

Are explicit apologies proportional to the offenses they address?

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"Whether one runs over another's sentence, time, dog, or body, one is more or less reduced to saying some variant of 'I'm sorry'."
(Goffman, *Relations in Public*, (1971: 117)

According to Goffman, we live in a world of *virtual offenses*: "Worst possible readings of an action that maximize either its offensiveness to others or its defaming implications for the actor himself" (1971: 108). This circumstance, Goffman suggests, sets the scene for remedial actions conceived in terms of distributive justice, "a sort of payment or compensation for harm done, the greater the harm the greater the recompense...for example, often a brief apology is given for a minor offense and protracted apology for something bigger" (1971: 116). In this paper, we consider this proposal of proportionality, based on the examination of 102 cases of explicit apologies from the Apologies Data Set, as described in the editors' introduction (this issue). To this end, we offer a typology of the primary apology formats within the dataset, together with a broad categorization of the types of virtual offenses to which these apologies are addressed.

BACKGROUND

In our initial approach to the dataset, we found it useful to make a distinction between 'local' and 'distal' problems addressed in apology sequences. Local problems are indigenous to the ongoing interaction, and commonly arise out of difficulties of speaking, hearing, or understanding talk (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks 1977), together with exogenous contingencies that invade the production or coherence of contributions to talk and arrest its progressivity (Schegloff 1979, 2007; Stivers and Robinson 2006; Heritage 2007). Distal problems, by contrast, consist of matters that are handled within the talk, but concern past or future conduct that is construed to be problematic; for example, failing to meet previous obligations, declined requests etc.

This preliminary classification rapidly became associated with a second distinction between problems that were intrinsically available to both parties and those that were not. For example, problems of speaking, hearing, and understanding were, for the most part, immediately available to interlocutors and were rarely named. Exogenous contingencies of interaction, however, were often only available to the one experiencing the difficulty, especially in telephone conversation from which this dataset is exclusively drawn. Similarly, the nature of past or future apologizables must typically be made available to a recipient through description, naming, indexing, or allusion (Cirillo et al. this issue; Margutti et al. this issue). As we will demonstrate, the 'local' vs. 'distal' distinction, together with the secondary 'available' vs. 'non-available' classification, has a considerable influence on the design and extent of the turns-at-talk in which apologies are implemented.

APOLOGIES: A SIMPLE TAXONOMY

Here, we describe 3 main classes of apologies presented in terms of a putative ranking of their extent or "protractedness".

(1) "Sorry"

The most minimal apology format that we encountered is a bare "Sorry". In describing this format as "bare", we mean to distinguish it from more expanded formats to be described below. The "Sorry" format is recurrently found in local contexts such as self-repair and other-initiated repair (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1977). In the context of self-repair, for example, a bare "Sorry" can open the repair space (Schegloff 2013), as seen in excerpt (1); Giles replaces "any" in "of any ↓si:te" with "all" in "of all sites" (Schegloff 2013). The replacement operation is initiated with a downward-intoned "Sorry" (line 3).

(1) [Anderson:CC:C:15]
 1 Henry: But whether that would (0.6) Whether that w- (0.3) that bra::nd, (0.9)
 2 would fit in to (0.6) East Midlands's got to be highly debatable.
 3 Giles: -> .t.hhhh I think, of any ↓si:te, it would fit in. (0.3) <eh- eh-**Sorry**. Of
 4 all sites at East Midlands it would fit in. It's a well known, local
 5 ↓product.

Alternatively, bare "Sorry" can be used following a repair proper, thus post-facing the closure of the repair space, as in (2) below where Giles replaces the word "promotion" with "concessionary payment" (line 3).

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

In cases of self-repair, the baseline virtual offenses involve: (i) a break in the progressivity of the turn and/or sequence which is occasioned by the repair proper, and (ii) an associated lexical or phrasal misrepresentation which could momentarily mislead the recipient.

Finally, bare "Sorry" also frequently occurs as an 'open class' initiation of repair (Drew 1997), that, in contrast to alternatives such as "What?", accepts responsibility (Robinson 2006) for the problem it raises:

(3) [Holt:1:1:1]
 1 Les: Hello:,
 2 Mum: ↑Hello::::, Christine?
 3 (.)
 4 Les: -> Sorry?
 5 (0.2)
 6 Mum: Christine?
 7 (0.3)
 8 Les: Oh yeh. Sorry I couldn't hear you very [well Je]:m's m-
 9 Mum: [O h :]
 10 Les: m-[Jem's
 11 Mum: [Are the family o:ff?
 12 (0.5)
 13 Les: -> SORRY?
 14 Mum: 'Av your family gone o:ff?

