Apologies in French and English: an insight into conventionalisation and im/politeness

This paper argues that a cross-linguistic study of the lexical semantics of terms used to apologise in English and French can shed light on the conventionalisation of (mock) politeness. Despite the long historical interdependence between the two languages, the linguistic forms most often used to say sorry in Present-Day English and French derive from different etymons. S'excuser *and* désolé((e)s) *are most frequently used in French while 'sorry' is more commonly used in English. Both languages draw more rarely on 'pardon', and 'regret'.*

The paper explores the semantico-pragmatics of apology and aims to identify norms and variations in the expression of apology intra- and interlinguistically. Tokens of SORRY, APOLOGI/ES/SE/ZE, DÉSOLÉ, EXCUSE, PARDON and REGRET were identified and analysed in a range of (mainly) spoken corpora of American, British and Canadian English and Canadian and French French. Distributional patterns highlight differences in the rates and pragmalinguistics of apologies across (different varieties of) English and French but, crucially, also across different genres.

While SORRY and EXCUSE have acquired the same illocutionary meaning in English and French, respectively, denoting APOLOGY, ironic uses of apologetic IFIDs are very rare in the data, arguably not denotative, and rely on a pragmatic mismatch to do mock politeness.

Key-words
apologies; English; French; sorry*; désolé;* mock politeness

1. Introduction

Since Sweetser (1990) highlighted the connection between pragmatic ambiguity, semantic change and lexical polysemy, a number of historical studies have provided convincing evidence of the way that new meanings are forged in the course of social interaction. A question arises as to what constraints there might be on conventionalisations of this sort. The present paper takes an onomasiological and semasiological corpus approach to trace norms and variations in the expression of apology across two languages, English and French, and across different varieties of these pluricentric languages, in Europe and North America. It considers the etymological origins of the lexical items used to apologise (Section 2.1), how these have conventionalised (Sections 2.1 and 2.2), previous studies of apologies in English and French (Section 2.3), the different methods which can be adopted to study apologies (Section 3) and how distributional frequencies differ (Sections 4.2 – 4.4). Finally, it considers the ironic, or sarcastic, use of apologies as a form of mock politeness (impoliteness) (Section 4.5) and investigates the status of these uses from a semantic viewpoint.

My argument in this paper is that different languages draw on lexical items with different (if somewhat similar) semantics/etymological origins to apologise and that distributional frequencies of forms vary across languages/regional varieties, genres (and other macro-

categories such as gender, age and power variables but these are not explicitly covered within the scope of this paper). Once conventionalised, these polite items can be used, ironically, to perform mock or impolite illocutionary acts and this is a tendency which appears to be cross-linguistically robust. The two (conflicting) usages co-exist, though the ironic usage is performative, not denotative.

The scope of this article does not permit an exhaustive study of all of the variables used to apologise in different contexts in the different varieties of both French and English. To that extent, the article can be considered as a scoping activity. Fruitful avenues for future studies are identified throughout the article.

2. Background

2.1 Types of semantic core senses/etymologies we might expect

As Grainger and Harris (2007: 2) point out, early studies of apologies, such as Olshtain and Cohen (1983), included amongst the main structural components of an apology

> (i) an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) and (ii) an expression of responsibility/blame, as general strategies, with three further situation-specific strategies involving (iii) an explanation or account (iv) an offer of repair and (v) a promise of forbearance.

In exploring apologies across different cultures as part of their CCSARP (cross-cultural study of speech act realisation patterns), Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989: 290) listed the following as the most common IFIDs for apologies: *sorry*, *excuse me*, *I apologize for*…, *forgive me*, *pardon me for*…, *I regret that*..., *I'm afraid* … They also mention the five strategies which make up the apology speech act. Jucker and Taavitsainen (2008: 231) provide the following example which illustrates these five strategies:

> (1) I'm sorry (IFID), I missed the bus (RESPONSIBILITY), and there was a terrible traffic jam (EXPLANATION). Let's make another appointment (REPAIR). I'll make sure that I'm here on time (FORBEARANCE).

