the reference to reparations and the newswriter's unsupportive stance, presuppositions related to public apologies in news media seem to vary depending on the kind of misdemeanour under scrutiny.

- (10) [Blair for slavery – The Guardian 27.11.06]
Tony Blair is to express Britain's *profound sorrow* over the slave trade, but *will not give an unreserved apology* for fear it will lead to *claims for reparations* from descendants of Africans sold into slavery.

In the corpus, the importance of the construction of public apologies to their success in the media is also illustrated by their careful wording. Examples (11-13) seem to suggest that press uptakes make a correlation between the careful wording of apologies and negative evaluation. Thus reference to the care with which public apologies should be worded is found in articles that judge apologies to be unsatisfying.

- (11) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam – The Guardian 19.09.06]
Given the scale of the offence, *the carefully worded apology*, actually, gives little ground; he recognises that Muslims have been offended and that he was only quoting, but there is no regret at using such an inappropriate comment or the deep historic resonances it stirs up.
- (12) [British Navy crisis (Browne's apology for allowing the selling of stories) – The Daily Mail 17.04.07]
Of Mr Browne's statement? Did it constitute an honest apology?
Or, to use his language, even 'a degree of' an apology? Being Mr Browne, being this lawyer, *everything was phrased with care*.
- (13) [Ferry for anti-Semitism – The Times 17.04.07]
Not unpredictably, there has been a bit of a fuss about this. Now, Ferry has "apologised unreservedly for any offence caused", (*careful wording, that*) insisting that the comments were made from an "art history perspective" and that he has no political love of the far Right. Although he is pretty keen on the Countryside Alliance.
(Joke. Don't write in.)

The last example suggests that news media make specific presuppositions on which forms of account enhance or undermine the felicity of apologies.⁵ What the newswriter perceives to be a form of excusing behaviour in Des Browne's apology,⁶ for example, is represented as an undermining factor (14). Browne is portrayed as attempting to minimise the nature of the offence by suggesting that it was 'made in good faith'. The second passage in italics, on the other hand, indicates that the newswriter is sceptical, on the grounds that the apology did not provide enough explanation as to why the offence occurred. Alternatively, this may be seen to indicate that the newswriter considers explanations as a positive move in public apologies.

- (14) [British Navy crisis (Browne's apology for selling of stories; explanation) – The Times 17.04.07]
Des Browne admitted that he had made a "mistake" in the naval captives' cash-for-stories debacle. He admitted very little more. He expressed regret that his handling of the affair had brought Britain's Armed Forces into disrepute, *but he attempted to excuse himself by saying that the decision was made in good faith*. He accepted responsibility for what happened, *but gave only the barest explanation of why such a decision was taken*.

5 The boundaries between speech acts classified as forms of account have been disputed (e.g. Robinson 2004). In this paper, apologies are considered to be a fifth form of account alongside Schonbach's (1980) four broad responsibility-focused categories: namely excuses, concessions, justifications and refusals.

6 This apology occurred as part of the British Navy crisis and regards the fact that Des Browne, then Defence Secretary, allowed the selling of stories by members of the sailing crew when they returned from Iran.

The following sections present further observations on the British subcorpus, focusing on how the success of public apologies can be gauged through explicit comments in the press.

3.4. Enhanced apologies

Explicit comments in the British subcorpus also indicate that the success of public apologies can be enhanced by certain elements. The importance of regret is an instance of this. In (15) it is foregrounded when relating the Pope's apology for his remarks on Islam, as the absence of regret in his act of contrition prompts the newswriter's criticism.

(15) [The Pope's apology (importance of regret) – The Guardian 19.09.06]

Even more bewildering is the fact that his choice of quotation from Manuel II Paleologos, the 14th-century Byzantine emperor, was so insulting of the Prophet. Even the most cursory knowledge of dialogue with Islam teaches – and as a Vatican Cardinal, Pope Benedict XVI would have learned this long ago – that reverence for the Prophet is a non-negotiable. What unites all Muslims is a passionate devotion and commitment to protecting the honour of Muhammad. Given the scale of the offence, the carefully worded apology, actually, gives little ground; he recognises that Muslims have been offended and that he was only quoting, *but there is no regret at using such an inappropriate comment or the deep historic resonances it stirs up.*

Recognising the offence that one is being accused of is represented as another important element. Denials of offence are therefore undermining elements for public apologies. This is apparent in one of the uptakes regarding Tony Blair's apology for the slave trade, where some of his other apologies are discussed (e.g. his disputed apology for the war on Iraq):

(16) [Blair for slavery – The Guardian 01.12.06]

Given his reputation for saying sorry at the drop of a hat, it is interesting to note that he has hardly ever actually apologised for anything. He claimed to have apologised for the lies about WMD in Iraq, for which he is widely held *responsible*, but never actually uttered the penitent words.