While many cases of bare "Sorry" occur in the context of repair (Biassoni et al. this issue), other minor face-threatening contingencies can also occasion this type of apology. In the following case (4), Carol fails to recognize Leslie's voice at the opening of the call (line 1):

- (4) [Holt:2:2:2:1]
 1 Leslie: .t I didn' think you w'r going to uk- (.) ↓answer.
 2 Carol: hhWho's th(h)a(h)[t.
 3 Leslie: [mg hh Me Leslie.
 4 (0.7)
 5 Carol: -> ↑↑Oh: sorry ih hih Ye:s,

After asking for, and discovering, the identity of the caller, Carol finds it necessary to apologize for her failure (line 5).

(2) "I'm sorry"

The "I'm sorry" format represents a minimal expansion on the first: Crucially, it includes an overt expression of agency through the use of the subject and contracted copula "I'm".¹

In (5) below, "I'm sorry" is used following the provision of a repair proper. In this case, Reginald replaces "address" (line 5) with "telephone number" (line 6).

- (5) [Heritage:I:6:1]
 1 Mrs Johnson: Uh :m I : wanted tih know if it were at all possible to make en
 2 appointment,h .hh uh::: with Mister Patton.=
 3 Reginald: =.t Oh dear uh::m .hhh yes well ih-it's his father talki:ng?
 4 Mrs Johnson: Ah ha:h?=
 5 Reginald: =Uh::m: (.) >t in fact he now has his clinic at another addre:ss.=
 6 -> Another, another telephone number I'm sorry:,
 7 Mrs Johnson: Yes: the (Ya:w) clinic.=is[n ' t i t](Yawk-)
 8 Reginald: [That's rji : g h t ,]

While this case is similar to (2) above in that the apology serves as a post-face to the repair proper, it is accomplished through the fuller copula format.

In (6), by contrast, the repair sequence involves a more expansive form of repair. Here Josh's effort to spell his interlocutor's first name (line 5) attracts a full-fledged other-correction in line 7. Having made a minimal attempt at the registration (Goldberg 1975) of the correction ("O:=pih", line 8), Josh apologizes for his error.

¹ The use of the uncontracted copula verb in this context is rare. Contracted copula usages were 50 times as common as the uncontracted format.

- (6) [CDHQ:II:100:R:2]
 1 Josh: Jus' give me yer pho:ne number yer na:me plea:se en nen ↓ah'll
 2 ah'll see if we ken rai:se ↓somebo[dy W't]'s
 3 Opal: [M a : h] name is (.) Op'l?
 4 (0.5)
 5 Josh: °O, p-e-l.° Aw[r_ight?=
 6 Opal: [u-
 7 Opal: =O:-p-a-↓l.
 8 Josh: -> O:=pih=**I'm sorry**,
 9 (0.3)
 10 Opal: Ah:< (0.3) Ow°↓ens.°

In this case the apology also accepts responsibility (Robinson 2006) for having misspelled a relatively common given name, together with a more substantial break in progressivity that is associated with this error and its correction.

(3) Expanded Apologies²

(i) "(I'm) sorry" + Named Offense

As we suggested earlier, apologies that include a naming of the offense commonly deal with distal concerns arising out of past or future actions:

- (7) [M:CB(b):16:2-3]
 1 Rick: -> **I'm sorry I didn't call you last night.**
 2 Linny: That's okay,
 3 (1.4)
 4 Rick: Didjeh git mad,
 5 Linny: No?
 6 (0.7)
 7 Rick: Yih didn't,
 8 Linny: Nope,

Here, Rick simply names the apologizable - an apparently broken undertaking to call the previous evening - within the subordinate clause of the turn that carries the apology. In the absence of this naming, the apologizable might not be readily available to the recipient.

² While it is certainly possible to imagine that a stand-alone "I'm [*intensifier*] sorry" format is commonly present in conversational data, in fact this format rarely occurs in the present dataset except adjacent to additional apology components that name the offense and/or account for it.

In case (8), the talk arises from a discussion of an unexpected visit by Ava's son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. The family members arrived while Ava was out, and Jessie entertained them until she returned. Here Ava apologizes for the imposition.

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

Ava's description of the apologizable "yih had th'm all on you Jessie like that" clearly conveys her understanding of the unexpected visit as an imposition (Margutti et al, this issue); it is this characterization that Jessie vigorously resists with an *Oh*-prefaced rejection of the description "↑Oh don't be silly" (Heritage 2002; Robinson 2004) at line 2 and a diametrically alternative depiction of the visit in question "No: that w'z lovely it w'z a nice surpris[e]" (line 3).

The practice of naming the offense within the apologizing turn is not restricted to distal problems. In (9), for example, Lily has phoned Cora to ask her to babysit for a while with her little boy. However it turns out that Cora has the flu (line 1, 3-4). Cora is audibly unwell (line 2), and after a couple more turns-at-talk, Lily, who could not have known this in advance of the call, apologizes for "disturbing" her (line 7).