Jucker and Taavitsainen remark that 'Among these strategies only the first is routinized to such an extent that it can be used as search patterns (sic) for a corpus-based investigation.' As we shall see, 'sorry' is the most frequent and most conventionalized apology IFID in Present-Day English, but other semantic cores are possible in other languages and, indeed, in earlier periods of English. In their historical corpus study, Jucker and Taavitsainen 2008 (p.241) found that:

> The routinized and lexicalized apologies in our data express different orientations. The request to *pardon* or to *excuse* indicates an offence that is in need of the addressee's generosity, whereas the phrase *I am sorry* indicates that the speaker is sorry and expresses his/her feelings. In the Renaissance period, the second-person oriented apologies with imperative forms *pardon*, *excuse*, and *forgive* are more

> frequent than the selforiented expressions, as the following numbers of absolute occurrences show: *pardon me/my* gave 1153 hits in prose drama and 178 in prose fiction; *excuse me/my* 431 and 87, *forgive me/my* 278 and four hits respectively, while *I am/'m sorry* occurred 494 times in prose drama and 33 times in prose fiction. The two orientations belong to different politeness strategies.

It seems that English moved from being more of a second-person oriented apologetic (*pardon , excuse*) culture to a more self-oriented one (*sorry*). In his study of the BNC, Deutschmann (2003: 51) explains that 'A total of 3070 explicit apologies were encountered in the corpus. Of these, 59.2 per cent contained the form *sorry*, 26.5 per cent the form *pardon* and 10.4 per cent the form *excuse*. The remaining lexemes *afraid, apologise, forgive* and *regret* together constituted approximately 3.9 per cent of the apologies.'

2.2. The evolution of common IFIDS for apologising: 'sorry' and 'excuse me'
As we shall see, some of the commonest illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) for apologising in English and French are 'sorry' and forms involving 'excuse'. Etymologically, these derive from both Germanic and Romance roots. According to the OED, 'sorry' is a blending of two etymons: 'sore' and 'sorrow'. These were already clearly associated in Old English, occupying the same semantic field of distress and suffering. 'Sorrow' appears to have exerted a semantic and possibly formal influence on 'sorry'. 'I'm sorry' (=I feel sorrow/sore) conventionalises as the performative 'I apologise'. A similar figure-ground shift to that for *apo+logos* and *ex-causa* leads to the reading of SORE/SORROW/SORRY/DÉSOLÉ as an apology. 'Excuse' is of more recent origin than 'sorry', coming in to Middle English from Old French *escuser* (verb), from Latin *excusare* 'to free from blame', from *ex-* 'out' + *causa* 'accusation, cause'.

There has been some debate in the literature concerning the French reflexive *s'excuser.* The non-reflexive 'excuser' to excuse someone is uncontentious. The reflexive form 'Je m'excuse' (I excuse myself? I apologise) was, at first, criticised by purists. The case is discussed by Recanati (1987: 102) who invokes Ducrot (1980:54)'s argument for the conventionalisation of *je m'excuse:*

> Today the formula *je m'excuse* is no longer objectionable. To justify it, we need only note that *s'excuser* can mean "to apologise". It is thus no longer absurd or outrageous to say "*Je m'excuse"* the way one says 'I apologise'.

This process (the auto-delocutive derivation of illocutionary meaning) is referred to, by Ducrot, as the 'performative illusion'.

2.3 Previous work on apologies in English and French.
A number of works have investigated apologies in English (Owen 1983, Holmes 1990, Deutschman 2003, Grainger and Harris 2007 (eds.), Jucker and Taavitsainen 2008, Drew et al. 2016), and the ways in which polite behaviour differs across English and other languages and cultures (Sifianou 1992 on English and Greek, Suszczyńska 1999 on English, Polish and Hungarian, Márquez-Reiter on English and Uruguayan Spanish 2000,

Ogiermann 2009, on Polish, Russian and English, Barros García and Terkourafi 2015 on American English and Peninsular Spanish).