He did say sorry for the Bernie Ecclestone scandal, in which it was alleged that his government exempted formula-one motor racing from its ban on tobacco sponsorship in return for a donation to the Labour party, *but at the same time vehemently denied the allegation.* So his only full-fledged apology was for nothing at all.

There is also a set of context-bound felicity conditions which emerge from the explicit comments in the British subcorpus. The timing of apologies, already identified in the French articles surfaces here especially when the lexical items *finally* and *grudgingly* occur in the explicit comments. These adverbs are used to indicate that a delay or reluctance in the delivery of the apology is negatively evaluated. Thus examples (17-18) clearly imply that public apologies should be made quickly.

(17) [Ahern for cash donations (headline with capitals in original) – The Daily Mail 04.10.06]

Bertie *finally* says sorry (*grudgingly*); THE GREAT EVADER TAOISEACH ADMITS AN 'ERROR AND MISJUDGMENT' BUT STILL INSISTS THAT HE DID NOTHING WRONG ACCEPTING MONEY FROM BUSINESSMEN

(18) [British Navy crisis (Browne's apology for the selling of stories) – The Guardian 17.04.07]

As mea culpas go, it was not exactly gushing. Des Browne, the defence secretary, having been nagged, cajoled and hectored, *finally* admitted to "a degree of regret that can be equated with an apology". *Pressed* to use the word "sorry", he said, *grudgingly*: "If you want me to say 'sorry', then I am happy to say 'sorry'." He said it in a very loud voice, which made it sound even less rueful.

Another contextual felicity condition relates to the assumption that public apologies should not be 'forced'. Looking at the corpus, the notion of a forced public apology appears to be that it is delivered reluctantly by the apologisee, which undermines the apology concerned. References to 'forced' public apologies are recurrent,⁷ as in the following comment:

⁷ In the British subcorpus, there were 30 occurrences of the stem *force* (covering *forced*, *forcing* for example) as a collocate of the stem *apolog-* (covering the nouns *apology*, *apologies* and the verb *apologise*).

(19) [Gibson for anti-Semitism – The Independent 15.11.06]

Mel didn't choose to go on television because he wanted to appear across the land chatting about his family, his career or his seven children. He was forced into this extraordinary act to get his new film released. This act of "repentance" was step one in the marketing plan for his epic, *Apocalypto*. Over a year ago, Mel struck a lucrative distribution deal for the project with Disney, which owns ABC.

3.5. Intentions of apologisers

Beside the use of other forms of account, the press represents some of the long-term goals of apologisers as factors undermining the success of public apologies. Although from an analytic point of view we cannot access apologisers' intentions, explicit comments suggest that the media make presuppositions regarding the intentions of public figures that discredit apologies. For example, apologisers who are seen as trying to avoid a full-blown apology (perhaps to save face or avoid legal liability) can be portrayed negatively. References to litigation or reparation in particular suggest this. Thus Blair's use of a non-explicit apology formulation in (20) is interpreted as a means to avoid legal claims and reparations:

(20) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Mail 27.11.06]

There have been fears in Whitehall that a formal apology could open the way for legal claims and the payment of reparations to the descendants of slaves.

Furthermore, negative evaluation targets public figures who appear to be exploiting apologies for their own benefit. The explicit association between public apologies and their potential to limit damages illustrates this point. For example, apologies for the Blue Peter phone-in scam or Mel Gibson's apologies for his anti-Semitic comments while drunk are depicted as exercises in damage limitation (21-22). These comments clearly invite a negative interpretation of the apology.

(21) [Blue Peter for phone-in issue – The Guardian 15.03.07]

The BBC shifted into damage limitation mode yesterday. Richard Deverell, controller of BBC Children's Television, said: "The decision to put a child on air in this way was a serious error of judgment". Blue Peter presenter Konnie Huq last night told viewers: "We'd like to apologise to you because when this mistake happened we let you down".