(9) [TCI(b):7:1-2]
 1 Cora: But I'd be glad=do it if I wasn't si(hh)ck.
 2 Lily: e-You sure sound aw:ful. [(hoarse.)]
 3 Cora: [.t o(gh)h:: my God] I been .hhh running
 4 th' highes' temperatures you ever sa:w.
 5 Lily: Omy go:sh well let me hang up 'n letchu get back tuh be:d=
 6 Cora: =eh huh [uh uhh]h h h u- h h u-]
 7 Lily: -> [**So:rry**]I **disturbed** you.]
 8 Cora: =How yih doin' hnon=
 9 Lily: =Oh jus' fi:ne.

Similarly, the sequence below in (10) follows an extended discussion of a family known to both Gwen and Leslie.

(10) [Holt:J86:1:4:1-2,10-11]
 1 Gwen: Yeh that'd be super.
 2 You know if you hear anything I'd really like to know becuz I'm (.) you
 3 know very fond a'th'm really a[ll of them.] [.hhehhh
 4 Leslie: [I k n o :]w ye[:s.
 5 (0.3)
 6 Leslie: .hh Righto then=
 7 Gwen: =Thanks ever so much
 8 (.)
 9 Leslie: Oka[y
 10 Gwen: [Bye [then,
 11 Leslie: -> [↑Sorry t'be the bearer'v bad tidi↑:n[gs
 12 Gwen: [Well you know it's one'v
 13 Gwen: those things p'raps it's better to know anyway becuz you know another
 14 time I might'v said yes I'd've gone alo:ng thinking I ↑c'd (0.2) dump
 15 myself on the:m you know,

In this call, Leslie has played a primary role in conveying the troubles of the family in question, and at line 11, she alludes to this role as the "bearer'v bad tidi↑:ngs" in an apology for this action (Maynard 2003).

(ii) "(I'm) sorry" + Account

In the cases in which an apology is associated only with an account, the apologizable is local and indigenous to the interaction, but its source is not available to the recipient. For instance, in (11) below, Marshall has paused in his response to Joanne's question in line 2. Then at line 4, before Marshall has completed his turn, Joanne cries out in pain and describes its cause (lines 4-5).

(11) [Drummond:G&D:I:3-4]
 1 Joanne: ngYea:h, so yer tired?
 2 Marshall: Huh? No:, just a lid'l bit, b'd ah mean I'm
 3 (0.4)
 4 Joanne: -> **Ow:. G(hh)od damn th'pat- cat's crawl(h)ing (h)up m(h)y l(h)eg**
 5 -> **(h)e-:(h)re [eh**
 6 Marshall: [Oh ril[ly,
 7 Joanne: [>hhhh Ow: Pippitt,
 8 (.)
 9 Marshall: he[h huh.
 10 Joanne: [O↓kay.
 11 Marshall: .hhh[h
 12 Joanne: -> [**Sorry** .hhh-
 13 (1.1)
 14 Marshall: u-Bu::t: yihknow we c'do that later o:n,
 15 (0.6)
 16 Joanne: ↑n↓Ka↓:y,

Here, the progress of the conversation is disrupted across lines 3-11, for which Joanne apologizes in line 12. After a silence, Marshall resumes the sequence with the conjunction "but" (line 14), thereby

apparently picking up from where he left off in line 2. In this case, the talk is evidently disrupted, but the source of the disruption is not available to one of the parties and therefore is appropriately accounted for.

A similar contingency arises in (12), taken from a call to a Suicide Prevention Center in which the caller is concerned that her child is possibly suicidal. At lines 1 and 3, the agent asks the caller to hold the line. After a period of time, he accounts for his request in terms of a competing call, which he suggests at lines 12/14 that he was obliged to attend to.

(12) [SPC:X:3:3]
 1 SPC: Couldju hol' on a minute someone is trying to: u[h
 2 CLR: [Okay,
 3 SPC: Hold on jist a moment,
 4 CLR: °Okay,°
 5 ((click))
 6 - - - tape break - - -
 7 SPC: Hello:,
 8 (0.7)
 9 CLR: Ye:s.
 10 SPC: -> Hello, I'm back. **Someone**, [there w'z another call=
 11 CLR: [°() ,°
 12 SPC: -> =I'm sorry I had to:, [.hh.hh
 13 CLR: [°Mm hm that's [quite alri:ght.°]
 14 SPC: -> [attend to i:]t,h
 15 SPC: .hhhhh W'were talking about the boy end eh these problems?hhhh

In overlap with the apologizing turn, the caller absolves the agent of any offense (line 13), and the agent resumes the topic of the call at line 15. In this case, like the previous one, a contingency that was unknown to one party and that severely impacted the progress of the call was subsequently accounted for in the apologizing turn.

