**Apologies made at the Leveson Inquiry: Triggers and responses**

## 1. Introduction

This paper deals with the interpersonally sensitive act of apologising as carried out in a public setting and uses a recent public inquiry in the United Kingdom, the Leveson Inquiry, as a source for the apologies under scrutiny. In this study, I take a conversation analytic approach and am concerned with how apologies are triggered and responded to (i.e. how they are co-constructed in interaction). I view apologies as being acts which indicate a speaker's regret at the performance of either a past or impending face-threatening act and express a speaker's desire to make good the potential damage done to his/her relationship with the hearer (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987: 68; Goffman 1971: 110f). Previous studies on political apologies have tended to focus on set-piece, statement-like apologies (see for instance: Harris *et al*, 2006 Kampf, 2009, 2011; Kampf & Löwenheim, 2012), this study differs by focussing on political apologies of an interactional nature.

The Leveson Inquiry into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press (henceforth, the Inquiry) was a major public inquiry in the United Kingdom which ran between July 2011 and November 2012 and was chaired by Lord Justice Brian Leveson, a high court judge. The Inquiry was set up in response to revelations that members of the British press had engaged, over a number of years, in illegal and/or morally questionable practices in order to obtain stories – practices which included: hacking phones and emails, paying members of the police force for details of ongoing investigations, bribing members of the Royal Household and blagging (i.e. duping National Health Service staff, banks, and others into believing that they were the targeted celebrity or politician in order to find out confidential information about the public figure). Videos of witnesses' oral evidence and transcripts thereof can be found on the Inquiry's website (www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/).

To investigate the apologies, searches on the Inquiry transcripts were carried out for a full range of both explicit and conventional apology expressions, i.e. the most frequent ways which politicians apologise (see Table 2 in Murphy, 2015). This gave 106 apology extracts which, along with their surrounding context, were transcribed and are the focus of this study. There are, of course, limitations to this approach. Firstly, sometimes apologies are not produced in a conventional way (though this is infrequent in political discourse) and so such instances are overlooked. Whilst unfortunate, this is also the approach taken in the only previous CA study of apologies (Robinson, 2004) and the alternative of (re-)watching approximately 350 hours of oral evidence for what might be but a handful of examples seems a cost too high to outweigh the potential benefits. Secondly, sometimes apology tokens are used non-apologetically in the performance of other actions. This is something which I will look at in some detail in section 4.

The structure of this paper is as follows: section 2 gives details of previous work on apologies in everyday talk; section 3 discusses the turn-taking norms and participation structure of the Inquiry (which has similarities with other types of courtroom discourse); section 4 outlines the types of offence which trigger apologies at the Inquiry; section 5 shows the sequential relationships that apologies enter into in this sphere and argues that apologies form action chains (Pomerantz, 1978), rather than adjacency pairs as has been proposed for quotidian conversation (Robinson, 2004); section 6 concludes with suggestions for what the oral evidence from the Inquiry can tell us about interpersonally

sensitive acts more broadly and gives ideas for future work using this large source of interactional data.

## 2. Apologies in quotidian conversation

Apologies remain understudied from a conversation analytic perspective – many introductory texts state that apologies enter into an adjacency pair either of type *apology—minimization* (cf Levinson, 1983: 303) or *complaint[1]—apology* (cf Psathas 1995: 17) but do not provide detailed evidence for this. There are two studies which have explored apologies in quotidian conversation in much greater depth both by Robinson (2004, 2006). Robinson (2004) looks at 'explicit' apologies and the range of sequential positions which they can occupy, the types of offence they can index and the preference organisation of their responses. Robinson (2006) has a narrower focus and discusses how apology tokens are used in the performance of repair work.

Robinson (2004) argues that a distinction needs to be made between apology tokens used exclusively to perform apology functions and those which perform some secondary action. So for instance, in something like 'Sorry, how old is your daughter again?', the apology element is '*subordinate* to the primary action, which is requesting information' (Robinson, 2004: 297, his emphasis). Where apologising is the foregrounded action, Robinson suggests that apologies are 'first parts of adjacency-pair sequences of action' (Robinson, 2004: 301). In his analysis he finds that the preferred response[2] to an apology is one which promotes social solidarity in mitigating or undermining an apology's claim to have caused offence; this can take the form of absolution ('that's alright') or disagreeing with the need to have apologised (*ibid*: 302). Dispreferred responses are ones which cause a pursuit of the preferred response and include silences, shrugs and the initiation of a new sequence. We will see in this paper that while apologies at the Inquiry *can* receive similar responses, they do not have to and their absence is unmarked, *contra* Robinson's argument that apologies are first pair parts of adjacency pairs.

In his 2006 paper Robinson argues that other-initiated repair can be performed using apology tokens in order for the repair initiator to show that they are at fault for the trouble encountered rather than the addressee. Robinson focuses on 'Sorry?' and 'I'm sorry(?)' which are open-class repair initiators in that they indicate there has been trouble with understanding the previous turn, but not where the trouble lies specifically. In this paper we will explore this open class, too but we will see that the idea that the apology token embodies a stance of the speaker taking responsibility for the trouble may be not be the whole story, since the addressee can respond with an apology in turn. We will

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[1] It is important to draw a distinction between direct and indirect complaints, as Heinemann & Traverso (2009: 2382) and the contributors to their special issue on Complaining in interaction in the *Journal of Pragmatics* do. Direct complaints are those which are made against a present interlocutor, whereas indirect complaints refer to a third party. In this paper we see only direct complaints, and it is these which we would expect to trigger apologies. Indirect complaints would only receive an apology if the apologiser is representative of or responsible for the third party.