Deutschmann (2003) provides a thoroughgoing analysis of apologies in British English based on the spoken part of the British National Corpus. He notes (p. 205) that 'the apologies in the corpus express a functional range, of which prototypical usage of the form is only one possibility'. Deutschmann identifies three main types of apology: 'real' apologies (for a range of transgressions) (36%), 'formulaic' apologies (requesting repetition, or covering slips of the tongue) (50%), 'face attack' apologies (disarmers when about to utter a reprimand or difference of opinion) (10%). Sarcastic or ironic uses accounted for around 3% of the total, and like 'real' apologies they were syntactically complex. Deutschmann found few gender differences in the use of apologies – but indicates that apologies are more frequent in middle-class than lower-class speakers such that the use of the apology form is 'primarily part of the middle-class sociolect' (p.206). Sarcastic apologies were more frequent in male and, especially, younger speakers. In terms of genre, Deutschmann found that formality was not a factor but the number of conversational partners was: a larger number of speakers in a group led to more apologies. In terms of who apologises more to whom, Deutschmann found that older speakers apologise more to younger speakers than vice versa and more powerful to less powerful. He proposes (p.208) that 'using politeness formulae such as the apology in British English is a way of signalling high status'.

The current paper builds on Deutschmann's findings, by making broadbrush comparisons with American and Canadian corpus data, and with the expression of apology in French, as reflected in spoken corpora with similar genres. The scope of the paper does not permit detailed comparisons across sociolinguistic and power variables, though this is clearly of vital interest to cross-Atlantic travellers and is an avenue for future research studies.

Surprisingly few works have been devoted to apologies in French or to a comparison of the pragmalinguistics of apologies in French and English or in different varieties of French. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1998, Chapter 4) discusses apologies as ritual exchanges and gives interesting examples from both English and (mainly written) French, most of which include *excusez-moi* (with fewer examples of *pardonnez-moi, pardon, désolé*). No quantification or comparison across varieties of French is offered but Kerbrat-Orecchioni suggests (page 165) that the embarrassment, contrition and regret which are associated with the ritual expression of apology can be realised in a range of expressions such as *désolé, navré, confus, embêté, regretter, avoir honte*. Schölmberger (2008) highlights the differences she has found between apologies made in French French and Canadian French, drawing on the DCT responses given by 20 native speakers of French French and 20 native speakers of Canadian French. She identifies (2008: 341) three sub-categories of apology IFID in French:

> Expression of regret (IFIDer):
> *Je suis désolé*
> I am sorry
>
> Offer of Apology (IFIDoa)

Je m'excuse
I apologise

Request for forgiveness (IFIDrf)
Je vous demande sincèrement pardon
I sincerely ask you to forgive me.

Both the Canadian French and the French French informants showed a clear preference for what Schölmberger terms the expression of regret (IFIDer) which thus constitutes a highly formulaic form. The Canadians had a tendency to use more intensifiers (such as *très, vraiment, sincèrement, énormément* 'very, really, sincerely, enormously/terribly') along with *désolé* while the French had a tendency to add more justifications. The Canadians tended to use more face-saving than face-threatening justifications. Also, the Canadians tended to use more alerters and preparators and more offers of repair than the French did. Schölmberger (2008: 348) suggests that the face-saving strategies employed by the Canadian speakers may be related to cultural factors, specifically a high level of uncertainty avoidance attributable to Quebec's maintenance of the French language in the face of the British attempt to impose the English language and culture there. Canadian culture may also have a higher uncertainty avoidance because of the non-standard nature of Canadian French vis-à-vis French French (widely considered to be the 'standard'). The present paper can further support and extend Schölmberger's findings by accessing occurrences of *désolé* and *excuse* in large corpora of spoken data. Though the search will be restricted to a quantitative survey of specific lexemes such as the IFIDer (*désolé*) and the IFIDoa (*excuse)* rather than the broader apology strategies which can be explored using DCT questionnaires, corpus data can claim to have greater representativity as larger numbers of speakers are included. The findings may further support and complement Schölmberger's findings.