(iii) Apology + Named Offense + Account

While naming or otherwise alluding to an offense may be necessary for an apology to achieve its object, accounting for an offense is surely not always essential. We may hypothesize, therefore, that apologies which include both a naming (or indexing) of the offense and an account of how the offense came to pass are a larger and more protracted form of apology, more likely to be addressed to distal apologies and possibly more major offenses.

In the following case (13), Dana has called in pursuit of a prior attempt to phone the previous day. After Dana identifies herself (line 3), Leslie (who was informed by Dana's mother of the difficulty in a

previous call) promptly begins an apology and explains why Dana's previous efforts to call the previous day were unsuccessful.

(13) [Holt:SO88:2:10:1]
 1 Leslie: Hello↑:?
 2 (0.2)
 3 Dana: H'llo this's Dana.
 4 Leslie: -> .hh ↑Oh Dana I'm: ↑**sorry it didn't rin::g yesterday: this: silly:**
 5 -> **thin:g the pin comes out of the ho:le.** .hhhh[hhh
 6 Dana: [eh heh [Ri(h)ght eh=
 7 Leslie: [Aa-
 8 Leslie: =An' then people get 'n engaged ↓signal. Uh w'l no: not engaged it
 9 ri:ngs [but nobody a]:nswers it.]
 10 Dana: [B u t n o] one's the:re]yes that's it,

Here Leslie indexes the virtual offense as "it didn't rin::g yesterday:" and then immediately offers an account framed in terms of a defective phone jack (lines 4-5). Both the apologizable and its account are here mandated by Dana's inability (hearing just a ringing phone) to have grasped the problem at her end of the line. The specific context in this case is that Leslie is planning to visit her son, Gordon at a university some 200 miles away, and Dana, Gordon's girlfriend, clearly may have an interest in sending some communication with her. Dana's mother described the situation the previous day to Leslie as "[Dana] rang you two'r three times but there wz no: one i:n." and Leslie accordingly treats the problem as worthy of a detailed apology, which she presents immediately.

More problematic is the following example (14). The context of this call is that Gordon has phoned his girlfriend Dana close to midnight the previous evening and thoroughly alarmed Dana's mother. Gordon was drunk at the time of that call ("I w'z out of my brain", "I w'z pissed", "pishhed", "sozzled"; lines 6, 10, and 11), and had no valid or pressing reason to make it. As Dana describes before this sequence, her mother was quite upset, and Dana had to go to some effort to fabricate an explanation for the call:

(14) [Holt:88U:1:4:1-3,9-11]
 1 Dana: So I w'z really having fits.
 2 Gordon: -> Ohh hI'm so(hh)rry it [w'z p r o b l- it w'z]
 3 Dana: [(You really made) me a] blo:b.=
 4 Gordon: -> =It w'z a bad mo:-ve. .pk.k.k[.hh [.khhhh
 5 Dana: [It wa[:s.
 6 Gordon: -> I w'z out of my brain at the ↓ti(hh)me a(hh)nywa(hh)y.=
 7 Gordon: =↓hhh[hh
 8 Dana: [I thou-[:ght so.
 9 Gordon: [.hmhhhh
 10 Gordon: -> .tlak I r- (0.2) .kn °hh° .pl I w'z pissed. hhmhhh .ptchlklah ↓pished.h
 11 .plk .k.khhhh[°sozzled.°
 12 Dana: [(You see),
 13 Dana: You see: I use to get these phone calls'n (0.5) <i:t w'z really
 14 upsetting 'n mother use to have fits c'z you see
 15 .hhh (0.5) i-the only (0.2) m:- if anyone rin:gs late at ni:ght
 16 mother automatically assumes something's happened to eether me
 17 or Gordon.

In the course of his apology, Gordon begins by characterizing the offense as something that was "proble-" (line 2), likely headed toward "probably a bad move". He then revises this to "It w'z a bad mo:-ve." in line 4. Following this, he accounts for his behavior with reference to his level of intoxication (lines 6, 10-11). Across this apology, Dana comments in ways that aggravate Gordon's offense: At line 3, just after the completion of "Ohh hI'm so(hh)rry", she says "(You really made) me a blo:b."; and after the gloss of his offense "It w'z a bad mo:-ve", she responds with an agentive repetition "It wa:s." (line 5) (Heritage & Raymond 2005; Stivers 2005). It is notable that Gordon's description of the virtual offense glosses over his agency in the misdeed (Margutti et al, this issue), and that his account in terms of drunkenness at the time is scarcely grounds for exculpation. Not surprisingly perhaps, Dana's response to his apology withholds acceptance of the apology and absolution for the offense, and instead re-aggravates the offense by describing the background of her mother's concerns.