(22) [Gibson for anti-Semitism – The Daily Telegraph 02.08.06]

But the damage limitation exercise has apparently come too late to save Gibson's collaboration with ABC – a television mini-series based on the memoirs of a Dutch Jew who hid from the Nazis during the Second World War.

Still in the same vein, apologies used by public figures to keep their jobs are also recurrently criticised in the British subcorpus, as suggested in relation to apologies by Des Browne, Mike Newell and Mel Gibson (23-25).

(23) [British Navy crisis; Browne's apology for the selling of stories – The Times 17.04.07]

And, with some petulance, he told the Commons that if Members wanted him to say it, he was "happy" to say that he was sorry. *It was hardly the robust statement to save a tottering career. However, Mr Browne looks set to survive.*

(24) [Newell for sexism – The Times 16.11.06]

Newell had plenty to say for himself after his team lost to Queens Park Rangers on Saturday, *but sorry seems to have been enough to save his £ 400,000 a-year job last night.*

(25) [Gibson for anti-Semitism – The Independent 15.10.06]

He sat, pinned in his chair, a patch of sweat glistening through the thick makeup. The beard was gone, the crucifix he wears nowhere in sight. *Last Friday, Americans woke to the sight of the world's highest-earning actor trying to save his career by apologising on national television.*

Considering that Tony Blair's apology for slavery is public-official, the media's suggestion that he may have used it to favour his own positive face, i.e. 'win plaudits' (26), may appear

more surprising than if he had issued a public-personal apology.⁸ As previously stated, Blair's expression of 'deep sorrow' for slavery was criticised in many newspapers; his apologetic performance, however, is considered to be positive by *The Daily Mail* (26), although the article stresses negativity as a news value.

(26) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Mail 27.11.06]

By aligning himself with campaigners who have long been pressing for western countries to apologise for their past failings, *Mr Blair hopes to win plaudits*.

A further example of how the media convey negative evaluations of apologisers seeking their own benefit is observed below:

(27) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Telegraph 29.11.06]

Expressing his "deep sorrow" for Britain's role in the slave trade, as he did this week, is the kind of empty, trendy grandstanding gesture that glamorises him and this generation at the expense of those who went before us.

The prominence of negative evaluation in explicit comments indicates a belief that public apologies should be costly to the apologiser. This echoes the traditional view in apology research that apologies are essentially hearer-supportive speech acts (see Edmondson & House 1981). However, speaker-supportive approaches to speech acts have been upheld by social psychologists in the past (Meier 1998) and applied to public apologies, which has led Davies et al. (2007) to question how costly apologies are to the speaker. These studies are useful in that they highlight that public apologies may be used to maintain or restore apologisers' reputation. Indeed, most displays of public contrition can be loosely equated to exercises in public-image preservation and rarely consist of unreserved heartfelt apologies. Further evidence of the media's presupposition that public apologies should be costly to the apologiser is the suggestion (in the British subcorpus) that they are too easy. Blair's expression of 'deep sorrow' is not acceptable because it is 'not enough' (28) or because he apologises too often (29). These both suggest that the apologiser is not trustworthy.

(28) [Blair for slavery (headline) – The Daily Telegraph 28.11.06]

Blair's deep sorrow for slavery 'is not enough' Critics say that Britain must pay a heavy price for its past.

(29) [Blair for slavery (Blair's propensity to apologise) – The Guardian 01.12.06]

Given his reputation for saying sorry at the drop of a hat, it is interesting to note that he has hardly ever actually apologised for anything.

Explicit comments also signal that public figures should take responsibility in their apologies. This explains the views presented in news texts that historical apologies are inherently flawed because the apologiser bears no responsibility. The way *The Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Mail* report Blair's apology for the slave trade is an illustration of this:

(30) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Mirror 29.11.06]

TONY Blair has now expressed regret for Britain's involvement in the slave trade. Marvellous. *Although it's always better to apologise for something for which one is directly responsible.*

(31) [Blair for slavery – The Daily Mail 27.11.06]

The statement marks the third time *Mr Blair has expressed regret for historical events for which he bears no responsibility*. In 1997, he expressed regret for Britain's role in the Irish famine of the 19th century. Last year, he apologised for the imprisonment of the Guildford Four, who were wrongly convicted of pub bombings when he was still student.

8 The distinction between these two categories of public apologies was introduced by Lakoff (2001), who considers them both as examples of 'one-off public apologies' indicating a different relation of the apologiser to the offence. In the case of public-official apologies, the public figure apologises on behalf of an institution (e.g. a nation state in Blair's apology for the slave trade).