My research questions in this paper are:
-How is the 'apology' speech-act performed through specific IFIDs in English and French, and across different varieties of English and French (in Europe, Canada and the US)?
-What is the semantico-pragmatic status of ironic or sarcastic (impolite) usages of these IFIDs?

3. Data and Methodology

This study takes a corpus approach to the investigation of apologies and some rationale for taking a corpus approach is required as the commonest way to investigate speech act realisation across different languages has been to use the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) in the manner of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) CCSARP model. As part of a DCT, respondents are presented with scenarios and asked what they would say in the circumstances, either selecting from different options or filling in the blanks with their own words. Despite the usefulness of this model, criticisms have been levelled at it, mainly relating to the artificial nature of the task and the possibility that responses are elicited in situations where participants would not necessarily have apologised or

responded but are forced to do so as part of the DCT. In their comparison of politeness in American English and Peninsular Spanish, Barros García and Terkourafi (2015) demonstrate the value of combining role-play and self-report in exploring the *why?* of pragmalinguistic difference. To my knowledge none of these approaches (DCT, role-play or self-report) have been applied to a comparison of English and French apologies and there is a significant gap /research opportunity here.

Unlike DCT studies where a range of apology strategies are investigated, the current paper restricts itself to particular word-forms – or IFIDs – used in the explicit expression of apology. A broadbrush picture is painted of the distributional frequency of these IFIDs across different varieties of spoken English and French, as reflected in existing available corpora. The paper, then, takes a corpus approach to explore variational pragmatics in two pluricentric languages (Clyne 1992, Schneider and Barron 2008). The advantage of drawing on corpora of transcribed spoken data is that the IFIDs appear in naturally occurring interactional situations – they are not artificially elicited – and we have a very large amount of data to work with which allows us to generalise. Corpora are generally devised to be representative of the population at large (although the researcher must always be vigilant in checking the constitution of the corpus and the settings in which the recordings were made, gauging the relative comparability of different corpora from a contextual point of view). What is more, we can randomly select examples in the data for more detailed analysis, thus combining a more qualitative approach with a more quantitative overview. The corpus approach allowed me to answer my research questions by comparing the distributional frequencies of the most frequently occurring apology IFIDs in English and French and to conduct qualitative analyses of occurrences of mock impoliteness.

The first requirement in exploring apology IFIDs in (spoken) corpora of English and French was to decide which word-forms to search for. The most frequent forms could then be explored as a first step. Previous researchers have identified 'sorry' as being the most frequent apology IFID in English[1].

Though 'sorry' has been identified as the most common apology IFID in (Present-Day) English, previous studies have not quantified apology IFIDs in French corpora. Schölmberger's (2008) DCT study elicited apology IFIDs in four situations and she found *je suis désolé* to be the most frequently used IFID in her data. Ancarno (2015) in her investigation of apologies made by public figures and reported in the news media,

[1] As Deutschmann (2003: 52) points out: 'Mattson Bean & Johnstone (1994:65) recorded *sorry* being used in 77 per cent of the apologies investigated. In Aijmer's (1996:86) study, 83.7 per cent of the apologies were variants of *sorry*, and in Holmes's (1990:172) study 79.3 per cent contained the form. The forms *excuse* and especially *pardon* were much less frequent in these studies. Methodological differences and differences in the styles of language sampled in the various studies can largely explain these discrepancies.'

found that, while apologisers in the British press generally 'say sorry'[2], apologisers in French use '*s'excuser*'.

One way to arrive at a list of apology IFIDs in French is to explore equivalence in translation corpora, such as the OPUS film sub-titling corpus (http://www.opensubtitles.org/, see Lison and Tiedeman, 2016). The OPUS sub-titling corpus has translations of film scripts. It is be assumed that most of these start off as scripted, then spoken, material but end up as written material in the form of sub-titles on the screen. The shift of mode from spoken to written, and space requirements for the sub-title will of course have an impact, but perhaps not as much of an impact for apologies as for pragmatic markers which are often simply omitted in sub-titling (see Beeching 2013). It is also not possible to identify whether originals are American, British or Canadian English, and we do not know whether the French film translations were aimed at an American, British or Canadian English audience or indeed whether any heed was taken of the fact that sub-titles in French might be read by a Canadian French audience. Translations have the advantage of being genuine communicative activities – and translation corpora reflect the intuitions of a number of different translators with a sensitivity to considerations of function and stylistic genre. There are limitations in the use of translation corpora (see Beeching 2013:122 for an enumeration of these). However, on the basis of the translations of 'sorry' in the OPUS sub-titling corpus, it was possible to build on Schölmberger's three IFIDs and construct a list of candidate forms for apology for French.