APOLOGIES IN CONTEXT

Goffman's observation that remedial actions may be conceived in terms of distributive justice may be construed as a principle of proportionality expressible as the maxim that 'little virtual offenses get little apologies'. In this section, we pursue this idea by first considering the extent of apologies in local and distal contexts, and then examine variation with these two primary classes.

In the dataset, 62% of explicit apologies addressed virtual offenses characterizable as local in character, the remaining 38% addressing distal virtual offenses. Notwithstanding Goffman's (1955:226) observation that "an unguarded glance, a momentary change in tone of voice, an ecological position taken or not taken, can drench a talk with judgmental significance", we began from the notion that distal virtual offenses are likely to be more problematic and *ex hypothesi* more likely to attract more expansive apologies. To this end, we compared apologies in local and distal circumstances, focusing on the contrast between cases in which the apologizer simply used the word "Sorry" (with no further elaboration) and cases in which the apologizer said more than this ("Sorry +").

	"Sorry"	"Sorry +"	Total
Local	24	39	63
Distal	0	39	39
Total	24	78	102

Table 1: "Sorry" vs. "Sorry +" for Local vs. Distal Virtual Offenses ($p = 0.000$)

Table 1 clearly demonstrates a considerable difference between the two contexts of local vs. distal. In a general context in which "Sorry +" predominates among apology formats, it was universal in distal environments, while cases of bare "Sorry" appear only in local contexts.

"Sorry" in the Context of Repair

To further investigate the use of bare "Sorry", we focused on instances of repair. As Table 2 shows, 15 of the total 24 bare "Sorry" cases are concentrated in the category of repair. The majority of these implemented other-initiated repair sequences in which the repair initiator took responsibility for a failure of hearing (Robinson 2006). In a small number of additional cases, "Sorry" played a role in the implementation of self-repair, as described above.

	"Sorry"	"Sorry +"	Total
Self-Repair	5	1	6
Other-Initiated Repair	9	2	11
Other Correction	1	4	5
Total	15	7	22

Table 2: "Sorry" vs. "Sorry +" in the Context of Repair ($p = 0.03$)

"Sorry +" formats were predominantly used in the context of other-correction. While it might be tempting to argue that a speaker's previous commitment to something that subsequently required correction is a sufficient virtual offense to warrant a "Sorry +" apology, we note that in three of the four cases, the correction in question concerns matters of gender or age, as illustrated in two examples below. In (15) a school official, calling to ask about a child with an unexcused absence from school, is misled by the low pitch of the mother's voice into addressing her as "Mister Richards" (line 3).

(15) [Medeiros:JPP:1:1]
 1 MOM: Hello,
 2 (0.4)
 3 OFF: hHello Mister Richards?
 4 (0.3)
 5 MOM: Ah: this: Missiz Richards,=
 6 OFF: -> =Uh Missiz Richards **I'm sorry** this is Miss Medeiros fr'm Reedondo
 7 Highschool calling? [.hhhhh
 8 MOM: [Mhm:,
 9 OFF: Uh w'z Bra:d home fr'm school i:ll t'da:y?

In (16), Niels commits himself (line 1) to what turns out to be a misrepresentation of the age of Alex's child, using a [*question + tag*] format which indexes a relatively shallow epistemic gradient (Heritage 2012). Having been informed that the child is "ni:ne," Niels overtly registers this as an informative correction (line 3) before acknowledging the new information situation with "O↓kay." (line 5) and subsequently "I see" (line 7). Finally, at line 9, Niels elaborates on his misapprehension "Ah thought 'ee was six" and apologizes for it.

(16) [Davey Riga:32-38]
 1 Niels: He's very young isn't ih?
 2 (0.2)
 3 Alex: °He's ni:ne,°
 4 (.)
 5 Niels: Oh he's °↑ni:ne. O↓kay.
 6 (0.2)
 7 Niels: I see
 8 (1.0)
 9 Niels: -> Ah thought 'ee was six ah'm s[orry]
 10 Alex: [No no] no:, ni↓:ne.
 11 (.)
 12 Alex: Ni↓:ne. kHe's big ee↑nough:
 13 Niels: Yes he's big enough fuh (0.4) reading en writing, (.) yeh

Notably in this case, Alex strongly resists the suggestion that the child is six with repeated "no no no" (Stivers 2004), and a repeat of the child's true age (line 10), insisting that the child is "big ee↑nough:" (line 12), with which Niels is at pains to concur.

In the fourth case, (6) above, there is a failure to spell the recipient's name correctly. It may be suggested, therefore, that in cases of other-correction involving matters of identity, a more expansive apology is warranted and appropriate. In our only case of other correction involving a bare "Sorry", the correction was embedded (Jefferson 1987) and involved a relatively superficial misspeaking by the apologizer. In sum, these observations about repair rather directly support the proposal that 'little virtual offenses get little apologies'.