[2] Preferred responses do not refer to a speaker's desire to perform a specific action, but rather relate to conventions within a particular language and culture and are the responses which will cause least damage to the hearer's (or speaker's) face (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Preferred responses are ones which tend to be produced without delay or hesitation and are usually performed without hedging or prefacing with markers like *um* or *well* (see Levinson 1983: 334f for more on the properties of (dis)preferred responses).

also see how the apology token can also preface a statement requesting a specific repair, thus initiating a closed class of repair.

## 3. Interaction at the Inquiry

The majority of the apologies made at the Inquiry by politicians are much closer in form to those found in everyday conversation than is the case for those produced in the House of Commons (see Murphy, 2015). That is to say, the apologies produced at the Inquiry usually occur immediately after the offence, contain just one apology token and can be responded to. Part of the reason for this is that the turn taking conventions in inquiry discourse are less removed from those in quotidian conversation than the interactional rules governing the delivery of personal apologies in the House of Commons. It is also noteworthy that, unlike personal statements in Parliament, the politicians giving evidence at an inquiry are not there (solely, at least) to apologise. This means that the sort of offences which trigger an apology can be of an interactional nature (e.g. interrupting, speaking too quickly, etc.), as well as for tangible offences.

The turn-taking system operating during inquiries is very similar to that found in courtroom discourse; this is, to some extent, to be expected since inquiries aim to gather evidence in the same way as a trial and are frequently led by members of the judiciary. The fundamental difference between conversation and (cross-)examination holds true for inquiry discourse; during evidence giving at an inquiry 'turn order is fixed, as is the type of turn which each speaker's turn constitutes' (Atkinson & Drew, 1979: 61). Similar to the courtroom, the participants during oral evidence to the Inquiry are the examiner and the examined. In this case, the role of the examiner is filled at any one time by either the lead counsel, who does most of the examining, Lord Justice Leveson (the inquiry chairman), or counsel for interested parties (e.g. the Metropolitan Police, News International, etc.), who are allowed, at the discretion of the chair, to put their questions to the examined after the lead counsel has finished his/her questioning. The role of the examined changes at the end of each evidence session, with politicians, journalists, and others affected in some way by the media acting in this position[3].

As well as restrictions on who can participate, Atkinson & Drew also highlight restrictions on the types of turn which can be produced in the courtroom, which also applies for the most part at the Inquiry. They state that talk is:

> organised into series of 'question' and 'answer' pairs. Whatever else these utterances may be heard to do, and however else they might be characterised […] speaker turns should be designed at least minimally as either questions or answers (1979: 61-2).

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[3] There were two instances where two people were examined at the same time - essentially fulfilling the position of the examined concomitantly. The first pair being Kate and Gerry McCann, whose daughter, Madeleine, was kidnapped in Portugal, and who were vilified in some parts of the media. The second were Bob and Sally Dowler, whose daughter Milly's phone was hacked by News International newspapers whilst she was missing and before she was found murdered. This joint examination is highly unusual for an inquiry; in fact, I can find no evidence of a precedent for this. Because of this, the full extent of their testimonies would be interesting to examine, but this is beyond the scope of this study which focusses on politicians' apologies only.

One of the features of witnesses' answers in the courtroom is that they are required to (and resultantly tend to) strictly adhere to Grice's (1975) maxims, and particularly of interest for our purposes, the Quantity Maxim. The Quantity maxim can be summarised as indicating that speakers should *say as much as and no more than is required* (Grice, 1975: 45-6). Hansen notes that witnesses must answer *only* what is asked in the question as 'counsel will not wish to take into account information not explicitly asked for, if that information points to conclusions other than those the (cross-)examination is leading up to' (2008: 1399). She finds that speakers will be reprimanded if they provide answers which do not *directly* answer the question (op. cit.: 1400). However, the application of Grice's maxims at inquiry discourse seems to be much more 'conversational' in nature. Consider the following example:

(1) **Leveson Inquiry Day 72 am, Pages 26-7** (Q = Robert Jay; A = Jack Straw)[4]

    Q:    of course you you were foreign secretary at this time (0.3) we've heard evidence (.) somewhat unclear evidence about three telephone calls between mister blair and mister murdoch in march two thousand and three? are you able to throw any light on those?

    A:→    i'm sorry mister jay i'm not er er i think i was vaguely aware that they'd taken place but but (0.2) .hh it's quite hard to get across t- k- (0.2) to those who weren't involved, the <u>pace</u> of events at this time um i mean i- (0.2) at the beginning of march (0.6) on the fifth or sixth of march i went to new york for what became- what turned out to be the last of the (0.5) the sec- series of security council meetings

Within the context of a trial, Straw's inability to shed light on the telephone calls discussed in Jay's question would in all likelihood mean that counsel moved on to the next question. However, in this setting, Straw is able to expand on *why* he is unable to answer the question, giving details of his busy schedule around the time Jay is interested in. Whilst Straw's utterance is still an answer, it is to a question which was not explicitly asked -- resultantly, it is not obvious that examples like that in (1) are instances of question-answer adjacency pairs, as Atkinson & Drew (1979) make clear is the case for the examination of witness at trial. The most obvious explanation for this difference in courtroom and inquiry discourse is that during a trial, counsel knows what its case will be and thus seeks to obtain a confirmation of its constructed version of events[5]. In contrast, counsel has not already made its mind up at an inquiry -- it is not there to defend or prosecute the witness, indeed in the case of the Leveson Inquiry no-one was on trial. As a result, counsel was seeking to find out as much information for Lord Justice Leveson, in order for him to come up with appropriate recommendations in his report -- stymieing a witness by strictly enforcing Grice's maxims, as in a trial, would not have been conducive to achieving that goal[6].