Both moves were widely seen as political manoeuvres to placate Irish republicans in the search for a peace deal in Northern Ireland.

Explicit comments in British articles supporting public figures' apologies may also indicate that contrition is not (or no longer) necessary or required. The view in (32) corresponds fairly well to the traditional attitude that apologies should be avoided, because they are perceived as a sign of capitulation; it is best summarised by the old maxim 'Never apologise and never explain', attributed to former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli.

- (32) [The Pope for his remarks on Islam – The Daily Mirror 24.09.06]
I THINK *the Pope should stop apologising*. How many times does he have to say sorry to appease Muslim extremists?

Most of the overt conditions of success made overtly in such explicit comments suggest that the press represents apologies as a difficult speech act to deliver. In (33-34) below, John Prescott's reluctance to apologise is stigmatised and the apology is framed negatively.

- (33) [Prescott for adultery – The Times 29.09.06]
For John Prescott, sorry has always been the hardest word. Yesterday was no exception, but he had no choice. I am sure that, when he had imagined his last conference speech, it was always a rabble-rousing triumph. Instead, it began with a whimper.

- (34) [Prescott for adultery – The Independent 01.01.06]
This Sunday, let's spare a moment's sympathy for *a real one-off in British politics. Not Mr Prescott, who finally managed to say sorry* to loyal party members in Manchester some months after he had been caught with his pants down and his hands up Tracey Temple's skirt, but his long-suffering wife.

4. Felicity conditions

The findings of this investigation can be presented as a list of felicity conditions for public apologies. It consists of six tenets which are by no means fixed, exhaustive or in any way prescriptive of what public apologies should be. In view of the limited scale of the French subcorpus, the results reflect primarily the presuppositions of British newswriters. Considering that several aspects were sometimes exposed in the same article, it may be argued that these tenets are not mutually exclusive but can co-occur. The system does not impose a particular way in which felicity conditions should be used (e.g. all conditions should be met for the apology to be felicitous), nor does it introduce a hierarchy within the felicity conditions. However, if we follow Turnbull's suggestion that "felicity conditions are conventions that speakers and addressees use as a code to produce and recognise actions" (2003: 50), it may be argued that the more tenets a public apology has, the higher its chances of success. Indeed, the use of multiple tenets may be seen to evidence the apologiser's attempt to encode his/her apology in a way that will support the hearer in his/her decoding of the message as an apology. Conversely, it is apparent that some of these tenets cannot apply to certain public apologies (historical apologies, for instance, are by definition not prompt).

- | | |
|-------|--|
| (i) | Public apologies should be prompt. |
| (ii) | Public apologies should be performed by explicit apology expressions. |
| (iii) | Speakers should be personally responsible for the apologised event. |
| (iv) | Speakers should explicitly take personal responsibility for the offence or admit guilt. |
| (v) | Public apologies should be delivered willingly. |
| (vi) | Public apologies may be undermined if:
... public figures perform their apologies by means of an expression of sorrow or regret;
... public figures use apologies for their own benefit. |

Figure 1. Public apology felicity conditions.

These findings can also be compared to earlier findings, as the felicity conditions listed in Figure 1 overlap with Marrus's (2007: 79) claim that:

With minor variations, complete apologies include the following four features:

1. an acknowledgment of a wrong committed, including the harm that it caused;
2. an acceptance of responsibility for having committed the wrong;
3. an expression of regret or remorse both for the harm and for having committed the wrong; and,
4. a commitment, explicit or implicit, to reparation and, when appropriate, to non-repetition of the wrong.

However, the model in Figure 1 helps to understand the broader phenomenon of apology press uptakes, which implies a few challenges. First and foremost, it confirms a premise to which I adhere, namely that “all journalism is ultimately opinion journalism in that it is always possible to detect signs of authorial stance even in so-called ‘hard-news reporting’” (Pounds 2010: 107). However, it also suggests that newswriters make clear assumptions about what successful public apologies are or should be. For example, there seem to be clear assumptions regarding the formulation and timing of apologies. It is also essential to recognise that media presuppositions about the conditions of success of public apologies can be indirectly constructed, for example through implicitly evaluative metapragmatic comments. This is inspired by Martin and White (2005), who acknowledged that stance can be conveyed both explicitly and implicitly, depending on the type of discourse. In the press, it can vary depending on the type of publication or section of a publication (Pounds 2010).