"Sorry" outside the Context of Repair

Considering cases of bare "Sorry" outside the context of repair, we find a pattern that centers on trivial interactional infractions and relatively minimal virtual offenses. In (17) for example, Leslie, calling to request information about an order, initiates a 'switchboard request' for "Mister Shorebridge" in line 3:

(17) [Holt:1:3:1]
 1 Leslie: Oh hello
 2 (0.2)
 3 Leslie: Is uh Mister Shorebridge the:re?
 4 (0.7)
 5 Reception: Mister Shorebridge who sh'll I say is calling,
 6 Leslie: -> **Sorry**, .h ehm (.) Well (.) mih-issiz Field with a que:ry=
 7 =about her order.
 8 Reception: Missiz Poole.

In response to Leslie's request, the receptionist asks for her name (line 5). In the context of a switchboard request, the requester should ordinarily volunteer his/her name rather than wait to be asked for it (Schegloff 2007). Here Leslie apologizes in line 6 before responding to the receptionist's question, thereby treating the apologizable as having priority over the provision of a response, and her previous omission as a virtual offense that should be addressed promptly.

A similarly trivial virtual offense emerges in the following conversation between a boyfriend and girlfriend. In the course of telling a story about a man who "lives with Ste:ve", Dana describes him as "the one with big ears" (line 2).

(18) [Holt:88U:1:9:5-6]
 1 Dana: He lives with Ste:ve. an' (0.3) with Cloe.
 2 .hh A:nd he's the one with big ears .t.hhhh Uh:m
 3 (.)
 4 Gordon: .t I c'n relate to this guy
 5 (.)
 6 Dana: °Yes.° .hh An'uh:m,hh Oh no they're even worse th'n yours.
 7 -> .t.h Uhm (.) ↓**Sorry**.
 8 (0.3)
 9 Dana: A::nd (.) e-he:: (.) (works-) . . . ((continues))

Gordon's response "I c'n relate to this guy" in line 4 apparently targets Dana's earlier remark about "big ears". At line 6, Dana begins with a response that projects continuation of her story, which she abandons in favor of something intended as a playful insult: "Oh no they're even worse th'n yours.". Encountering no responsive laughter across her subsequent ".t.h Uhm" and short pause, Dana offers a minimal apology in line 7.

Table 3 below shows just nine cases of bare "Sorry" outside the context of repair, all of them occurring in local environments and addressing these minimal contingencies, together with a small set of somewhat expanded apologies (e.g., "I'm sorry," "I must apologize") that do not name or account for the virtual offense.

	"Sorry"	"I'm sorry"	"Sorry +"	Total
Local	9	4	28	41
Distal	0	5	34	39
Total	9	9	62	80

Table 3: Apology formulation, excluding cases of repair ($p = 0.006$)

Our comparison of apologies implemented with just the word "Sorry" with those implemented by "Sorry +" strongly suggests that the principle of proportionality straightforwardly applies both in the context of repair and outside it. A bare "Sorry" is ordinarily used to address the most minimal virtual offenses, primarily involving self-repair, other-initiated repair, and other comparatively minor interactional infractions. In general, the results so far support the notion that local and intersubjectively available virtual offenses are treated minimally, while distal virtual offenses, addressing matters outside the here-and-now of the interaction, accrue more substantial apologies.

However, there remains a residue of puzzling cases that are summarized in Table 4.

	"Sorry"	More than "Sorry" ³	Name	Account	Name + Account	Total
Local	9	4	15	5	8	41
Distal	0	5	16	8	10	39
Total	9	9	31	13	18	80

Table 4: Distribution of Apology Types in Local vs. Distal Contexts (excluding Repair)

Table 4 shows that among the local virtual offenses, which we have suggested will tend to be apparent to a recipient, 23 (63%) are nonetheless named, while 26 (67%) of the distal virtual offenses, which may be less apparent, are likewise named. The difference between these two outcomes is not statistically significant ($p = 0.791$). This observation is not at all compatible with the principle of proportionality, and invites an investigation of why such similar proportions of the two classes of virtual offenses should be named. A consideration in relation to the presence of accounts invites a similar question as to why as

³ This category includes forms greater than "Sorry" but without the addition of named offenses or accounts.

many as 13 out of 41 (32%) of local virtual offenses should accrue an account, compared with 18 out of 39 (46%) of distal virtual offenses. Again, the difference between these two outcomes is not statistically significant ($p = 1.000$).

NAMING AND ACCOUNTING FOR VIRTUAL OFFENSES

(i) Names

Ex hypothesi, local virtual offenses should not be named, while distal virtual offenses should be named. However, Table 4 shows that this is clearly not the case. Under what circumstances are local virtual offenses named and distal virtual offenses not named?