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[4] Full transcripts can be found at http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/evidence -- I give day, time and page references so that the reader can easily access the example with further context. The transcripts I have produced follow Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions but I do not use ad-hoc orthography to indicate how a particular word was pronounced because I do not believe it adds to the analysis here and it means that the transcripts cannot easily be automatically searched for particular word forms.

[5] This is, to some extent, a crude over-simplification of the role of counsel in trial discourse, but Gibbons (2003: 93ff) expands and elaborates on this point more than I am able to here.

[6] This is also often the case in Coroner's Courts, where the aim is, usually, to uncover the circumstances surrounding a sudden death and not to apportion blame for it (see Atkinson, 1978).

In addition to the answer turns following the conversational maxims less strictly, the turn types found at inquiries are slightly more varied; inquiry talk does feature some non-question and answer adjacency pairs which are not found in the courtroom. The first exception to this comes before the examination of the witness, when the lead counsel calls the witness as in (2).

(2) **Leveson Inquiry Day 74 am, Page 1** (LEV = Lord Justice Leveson, Q = David Barr)

LEV:     good morning mister barr.
Q:       morning sir. (0.3) .hh our first witness today is the right honourable (.) tessa jowell.
LEV:     (0.5) thank you.

Following the exchange of pleasantries and the witness being called, s/he either swears or affirms that his/her testimony 'shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'.

A further departure from the question-answer exchanges comes after the witness has been sworn, when Lord Justice Leveson invariably thanks the witness for his or her written evidence, such as the exchange between him and Sir John Major (labelled A. in the extract) in example (3).

(3) **Leveson Inquiry Day 84 am, Page 1** (A = Sir John Major)

LEV:  sir john. (0.3) thank you <u>very</u> much indeed for this statement which has <u>obviously</u> been an enormous amount of work. (0.3) i am very grateful to you.
A.      (0.2) thank you very much.

A third instance where the restriction on turn type is relaxed is when the witness is being introduced to the inquiry. The introduction usually takes the form of an outlining of their previous positions (as in example 4).  It sometimes also includes some direct reference to how they have been affected in their daily lives by their dealings with the press and how, as a result, they are in a position to advise the inquiry and make representations to it. (4) gives an instance of this type of introductory exchange, and also provides the first of many examples of apology to be discussed in this paper.

(4) **Leveson Inquiry Day 76 pm, Pages 145-6** (Q = Carine Patry Hoskins, A = John, Lord Reid)

Q:      from nineteen ninety seven in government you held a number of posts including (.) home secretary, secretary of state for defence, secretary of state for health, secretary of state for northern ireland, leader of the house of commons and president of the privy council, chairman of the labour party and cabinet minister without portfolio, secretary of state for scotland, minister for transport and armed forces minister. so a very w- wide variety of positions.
A:→   i'm sorry they're so long!
Q:      no °not at all°
LEV:    i hope you found them interesting.
A:      they were.

In (4) we find John Reid, who, as counsel notes, held a wide variety of positions in the Labour Government from 1997 onwards, being introduced and apologising for the length of his titles. Reid's apology, and the majority of those found at the Inquiry, has the following features in common with those found in quotidian conversation

     i.    The vast majority of apologies immediately follow the offence, or an utterance which could be interpreted as a complaint about a prior offence.

    ii.    It is possible that the apology receives some uptake; that is to say, the apology can be responded to in some way by the other participants in the exchange.

    iii.    The apologies are very frequently short; they usually contain just one explicit or conventional expression of apology (e.g. *I apologise; I'm sorry; I'd like to say sorry;* etc.).

The exchange in (4) has all of these characteristics: i) it follows the 'offence' of Ms Patry Hoskins having to read out an extended list of Cabinet positions (indeed, her comment 'so a wide variety of positions' could have been construed as a complaint about the offence by Lord Reid); ii) there is some uptake of the apology --- Patry Hoskins' 'No' seems a rejection of the need to apologise (the preferred response to an apology according to Robinson (2004), we return to this idea in section 4); iii) the apology is short containing the conventional expression of `I'm sorry' (in addition to what could be interpreted as an explanation – a non-conventional apology token).

So interaction at the Inquiry (and possibly public inquiries more generally) does have similarities to courtroom discourse, in that the main pattern of exchanges centres on questions and answers. However, we have also seen that answers need not be as strictly wedded to the question posed, unlike in trials. There are also instances of deviation from the question-answer pattern during a witness' evidence and this taken together gives rise to an atmosphere in which apology tokens can occur and in which they can be responded to.

## 4. Types of offence

Following the close analysis of all instances of exchanges containing an explicit or convention apology token, I have found five broad `offences' which trigger an apology (and one instance which does not fit in any of these categories and is presented in example 17).