In order to explore apologies across contemporary French and English, quantitative and qualitative analyses of the most common IFIDs in French and English were made, drawing on the following corpora:

- The 'demographic' spoken section of The British National Corpus (BNC), 100 million words, of which 10 million are spoken, 1990s.
- The Contemporary Corpus of American English (COCA), 520 million words, approximately 100 million of which are spoken, 1990-2015.
- The Corpus of American Soap Operas (CASO), 100 million words, 2001-2012.
- Strathy Corpus (Canada), 50 million words, 1970s-2000s
- Corpus de Référence du Français Parlé (CRFP) (France), 287,482 words, 1980s - 2002.
- Corpus du Français Parlé Parisien (CFPP) (Parisian French), 654,375 words, 2000-2015.
- Corpus de Langue Parlée en Interaction (CLAPI) (Lyons, France), 600 hours of transcribed video/audio recordings (in both professional and private interactional contexts), 1990s-2000s.
- Corpus du Français Parlé au Québec (CFPQ), (Quebec, Canada), 686,915 words, 2008.

[2] Though Murphy (2015) found that 'apologise' is more common in parliamentary apologies.

These corpora were selected as they are all spoken corpora and, to that extent, comparable. They are also (apart from the CRFP) easily accessible online. In the case of the BNC, COCA and Strathy corpora, only the spoken sections were selected for study. However, there are differences in formality and genre between these corpora, with some material which is drama-based and scripted, and other material which is spontaneous to a greater and lesser extent as radio interviews are included.

The BNC constitutes the most naturalistic data in the collection, recorded by volunteers as they go about their normal everyday life. The spoken element of COCA is reputedly less spontaneous than the BNC as it includes radio interviews while CASO is formed of transcriptions of scripted soap operas. The Strathy Canadian corpus is similar to COCA with a combination of spontaneous everyday talk and radio broadcasts.

The French corpora are all transcriptions of spontaneous speech, with the CFPQ (recorded in Quebec) being the most recent and most informal with a number of speakers interacting in each conversation. The CRFP is made up of sociolinguistic interviews with generally only two speakers, as is the CFPP. A large number of the CRFP interviews are between MA students and their friends and acquaintances and these conversations tend to be less formal than the CFPP interviews which are between an older researcher and more elderly French interviewees talking about the different *quartiers* where they live in Paris. Finally, the CLAPI Corpus features groups of people interacting in the workplace and in more domestic contexts. Conversations can feature two or more speakers.

It is important to bear in mind that Deutschmann found in the BNC that there were differences in rates and types of apology, not depending on formality, but on the number of speakers involved in conversations. Crosslinguistic comparisons of the pragmalinguistic expression of apology need to take this into account.

In order to verify whether any differences in the distributional frequency of the apology IFIDs were statistically significant across the different corpora, the Corpus Frequency Wizard[3] was used. This online tool gives the results of a chi-square test on the basis of a frequency comparison between two samples.

4. Results

4.1 Translation equivalence

The first step was to find the most common equivalent for 'sorry' in French. The Opus film sub-titling was used for this purpose. The search term 'sorry' was typed in and parallel lines of text with 'sorry' in the left column and the French translation of the line in the right column were brought up. Table 1 displays the translation equivalents in French for 1,128 'hits' for 'sorry' in English in the corpus. 275 'hits' were non-apologetic uses such as 'a sorry plight' or 'I felt sorry for him' and are not included in the data – the translations clearly highlight the polysemy of the etymon 'sorry' (with translation equivalents such as 'triste' or 'faire pitié', respectively).