Beginning with the 13 cases of distal virtual offenses in which the offense was not named, two circumstances exhaust the possibilities. First, and most obviously, the virtual offense was named in a preceding turn prior to the apology (Margutti et al., this issue). This occurs in 10 out of 13 cases (77%) in the dataset. In the remaining three cases, the apologizer defers naming the virtual offense until later in the sequence, or elides it altogether. The following case illustrates this second practice:

(19) [Holt:C85:3]
 1 Leslie: ↑Are you thinkin:g of comin:g t'the meeting t↓'night
 2 Myra: -> D'you know I'm: **terribly** ↓sorry. I w'z gun' to ring you in a short
 3 -> while .hhh I've had a phone call fr'm ↓Ben, he's down in Devon.
 4 -> 'n he's not gun' to get back t'night, .hh[hh
 5 Leslie: [Ye[s.
 6 Myra: -> [An' Mummy's goin'
 7 -> t'this khh- (.) ku-uh:m
 8 Leslie: That [k-
 9 Myra: -> [c a[rol c o n c e : r t.]
 10 Leslie: [Yes of cou: rse I] think my husband's goin t'that too!:=
 11 Myra: -> =I'm **dreadf'ly** sorry, [it's hhh]
 12 Leslie: [That's ↑alri:ght]

In response to Leslie's question about coming to the meeting, Myra launches an apology that is elaborated with an extensive description of circumstances that suggest that Myra's expected help with childcare will not be available (her husband Ben is unexpectedly away, her mother is going to a carol concert). This outcome, while inferable, is never explicitly stated, and indeed, Myra defers her negative response for another several turns-at-talk, finally stating: "I've just been t'fetch Amanda f'm her piano l'sn I w'z- e-on the way back I w'z thinking now how c'n I get round ↓this. But I don't think I can Leslie,". It may be

noted that even this negative response is mitigated with "I don't think I can" and is offered as a response to her own question "How c'n I get round ↓this", thus presenting her response as the disappointing outcome of inward struggle rather than as a direct response to Leslie's original question.

If unnamed distal virtual offenses can be accounted for, there still remains the puzzle of named local virtual offenses. Three contingencies account for almost all of the cases in which an apology for a local virtual offense is accompanied by a naming of the offense. Just under half of the cases (11 out of 23) involve some reference to the apologizer's circumstances, of which the recipient will necessarily be unaware:

```
(20) [Holt:1:8:1]
1 Leslie: Hello:,=
2 Mum:      =(Hello),
3 Leslie: -> I'm sorry tuh keep you, I've jus' been stickin:g .h something on
4           -> thee front a' thee: uhm (cooker. .h because:: uh: (.) the top a' the
5           -> knob fell off.
6 Mum:      Oh: I see:,
```

In this case, the call was apparently answered by another member of the family, and Leslie is accounting for her delay in getting to the phone.

In the second substantial class of cases (7 out of 23), an aspect of the recipient's circumstances prompts an apology in which the local virtual offense is named. In case (21), Randall apologizes for imposing on Leslie by calling and by asking her to relay a message to her husband, Skip.

```
(21) [Holt:M88:2:3]
1 Leslie: Hello::?
2         (0.7)
3 Randall: -> Oh: Leslie sorry to (.) beh to bother you? .h[h
4 Leslie:                                     [Oh: right.
5 Randall: ↑Could you a::sk Ski:p if- .hnh [at- when you go: to this meeting=
6 Leslie:                                     [.p.k
7 Randall: =tomorrow .hm could'ee give Geoff: Haldan's a↓pologies through
8         sickness?
```

Here, both the call and, by implication, its purposes, are treated as amounting to a virtual offense, named as "bothering you" (line 3).

In the remaining five cases, apologizers use explicit naming to formulate some other aspect of the ongoing talk as a local virtual offense, as in the following sequence:

(22) [HG:II:10-11]
 1 Nancy: Didja a'ready get the mai:l,=
 2 Hyla: =.hhhh Yes, hh-hh-h[h,
 3 Nancy: [Oh, hhhmhh[hh
 4 Hyla: [hh-hh
 5 (.)
 6 Nancy: -> **Sorry I brought it uhhhp**

Here, Nancy's question in line 1 is understood as an oblique reference to (a lack of) correspondence between Hyla and her current boyfriend. Hyla's unelaborated affirmative response is understood as implying that she has not received any mail from him, and Nancy subsequently apologizes for having "brought it uhhhp" (line 6).

(ii) Accounts

Accounts appear in broadly equivalent numbers in the context of both local and distal virtual offenses. While the relevance for accounts for distal virtual offenses (18 out of 39, 46%) requires little explanation, their appearance in apologies for local virtual offenses (13 out of 41, 32%) merits elucidation. In one subset of cases, a failure in the progressivity of the interaction occasions an account that is either prefaced or post-faced by an apology, as in (23) below. Here, in a long and emotional conversation between Penny and Pat whose house burned down the previous evening, Pat finds it necessary to curtail the call.