### 4.1. Talk offences
Talk offences include interrupting counsel, being repetitious, being verbose and talking too fast, as in the following example.

(5) **Leveson Inquiry Day 41 pm, Pages 87-8** (Q = Robert Jay, A = John, Lord Prescott)

A:        >>secondly if you want another one (.) the evidence we've just received from every newspaper about the legal aid but there's a proposal now which we rejected as a government but this one has accepted it that they->>

Q:        i'm sorry can i just ask you to go a tiny bit slower.

A:→      i'm sorry i'm sorry.

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Q:          sorry to cut you off in full flow there.
A:          now you can feel the sympathy for the hansard writer=
LEV:                                                      =well we
            have one here as well!
```

Talk offences are particularly problematic in the frame of courtroom-like discourse since an accurate record of the talk needs to be made by the stenographer -- this task is made more difficult by overlapping talk (since the talk of two speakers needs to recorded at the same time) and talking too fast (whilst a stenographer can record up to 250 words per minute (Merrill Legal Solutions, p.c.) long stretches at this pace increase error rates, impacting upon the quality of the transcript). Being repetitious and verbose are viewed (by some, at least) as offences since the time of the inquiry is wasted by witnesses not adding `new' information; this is especially a concern when the inquiry has a large number of witnesses to hear from (650 people testified either in writing or in person). Note that counsel also apologises before and after Prescott – our main focus in this paper is on the apologies of the politicians themselves, but we will return to counsel's apologies briefly in section 5.2.

## 4.2. Misspeaks

Misspeaks can be viewed as a particular type of talk offence in which the speaker makes an error in her talk which requires repair. I consider misspeaks separately from other talk offences because their sequential positions vary compared to other talk offences and because of the high frequency of their occurrence. The example below gives an example of a misspeak, the self-initiated self-repair for which is announced with a `sorry' token.

(6) **Leveson Inquiry Day 83 pm, Pages 63-4** (A = George Osborne)

```
A:      i guess what i had was (0.4) and i- i:: have been involved from a
        very junior level in conservative politics since two thousand and
→       four (0.2) er sorry! >>nineteen ninety four>> so you know over a
        long period […]
```

## 4.3. Document offences

Participants at the Leveson Inquiry are provided with swathes of documents intended to help them prepare their written statements and prepare for their examination by counsel and Lord Justice Leveson (if they are invited to give further oral evidence). The collection of documents (`bundles') contain relevant sections of legislation, other witnesses' evidence, newspaper articles and other documents which counsel intends to refer to in the process of the inquiry. These bundles are often large and cumbersome, and numbered in a variety of ways (i.e. each document has its own evidence number, contains original page numbers and is also numbered with the inquiry's own pagination). The unwieldiness of these bundles leads to exchanges such as the one below.

(7) **Leveson Inquiry Day 81 pm, Pages 53** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Dr. Vincent Cable)

```
Q:      zero one six five eight now doctor cable apparently refers to a
        meeting with lord clement-jones described as the treasurer of the
        lib dems and the culture and media spokesman in the lords=
A:→                                                           =i'm
    →   sorry could you just er give me a second to catch up?
```

```
Q:       i'm sorry
A:→      so the number was? what sorry?
Q:       zero one six five eight.
A:       (3.0) i have it thank you.
```

Virtually every politician appearing before Lord Justice Leveson had an issue with not being able to find the right page in the bundle, or forgetting which page they were supposed to be referring to (although, not all of the politicians apologised for these 'document offences'). Given that the offence is an understandable one to make, it is interesting that it is viewed as an offence at all by those apologising for it. I would suggest that problems of this nature are viewed as offences as they delay the proceedings of the inquiry (in the same way that being repetitious and verbose do), so despite being understandable, some view it as still requiring an apology.

### 4.4. Clarification requests

Clarification requests are essentially other repair initiators. They can either be open class repair initiators where the witness does not 'identify the repairable items in the prior turns, or specify the nature of the difficulty which [they] have in understanding what their co-participants have just said' (Drew, 1997: 72), in which case they simply take the form of 'sorry?' or 'I'm sorry' in this data set. If they are closed class repair initiators (as is the case in example 8) the apology token is coupled with an explanation of what the difficulty is – in this case that Campbell is unsure of what the meaning of the previous question is.

(8) **Leveson Inquiry Day 70 pm, Page 65** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Alastair Campbell)

```
Q:       although the terms of the debate having been set. (0.7) .hhh the
         political response which is to debate policy may flow from that
         may- er might not it?
A:→      (1.2) er wh- er sorry what do you mean by that?
Q:       if- if- if the newspapers have er set the terms [of the debate] […]
```

### 4.5. Evidence offences

Evidence offences may be viewed as the most 'serious' of all of the offences encountered in this data set. They see a witness either unable to provide an answer to a question, become confused in their answer or provide incorrect information to the Inquiry. In the example below, Lord Mandelson's response is inadequate because he did not research a particular aspect of his answer and so this becomes apologisable.

(9) **Leveson Inquiry Day 74 pm, Pages 64** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Peter, Lord Mandelson)