[3] http://sigil.collocations.de/wizard.html.

Table 1: Translations of 'sorry' in the OPUS corpus

1,128 'hits' for 'sorry'

désolé	598	(53%)
excuse(z)-moi/nous	78	(7%)
pardon	71	(6.2%)
je regrette	47	(4.1%)
navré	44	(3.9%)
je m'excuse	10	(0.8%)
je m'en veux…..	5	(0.44%)
Total	853	(75%)

The vast majority of the examples of apologies with 'sorry' in English were translated *désolé(e)(s)* in French but there is a good range of other ways to translate 'sorry' including different forms of *s'excuser, pardon, regrette, navré* and *je m'en veux.*[4]

In order to further explore the differences in the expression of apology in French and English, the number and percentage of the range of French apology IFIDs that were translated by 'sorry' were calculated. The results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of times 'sorry' is used to translate *désolé, excuse* etc. in the OPUS corpus

*désolé** - 323 hits 315 (98%)
*regrette** - 77 hits 71 (92%)
*excuse** - 75 hits 19 (25%) (19 apologise)
*pardon** - 71 hits 19 (27%)
*navré** - 31 hits 28 (90%)
*en veu** - 0 hits
TOTAL: 577 452 (78%)

The vast majority of all the variants in French were translated by 'sorry' suggesting that this is the most common etymon for apologising in English.

[4] Capitalised and asterisked forms such as DÉSOLÉ / *désolé** refer to the lemma which was used as a search term in the corpora, and to the semantic 'core' in each case. In both languages, some of the forms occur on their own (*sorry, désolé, pardon)* but can also occur in fuller, more conjugated, forms (*I'm sorry, je suis désolée, pardonnez-moi*). The scope of the article unfortunately does not permit a detailed examination of the contexts in which the short or long forms occur. We can, however, state that *regrette* does not occur in isolation but always with a personal pronoun e.g. *je regrette,* and *s'excuser* is generally to be found in *je m'excuse* (as discussed in Section 2.2) or in expressions such as *Mille excuses* ('A thousand apologies'). Further detailed work on these areas would be of great interest.

On the basis of evidence from the OPUS corpus, we can begin to discern differences in apology behaviour across French and English, with *(I'm) sorry* predominant in the English data and *désolé* at the top of a far longer list of common expressions in French. Further fine-grained qualitative analysis is required to reveal particular contextual determinants for the variety of uses in French.

4.2 Intralinguistic Variation: across UK, Canadian and US English

Table 3 shows the rates of occurrence per million words of the tokens 'sorry', 'excuse me', 'apologies' and 'apologis/ze' in the spoken sections of the British National Corpus, the Strathy corpus of Canadian English, the Corpus of Contemporary American English and the 2012 section of the Corpus of American soap operas. British English at first appeared to have the highest rates of 'sorry', followed by Canadian English and then American English. However, when we add the soap opera data, a very different picture emerges. The rates of all of the apology etymons are much higher here, though it is still the case that 'sorry' wins out over all of the others. Dramas, and particular television dramas, put protagonists in conflict situations so it is perhaps unsurprising that apologies would be very high in such contexts. The comparison highlights once again the difficulties associated with any assumptions about rates of usage which do not take genre into account.

Table 3: Rates of apology etymons per million words in the English spoken corpora

	sorry	excuse me	apologies	apologis/ze
BNC spoken	446.82	43.36	10.44	9.84
Strathy spoken	379.71	41.24	9.44	46.48
COCA spoken	135.65	37.36	6.16	19.74
CA soap operas 2012	1607.33	238.47	9.86	91.54

Rates of 'sorry' are statistically significantly different across the different varieties of English represented in the corpora to at least the $p < .05$ level. This suggests that, unless what we are looking at are genre differences, British English uses 'sorry' most often and Canadian English uses 'sorry' more often than US English. The American soap opera corpus, however, has by far the highest frequency of 'sorry'. There is no statistically significant difference in 'excuse me' across the British, Canadian and US spoken corpora – rates are very low – but there is a statistically significant difference between those three and the American soap operas. There is no difference in the frequency of the lexeme 'apologies' across the four corpora but there are differences in the frequency of 'apologis/ze – British English has very low rates, much lower than Canadian English – though there is no statistical difference with the US. Once again, the American soap operas have very high frequencies of 'apologize', showing a statistical difference with all of the other corpora. Rates of 'apologis/ze' are also statistically significantly higher in the Canadian Corpus than in the American spoken corpus.