The unpredictable way felicity conditions for public apologies are represented by the media poses another challenge. This is shown, for example, in the case of press uptakes about the same event that suggest very different views on the performance of the apology (which recalls the news-value driven nature of many press uptakes). These media presuppositions need to be viewed in their context, acknowledging that news texts are constrained by the political/ideological positioning imposed by the newspaper and by contextual factors specific to apology news stories. The latter include, for example, the social context in which apologies are delivered, whether or not an apology was preceded by a demand for apology, and whether an apology is judged to be trivial (which can lead to more humour-focused uptakes).

Finally, it is important to stress that the overt media presuppositions identified in this paper play a significant role in shaping the representation of successful public apologies. Considering that explicit comments are characterised by negativity, continued exposure to metapragmatic discourse is likely to impact negatively our perception of public apologies. Given the stakes involved in certain public apologies (e.g. those in conflict-resolution processes), the potential undermining effect of such media representations deserves to be acknowledged. This means that media representations of what constitutes a successful public apology cannot be disassociated from the news discourse of which they are part.

5. Conclusion

Public apologies, as overtly represented in British and French press uptakes, indicate how subjectivity permeates even the most objective forms of news discourse. In addition to issues of explicitness and implicitness of evaluative stance-taking, it is crucial to realise that media presuppositions concerning the success of such uptakes are heavily embedded in the context in which apologies are delivered⁹ and the paper accordingly highlights the impossibility of formulating a systematic account of public apologies.

⁹ In a study of student email apologies to academic staff, Davies et al. (2007) rightly note that linguistic research on apologies mostly ignores the co-text. Some researchers claim that disregarding the influence of sociological, political and historical factors can only lead to erroneous interpretations of public apologies. For Murata (1998: 502), “real-life incidents which involve social, historical, economic and political issues” – including public apologies – require a linguistic, cultural, social and historical perspective.

As for ideology in news discourse, the results indicate that British and French newspapers want to be perceived as adhering to standard views of apologies, which centre on private apologies (and thus fail to account for the specificities of public apologies) and overlook the diversity of public apologies. The findings primarily identify elements of the apology process that are believed by newswriters to be easily recognisable by readers as prototypical of successful/questionable apologetic behaviour.

This paper confirms the validity of public apology press uptakes as a source of evidence. The fact that this speech act is not necessarily found in the realisation of public apologetic speeches or letters corroborates Thomas's (1995) argument that the perlocutionary effect, commentaries by speakers and co-text or subsequent discourse of speech acts can all contribute to understanding speech act realisation. In addition, the investigation of apology media uptakes uncovers an important facet of public apologies, namely the non-dyadic pattern of sociation in public apologetic discourse.¹⁰

Many of the questions we may have about public apologies are being answered by ongoing research in pragmatics (e.g. Kimoga 2010), intercultural pragmatics (Glinert 2010), psychology (Fehr & Gelfand 2010), the political sciences (Murphy 2010), communication studies (Edwards 2010). Considering the limitations of this study in terms of gauging culture-specific characteristics of apology media uptakes, further investigations into possible cross-cultural variations in apology press uptakes are timely. Future work could turn to the examination of other apology uptakes in the print and broadcast media, and to the study of opinion-led apology press uptakes (e.g. editorials, leading articles, comments articles, debate articles or opinion articles bearing on public apologies), highlighting the extent to which they differ in their representation of what makes a successful public apology. Since category blurring in speech acts is an under-researched phenomenon (exceptions include Thomas 1995), more pragmatic and critical-discourse analytic research on media uptakes of public speech acts might also be timely.

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10 This supports Tavuchis's (1991) views on the triadic nature of public apologetic discourse. What is noticeable in the discussion of third parties in public apologies is the dominance of the media, as shown by their privileged position in accessing public discourse and communication (on the notion of *access* in discourse, see van Dijk 1993, 1996).

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Clyde Ancarno holds an MA in English Linguistics (Nantes, France), a Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies in Applied Linguistics (Bordeaux, France) and a PhD in Pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis (Cardiff). Her main research interests are news discourse, technology-mediated discourse, classroom discourse and academic discourse. She has worked as a lecturer and seminar tutor (in sociolinguistics, media communication, SFL and French as a Foreign Language) in British universities since 2002. Email: ancarnocs@cardiff.ac.uk