```
Q:       do you think mister brown had an eye on the daily mail and mister
         dacre's view in terms of (0.4) policies for which he was responsible?
A:        hmm (0.4) as prime minister he was responsible in a sense for all
         policies. (0.3) i'm not sure. i- i- i- i mean the only thing i vaguely
         remember er (1.0) was (1.0) something to do with data protection.
  →      uhh er there was an issue to do with data protection. i'm sorry i
         didn't research this and my memory is not great on it but there was
         a piece of legislation, i can't remember which-
Q:       we have looked into this lord mandelson.
```

### 5. Apologies and sequencing

Having looked at the sorts of events which precipitate apologies at the Inquiry, in this section we shall explore how the apologies themselves are sequentially ordered in the talk exchange. The main focus will be on: i) how apologies *can* be triggered by complaints; ii) how apologies can receive uptake and them forms that that can take; iii) how a lack of uptake is unmarked; and iv) how different functions of an apology can affect how it is responded to.

#### 5.1. Triggers for the apology

I noted earlier that Psathas suggests that apologies are second pair parts of a complaint--apology adjacency pair (1995: 17). Some of the examples already shown (4, 5) give support for this view. Indeed, there are further instances where a complaint could be interpreted from the previous (question) turn; some of these potential complaints are more subtle that others:

(10)    **Leveson Inquiry Day 82 pm, Page 24** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Jeremy Hunt)
    A:    um (1.5) i- i'm afraid i can't remember what event happened that
          day?
    Q:    it was in fact the day before. the third of march was the
          announcement.
    A:    oh! right. yes sorry it was the day after i'd made the announcement
          about the uils and um i sent him a text to thank him for his um help
          and i also sent my other special adviser a text to thank her for <u>her</u>
          help.

(11)    **Leveson Inquiry Day 76 pm, Page 175** (Q = Carine Patry Hoskins, A = John, Lord
        Reid)
    Q:    and then at forty two you don't just deal with the priorities you also
          deal with the <u>routine</u> ministerial duties that you had to deal with as
          well.
    A:     i apologise for the length of these=
    Q:                                       =no
    A:    but basically prioritisation is almost by definition a relative
          decision.

In (10) the complaint can be viewed as counsel having to correct the witness on the facts of the question being asked, and the 'in fact' in Jay's correction is an explicit indication that he is providing a repair for Hunt's previous turn. In (11) counsel states that Reid has provided not *just* details of priorities but also routine matters he dealt with, meaning that his evidence will be much longer and it is for this that he is apologising – giving an indication that he has interpreted counsel's turn as a(n implicit) complaint.

However, this is not the whole story. Apologies can often be made off a politician's own bat, as it were. This is naturally particularly true for misspeaks where speakers very often initiate their own repair without prompting. In addition, where the apology is used by the politician to seek clarification, it is clear that this has not been triggered by a complaint, but rather by the trouble encountered. We shall return to the special status of this type of apology later in this section. That said, it is not just in these cases where we find the absence of a complaint. Consider the following two examples:

(12)   **Leveson Inquiry Day 80 am, Page 32-3** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Theresa
       May)
       Q:      so this was <u>now</u> being seen as part of a wider picture where other
               issues or press regulations might now come into play. (.) is that
               right?
       A:      yes=may i just take you back er er mister jay to my previous
               answer because i now realise that there are <u>two</u> lord wallaces in the
               lords and this may in fact be a reference to lord wallace who was at
    →          the time a whip in the lord for home office matters. (0.5) so i
    →          apologise if i can't clarify which of the <u>two</u> lord wallaces it was. […]
(13)   **Leveson Inquiry Day 72 am, Page 94** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Jack Straw)
       Q:      unless you've got any other points you wish to:: develop mister
               straw in relation in particular to the future (.) those were all the
               questions i had for you.
       A:      can i just- sorry. it was er triggered (0.3) in my um mind by lord
               justice leveson's reference to the times [1 page of evidence]

Table 1 gives a summary of the data found at the Inquiry. We can see that not all apologies
belong to this adjacency pair of complaint—apology, and that there is another source for
them: speakers recognising without prompting that their actions are potential offences and so
spontaneously apologising for them. What we can also see is that the most serious offence
type, that of giving incorrect or faulty evidence, is the action which is most complained about
by counsel or the Inquiry chairman, indeed this is the only category of apologies where more
of the apologies come as a result of a complaint than without prompting.

| Offence type | Complaint | No complaint | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Talk** | 15% (3) | 85% (17) | 20 |
| **Misspeaks** | 22.2% (2) | 77.8% (7) | 9 |
| **Document** | 26.3% (5) | 73.7% (14) | 19 |
| **Clarification** | 13.3% (2) | 86.7% (13) | 15 |
| **Evidence** | 52.4% (22) | 47.6% (20) | 42 |
| **TOTAL** | **32.4% (34)** | **67.6% (71)** | **105** |

**Table 1 showing whether a complaint is the trigger for an apology for each offence
type (raw figures in brackets)**

### 5.2. Reaction to an apology

Having looked to what offences receive apologies and whether they are triggered by
utterances interpretable as complaints, we now move to looking at how they are reacted to
by Counsel and Lord Justice Leveson (who are the potential recipients of the apology). In
this case, the focus is on seeing whether Robinson's (2004) finding that apologies set up
an adjacency pair of apology—undermining an apology's claim to have caused offence
also applies at the Inquiry.