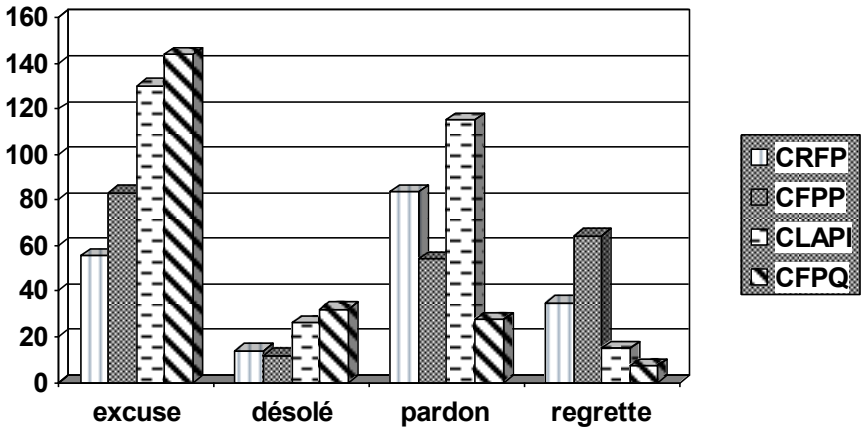
In summary, in English, 'sorry' is by far the most frequent lemma, 'excuse me' trails way behind this, 'apologies' is very rare and 'apologis/ze' appears rarely in the US and

Canadian data and very rarely in the UK data. Brits and Canadians appear to use apology IFIDs to a greater extent than speakers in the U.S. with Brits using 'sorry' more than Canadians and Canadians using 'apologis/ze' more than Brits. Style or genre is a crucially important factor in the frequency of apologies, however, and 'sorry' and 'apologis/ze' are used at least four times more often in the American Soap Opera corpus than in the other corpora.

4.3 Intralinguistic Variation: across French French and Canadian French

We have seen that there is a greater spread over a number of different variants in the expression of apology in French than in English with the following (either in isolation or in conjugated forms): *désolé, excuse, pardon, regrette, navré* and the fixed form *je m'en veux* appearing in the OPUS film sub-titling corpus. Figure 1 charts rates per million in the following spoken French corpora: the Corpus de Référence du Français Parlé (CRFP), the Corpus du Français Parlé Parisien (CFPP), the Corpus de Langue Parlée en Interaction (CLAPI), all corpora of French French, and the Corpus du Français Parlé au Québec (CFPQ), representing Canadian French.

Figure 1: Rates of apology etymons per million words in the French spoken corpora



The data are more spread over the different variants in French than in English, but the frontrunner is easily *excuse (navré* and *je m'en veux* have 0 occurrences). *Désolé* (sorrow) is much less frequent than *excuse*, with *pardon* popular in the CRFP and CLAPI and *regrette* popular in the CFPP. The differences between the rates indicated by the bars for *excuse, désolé, pardon* and *regrette* in Figure 1 are all statistically significant to at least the $p < .05$ level except for CLAPI and CFPQ where there is no difference between *excuse, désolé* and *regrette.* Once again, there appears to be as much of a difference between genres as there is between national varieties.

The findings displayed in Figure 1 are tricky to interpret. Confounding variables include the possibility of:

- Diachronic shift from *pardon* and *regrette* to *excuse* (which we see in the most recent, Canadian, CFPQ, corpus);

- Cross-national variation: Canadians use *excuse* and *désolé* more than French speakers in France (perhaps because there is a greater degree of bilingualism and 'excuse me' and 'sorry' are more prevalent in English);

- Stylistic/situational variation across the corpora 'the context-sensitivity of discourse features' (Pichler 2010: 584) (CRFP and CFPP more interview-style, CLAPI more interactive and CFPQ more informal).