(23) [Frankel:II:21-22]
 1 Pat: -> hhOkay, wai- Oh Penny, **I'm sorry. .hh they're waitin' f'the**
 2 **insurance c-people [t' ca:ll.]**
 3 Penny: [.hhh Oh:]:okay. Oh no. I didn' realize that,
 4 (0.2)
 5 Penny: [Awright.]
 6 Pat: [Oh that's] awright. .hhh I'l[l u:m, I'll prob'ly be in touch with you=
 7 Penny: [°.tch!°
 8 Pat: =(again'n) I'm really happy y'called. hh-huh-hu[h

In this case, Pat accounts for her need to bring the call with Penny to a close by reference to an anticipated call from the insurance company. And in the following case (24), an extended failure of progressivity in the opening of a telephone call, and one moreover in which Skip's jocular opening is absolutely without reciprocation from his interlocutor, Skip is eventually obliged to self-identify at line 11.

(24) [Holt:SO88(II):1:4:1-2]
 1 Skip: .hhhh Hello you miserable ol'hhh
 2 (0.6)
 3 Skip: .t.hhh hh .hhh Wotcha?
 4 (0.5)
 5 Hal: He|llo?
 6 Skip: .ph Hello Hal,h
 7 (0.2)
 8 Hal: Hell[o?
 9 Skip: [.hhhh
 10 (0.3)
 11 Skip: It's Skip. ((flatly produced))
 12 Hal: ↑Oh 't's ↑you ↓Skip.=
 13 Skip: =Ye(h)ehh[h
 14 Hal: -> [Sorry didn' reco'nize your [voice] f'r a minute,
 15 Skip: [y::Yehh] heh heh heh .hu:h
 16 .hu[h
 17 Hal: [.hhh huh ↑ha:h ha:h huh he- .hheh heh .h ↑↑Innit ↓funny 'ow you
 18 can't reco'nize voices occasion'ly.

Subsequently, Hal registers recognition of Skip at line 12 and then simultaneously both names and accounts for the problem in an apology that asserts his failure to recognize Skip's voice.

It may be added that, in contexts of repeated failure in progressivity that prima facie expand the virtual offense, apologizers tend to account for the problem, as in the following case involving repeated failures in the transmission of a phone number:

(25) [FD:IV(IIIrd)44-53a:R:2]
 1 Frank: Mi-ister Dodd's number: is F E three:,
 2 (0.2)
 3 Frank: two: eight oh: ni:ne,
 4 Operator: F E two:. eight oh:?
 5 Frank: No: F E three:,
 6 (0.4)
 7 Frank: two: eight, oh ni:ne.=
 8 Operator: -> **Sorry I can't hear** ().
 9 (0.4)
 10 Operator: Repeat (),
 11 Frank: F E three:, two (.) eight, (0.2) oh: ni:ne.

Finally, accounts may be produced when an exogenous disturbance hinders the progressivity of the talk, as in (11) above in which a cat intervenes on Joanne's side of the call.

CONCLUSION

Do little offenses get little apologies? The evidence presented in this paper suggests that they do. First, comparing the bare "Sorry" format with all others, we find that it is exclusively deployed in

contexts where the difficulty is local in character (Table 1), and primarily involves issues of speaking, hearing, and/or understanding the talk (Table 2). Second, comparing the "Sorry" with the "I'm sorry" formats, the "Sorry" format is most common in cases of self-repair and in the other-initiation of repair where, in the latter case, it is used to assume responsibility for trouble sources in the talk which may not be the exclusive responsibility of the repair initiator (Robinson 2006). "I'm sorry", by contrast, primarily emerges in the context of other-correction (Table 2) and remediates intrinsically more face-threatening virtual offenses. Third, however, we have characterized expanded apologies in terms of additional apology components in which the virtual offense is either named, or accounted for, or both. These expanded apologies present a more mixed picture (Table 4), largely because a variety of interactional contingencies other than the scale of the virtual offense may require naming or accounting for the situation in question. For example, where the nature of the local virtual offense (e.g., a cat clawing the leg of one of the parties in a telephone conversation) is unavailable to a recipient, it may have to be named or accounted for. In distal contexts, by contrast, where the virtual offense has already been named, further naming of the offense may be redundant or elided (Margutti, et al., this issue). In some of these cases, of course, the elisions may be strategic, designed to avoid characterizing the virtual offense, and perhaps in a reflexive correlate of our maxim, to suggest, through a minimal apology, that the virtual offense is to be treated as minimal. This is to say that if, as we have suggested, there is a norm of proportionality in the relationship between virtual offenses and the apologies that address them, then this principle, in common with all other normative aspects of human communication, is amenable to reflexive manipulation.

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