Firstly let's look to the similarities. We do find uptake of the type described by Robinson
(2004). Example 14 shows how counsel rejects the notion that Gordon Brown needed to
apologise for the offence which he describes as moving from the point of the question.
This, I believe, relates to what I said in section 3, that the Inquiry had (and inquiries
generally have) the purpose of finding out *all* the relevant information before reaching

their conclusion and so deviating from a question can be inoffensive if important points are raised in the evidence.

(14)     **Leveson Inquiry Day 83 am, Pages 115-6** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Gordon Brown)
>       A.       if- if- if i may say, (0.3) i think there's quite a lot to learn from (.) <u>america</u> where this is a live debate at the moment. (0.4) i'm sorry i moved from your initial er initial point about self-regulation.
>       Q. → (0.3) not at all. (0.6) now er mister brown the- the prime minister as you will know has said that the relationship between the press and politicians .hhh needs to be reset.  (0.8) what would <u>you</u> recommend- if anything (.) in that regard?

An extension of rejecting the need to apologise and not discussed in Robinson's work is the apologisee taking on blame for the initial offence.  Thiscan be seen in the following example in which Kit Malthouse produces an apology following a complaint that he was answering a different question.

(15)     **Leveson Inquiry Day 58 am, Page 23** (A= Kit Malthouse)
>       LEV:    hm yes actually i was asking about a slightly different point.
>       A:       i'm sorry.
>       LEV:→no not at all i'm sure it's my poor question. […]

This 'taking the blame' component can be taken further still and sees either counsel or the Inquiry chairman apologising in turn following the witnesses' initial apology – we saw an example of this in (5) with Robert Jay apologising in turn to John Prescott for having to interrupt him, as well as in (7) where Jay again responds to Vince Cable's apology for not keeping up with an apology in kind.

Again from Kit Malthouse's evidence we find a further type of uptake described by Robinson (2004), that of suggesting that the offence which led to the apology is either inoffensive or irrelevant in the present circumstance:

(16)     **Leveson Inquiry Day 58 am, Pages 49-50** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Kit Malthouse)
>       Q:        i think that was in fact the seventeenth of july but check that (0.3) monday was the eighteenth of july.
>       A:       was it? i'm sorry (.) my apologies.
>       Q:→ (2.5) it doesn't matter at all but you can see from the next page you get the date right.
>       A:       do i? i'm sorry.
>       Q:       that's the monday.

The example shows a complaint from Jay about the wrong date being used in Malthouse's evidence -- this complaint elicits an apology from Malthouse. Despite making the complaint, Jay asserts that getting the date wrong 'doesn't matter at all'; this, I suppose, would usually raise the question why make the complaint if the offence is unimportant? The answer to that, I believe, lies in the importance for evidence to be accurate for the purposes of the inquiry and making the complaint leads to inaccurate evidence being corrected by the witness. The complainer (Jay) then attempts to minimise the face-loss experienced by Malthouse with this

assertion that the offence is merely hypothetical and unimportant (and thus has not been realised). Interestingly, however, a second complaint is made by Jay after the uptake for the apology -- the complaint this time that Malthouse has used the correct date later in his evidence, leading to this muddled picture. Though Jay has suggested this type of offence is irrelevant, it still receives a further apology from Malthouse. This second apology could indicate that Malthouse views Jay's 'It doesn't matter at all' as non-genuine, or he views this second offence of causing confusion as sufficiently different to the first offence of getting the fact wrong to require a second apology.

There is an example of a type of uptake not found at all in Robinson's data set which might be described as *questioning the sincerity of the apology*. There is only one instance of this at the Inquiry, but it is a deviant case which merits mention.

> (17)       **Leveson Inquiry Day 86 pm, Pages 59-60** (A = David Cameron)
> A:      i think they've got to be rigorously tested as to whether they can
> deliver independence (.) penalties (.) compulsion (.) toughness (.)
> public confidence  and all the rest of it. and i think that's- er sorry
> to have given you this umm hot potato ((smiling)) but i think that's
> the test.
> LEV:→i don't think you sound sorry about doing that at all actually!
> ((laughter from gallery)) but ummm but there are some
> contradictions in there because if it has to involve everyone […]

Cameron apologises to the chairman of the Inquiry for having passed on responsibility for devising a new regulatory system for the Press (what he describes as a 'hot potato') which leads to Leveson suggesting that Cameron is not really sorry about it[7]. This comment elicits laughter from the gallery but once this dies down, Leveson goes on to suggest that there are contradictions in Cameron's answer. This coupled with the suggestion that the believability of Cameron's apology is questionable has the potential to cause Cameron face-damage, since it could be seen to call into doubt an aspect of his personality (i.e. his trustworthiness) integral to his positive public image (see Murphy, 2014: 78 for more on the face-wants of political figures). The riskiness for interpersonal relations may explain why this is not found in the quotidian apologies looked at by Robinson (2004), and why it is found but once in this data set.

### 5.3.Absence of reaction to an apology
So far I have provided support for the view espoused by Robinson (2004) (and Levinson, 1983 for that matter) that apologies are first pair parts of an adjacency pair, albeit I have shown that there are additional possible responses. Here though I will show that a response to the apology itself can be wholly absent and that this is unmarked.

Example 18 shows that some apologies do not predicate the need for a response from the interlocutor (i.e. the absence of a response to the apology will not be commented upon by the apologiser, as one would expect if they did enter into adjacency pairs). In this case, we have an apology as the first turn constructional unit of a speaker's extended turn.

