

THE FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF APOLOGIES WITH INDICATIVE REFERENCES TO THE LETTERS OF KEATS AND BYRON

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ABSTRACT

An apology may be defined as “ the act of declaring one’s regret, remorse or sorrow for having insulted, failed, injured, harmed or wronged another(Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy IEP).A definition quite interested in the function suggests that “an apology is a speech act addressed to B’s face – needs and intended to remedy an offence for which A. takes responsibility.” (Holmes, 1990:159).

Apologies are also "speech acts" that are hard to identify, define or categorize, a difficulty that arises directly out of the functions they perform (Lakoff,2001:201) and the forms they take. In function, they range from self-abasement for wrongdoing to the formal display of appropriate feeling. In form, they range from explicit apologies to the most ambiguous ones.

Apologies matter theoretically because they are rich in forms and functions. They also involve intricate presuppositions and / or assertions. Their attraction is that they either blur things or explicitly state them. Moreover, their theoretical richness as unique human activities shows in the categories they take i.e. register, genre and key etc. Practically, apologies matter because, as speech acts, they are felicitous from the speaker's perspective and soothing for the addressee.

Apologies are needed on both individual and social levels. On an individual level, they appease the listener. On a social level, they smooth things and bring harmony to the parties involved. Talking about apologies ushers us to an operative linguistic discipline nowadays, namely Pragmatics. Stalnker’s definition of this discipline is quite helpful:

*Pragmatics is the study of the purpose for which sentences
are used, of the real world conditions under which a sentence
may be appropriately used as an utterance (1972:380).*

In a relevant sense, apologies are thematically enticing and practically significant as pragmatic ‘speech acts’, they postulate a daunting task by virtue of their fluidity and of the intricate relations between their forms and functions, and, in a deeper linguistic sense, the relations between language and its context of utterance.

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