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[7] Note as well that this is a deviant case in another respect; it does not fit into the offence categories discussed in section 4. The offence might be described as an action done outside of the Inquiry. Given that it is unlike the other apologies looked at, it does not appear in the numerical results presented later in this paper.

(18)    **Leveson Inquiry Day 72 am, Pages 26-7** (Q = Robert Jay; A = Jack
        Straw)
        Q:      of course you you were foreign secretary at this time (0.3) we've
                heard evidence (.) somewhat unclear evidence about three
                telephone calls between mister blair and mister murdoch in march
                two thousand and three? are you able to throw any light on those?
        A:→    i'm sorry mister jay i'm not er er i think i was vaguely aware that
                they'd taken place but but (0.2) .hh it's quite hard to get across t- k-
                (0.2) to those who weren't involved, the <u>pace</u> of events at this time
                um i mean i- (0.2) at the beginning of march (0.6) on the fifth or
                sixth of march i went to new york for what became- what turned
                out to be the last of the (0.5) the sec- series of security council
                meetings [14 lines of evidence]
        LEV:→(1.0) but how important was it um <u>politically</u> to (0.2) as it were?
                get a newspaper onside be- because the public had to be convinced?

Straw's apology for being unable to answer is followed by a long (14 further lines in the
Inquiry transcript) justification for why he is unable to answer (which constitutes a
particularised conversational implicature interpretable as an apology). The apology receives
none of the uptake discussed previously, indeed Leveson does not acknowledge it at all and
moves on to the next question.  One argument for why this occurs is that by the time the
speaker has relinquished the floor after the long turn at talk, it is no longer relevant for the
hearer to comment upon the apology.

Other scenarios where the apology receives no uptake is where it is used to apologise for
overlapping or interruption, as in (19) and (20)

(19)    **Leveson Inquiry Day 86 am, Pages 8-9** (Q = Robert Jay; A = David
        Cameron)
        Q:      do you think [the-
        A:→                 [but what] it- er sorry what it has leant me towards is
                spending quite a lot of the focus er and this is in my evidence (.)
                quite a lot of focus on broadcasting. [15 lines of evidence]
        Q:→    yes:: and broadcasters are subject to quite different regulations of
                course.

(20)    **Leveson Inquiry Day 74 pm, Page 45** (Q = Robert Jay; A = Peter, Lord
        Mandelson)
        Q:      okay well the last point you make if we go back to your statement
                at oh six nine oh six. this part of your state[ment]
        A:→                                                  [i mean] i'm sorry i just
                think that writing me a letter like that i mean it just showed such
                chutzpah [6 lines of evidence]
        Q:→    mm well you've drawn it to our attention lord mandelson so it's
                there.

However, it is not just the sequential position of the apology which affects whether or not it
receives a response.  There are instances where the apology appears turn-finally and is the
main function of the turn but where uptake from counsel or Lord Justice Leveson is absent,
despite a response being a plausibly relevant response.  The example below highlights this.

(21)  **Leveson Inquiry Day 74 am, Page 68** (Q = Robert Jay; A = Tessa Jowell)
   LEV:  i'm not trying to inquire into your personal circumstances you
         understand.
   A:    no no no this doesn't take much er invitation for me to start talking
         →about this i'm afraid so do forgive me.
   LEV:→ (1.5) but uhhh did you pursue anything through the ppc? (0.2)
         and- and if so to what effect?=and if not then why not?
   A:    (1.0) hm i'm sure that this is <u>such</u> an inadequate answer but really
         there is <u>much</u> of that that time that i (.) <u>simply</u> can't remember.

Note that a preferred response to the apology is not pursued by the apologiser, as is shown to be the case in Robinson (2004) and which he cites as evidence for his view that apologies form adjacency pairs in quotidian conversation.

Table 2 shows the frequencies with which apologies do not receive a response according to their sequential position in the Inquiry data.  It shows that an apology being in initial position does not preclude it receiving a response from its recipient, but also that appearing turn finally or occupying the full turn does not guarantee that the apology will receive a response.

| Offence type | Sequential Position | Response | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | None | Reject | Minimize | Apology |
| Talk | Initial | (10) | (1) | -- | -- |
| | Medial | (2) | (1) | -- | -- |
| | Final | (3) | (1) | -- | -- |
| | Full | -- | (1) | -- | (1) |
| Misspeak | Medial | (6) | -- | -- | -- |
| | Final | (2) | -- | -- | -- |
| | Full | (1) | -- | -- | -- |
| Document | Initial | (4) | -- | -- | (1) |
| | Final | (4) | -- | -- | -- |
| | Full | (7) | -- | (1) | (2) |
| Clarification | Initial | (1) | -- | -- | (1) |
| | Final | (1) | -- | -- | (1) |
| | Full | (10) | -- | -- | (1) |
| Evidence | Initial | (20) | (1) | (1) | -- |
| | Medial | (3) | -- | -- | -- |
| | Final | (3) | -- | (1) | -- |
| | Full | (7) | (4) | (2) | |
| **TOTAL** | | **84** | **9** | **5** | **7** |

**Table 2: The uptake received by apologies based on their sequential position and offence type.**

Table 2 reinforces that the lack of response is a fairly common feature of the apologies at the Inquiry and this taken with the fact that sequential position does not seem to have a great bearing on the uptake the apology receives suggests to me that apologies in the inquiry context do not form adjacency pairs, but instead are part of a looser sequential relationship, which Pomerantz (1978) describes as an action chain.  Pomerantz describes action chains as 'a type of organization in which two ordered actions, Action$_1$ and Action$_2$, are linked such

that the performing of action $A_1$ provides the possibility of performance of $A_2$ as an appropriate next action' (Pomerantz, 1978: 82). In this case, the action of apologising makes relevant the possibility of rejecting the need to apologise, minimizing the offensiveness of the action which precipitated the apology, or apologising in turn. However, the non-performance of any of these actions will be unmarked, because, unlike with an adjacency pair, there is no 'compulsion' for a co-participant to perform any of these actions.

There is a further advantage to considering apologies as part of an action chain and that is that one can include a further optional element before the apology, in this case a complaint which we have seen does trigger some of the apologies. This taken together gives us a 'pathway' for apologising at the Inquiry which can be represented as in Figure 1:

(Complaint) → Apology → (Rejection of need to apologise) → Next turn
(Minimize the offence)
(Apology in kind)

**Figure 1: A pathway for apologising at the Inquiry, bracketed elements are optional.**

### 5.4. Apologies performing repair

So far we have looked particularly at examples of apologies where the main function is, indeed, to apologise. In this section I want to spend some time looking at apologies which are used to indicate that repair work is needed. Robinson (2006) suggests that speakers use apology tokens in the performance of this action in order to make clear that they feel responsible for the need for the repair; this seems a plausible account, but a number of the examples in this data set suggest to me a different interpretation.

(22)    **Leveson Inquiry Day 84 pm, Page 13** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Ed Miliband)
    Q:     to- to what extent do you give weight to the <u>chilling</u> effect
           argument and coupled with that i suppose are the unintended
           consequences of regulation which we've- we've heard from one or
           two witnesses?
    A:     (1.8) i'm sorry mister jay would you just explain the qu- the qu-
           what you're seeking from the question?
    Q:     sorry! the chilling effect (.) that if you are not careful with
           regulation you have a:::?=
    A:                                    =yes i think that is always something that
           when<u>ever</u> we are scrutinising:: proposals that we must look very
           carefully at.

Miliband's apology may be used to minimise the imposition of having Jay repeat (or rephrase) what he has already asked, and may additionally indicate Miliband's regret that his lack of understanding has impeded the 'flow' in conversation, which conversational partners aim for. However, rather than interpreting Miliband's utterance as a `usual' apology and either suggesting the apology was unnecessary or asserting that the action was inoffensive, Jay apologises himself. Jay's 'sorry' indicates that he believes the offence lies with him and that Miliband's need for clarification derives from *his* unclear question, rather than a fault on Miliband's part. Jay's reaction to Miliband's initial apology would suggest that these apologies are not interpreted by hearers as indicating the speaker's regret at her misunderstanding, but instead, are viewed as mitigation of a

request for clarification[8] (implicit in which is a complaint about the quality of a prior utterance).

A request for repair can also contain within it contradiction of a prior turn at talk. The following example in which Vince Cable seeks to repair the presupposition in counsel's question further indicates this:

(23) **Leveson Inquiry Day 81 am**, **Page 29** (Q = Robert Jay, A = Vincent Cable)

      Q:     so you knew his [Frederic Michel's – J.M.] name at the time. (0.4) did you know what his status was within the company?=

      A:                                  =no      i'm sorry! (0.2) i said at the time i <u>didn't</u> (.) register who mister frederic michel was, (0.3) i knew who james murdoch was.

      Q:     my apologies. (0.2) you did say that.

Here Cable's apology is coupled with an explicit statement identifying that he is not responsible for the repair, since he has already provided evidence which is contrary to Mr Jay's question. Also noteworthy is that whilst Cable's 'I'm sorry' is a generalised conversational implicature (GCI) potentially interpretable as an apology, Jay's response is an explicit apology token only interpretable as an apology (see Levinson, 1995 for more on GCI theory). Examples like this suggest that it is too simplistic to view apologies doing repair as indicative of the apologiser indexing a sense of responsibility for the need for repair.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper I have shown the main offences performed by British politicians when giving their evidence at a major public inquiry, namely the Leveson Inquiry. We have seen that many of these offences are interactional in nature, rather than being for tangible transgressions and this allows for comparability with previous studies into apologies in quotidian conversation (Robinson 2004, 2006). I have shown that the relationship between apology and response is less strict at the Inquiry than in everyday talk, and that responses when not given are not pursued by co-participants. Where we do find responses, they are similar in nature to those found in everyday talk. I suggest that apologies (in this setting at least) form action chains, rather than a stricter sequential relation like the adjacency pair.

Apologies can be used in the performance of repair work at the Inquiry, as is the case in quotidian talk. However, I suggest that simply because an apology is used does not mean the speaker is taking responsibility for the fault, it may simply be the case that apology tokens have become routinized to the extent that they merely indicate that something 'unexpected' has taken place.

Finally, the Inquiry provides a large source of interactional data which can be used to explore other interpersonally sensitive acts. In particular, the Inquiry would be a useful source of data for exploring how blame and responsibility is negotiated between interactants, as well as for how criticism of absent others is performed.

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[8] This suggests that apology tokens are undergoing pragmaticalisation, where in some contexts the use of the apology 'permits, for example, extensions of meaning involving the speaker's attitudes to the hearer or to the message' (Aijmer, 1997: 3). More work on the development of apologies is needed, however.

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