When we compare the corpus findings with those from Schölmberger's (2008) DCT questionnaires, we are struck firstly by the far greater prevalence of *excuse* (IFIDoa) in the corpus data over the *désolé* (IFIDer) which Schölmberger found to be common. A closer qualitative look at the examples in the corpus data may provide an answer. Though *excuse* can be used for major infringements, it is very often used to apologise for small interactional faux pas, such as interrupting someone, swearing or changing the subject (examples (1), (2) and (3)), in other words, what Deutschmann refers to as 'formulaic' apologies. In example (1), the speakers have been discussing Hubert's desire to get a job, buy a house and find himself a wife.

(1)
H : hum (.) justement il y en a j'en ai une: qui trotte dans ma tête
A : attends un petit peu tu vas voir tantôt comment que je vais t'organiser ça (en s'adressant à Bastien)
L : (RIRE)
B : (RIRE) oh oh
A : (RIRE) **excuse** Hubert vas-y
H : c'est ça il y en a une dans le cours à David qui euh: est célibataire'
CFPQ , sous-corpus 14, segment 5, page 51, ligne 4

'H : hum (.) as it happens there's someone I've someone in mind
A : wait a minute you'll see how I can organise that for you (addressing Bastien)
L : (LAUGHTER)
B : (LAUGHTER) oh oh
A : (LAUGHTER) sorry Hubert go on
H : that's it there's someone in David's class who is er : single.'

The syntactic parallelism in Hubert's words 'il y en a j'en ai une', repeated as 'il y en a une' after A's apology and request that he continue, demonstrates very clearly that Hubert is picking up where he left off and that A is apologising for having interrupted him.

Examples (2) and (3) also illustrate the use of EXCUSE to apologise 'formulaically' as Deutschmann terms it, for relatively minor infringements of conversational etiquette.

(2)
H : quand j'ai vu: la couronne là la couRONNE dégagée tout le tour de l- de la roche j'ai: **excusez** le mot mais Jésus Jésus peur ¤<492946>
CFPQ, sous-corpus 11, segment 8, page 98, ligne *2*

'H : when I saw the crown the crown all round the rock I was excuse the word bloody petrified'.

(3)
A : pour revenir à notre idée de tantôt ta question **excuse**-moi je voulais pas euh changer de sujet
CPPQ, sous-corpus 14, segment 3, page 25, ligne 22
'A : coming back to our idea earlier your question sorry I didn't mean to er change the subject...'

In (2), before using the blasphemous terms *Jésus Jésus* to intensify the expression of how afraid s/he felt, the speaker apologises using 'excusez le mot'. In (3), the speaker apologises for having changed the subject and now comes back to what s/he and the hearer had been talking about previously.

By contrast, the situations set up to elicit apologetic behaviour in Schölmberger's DCT involve more serious solecisms: not bringing a promised chocolate mousse to a birthday party, not completing your section of the group work, not finishing a term paper and not returning books to your professor. It may be that these are situations which are more likely to elicit *désolé* than *excuse*, and that in ordinary everyday interaction small infringements of turn-taking rules and the apologies which accompany them are more numerous than the more weighty violations of social expectation which tend to feature in DCT scenarios. Indeed, Deutschmann (2003: 52) comes to a similar genre-related conclusion in his evaluation of the differences between the rate of *sorry* and *pardon* in the BNC by comparison with DCT-based studies. *Pardon* is generally used in British English to ask for someone to repeat what has been said ('beg your pardon?') or to apologise after making 'rude' involuntary noises such as yawning or burping ('pardon me').

4.4 Crosslinguistic variation: Comparing apologies in English and French

Comparing rates of apologies across American, British and Canadian English and Canadian and French French should, logically, give some empirical evidence on the amount of apologies as well as the type of apology IFID which are used across the two languages and five cultures whose corpora were investigated. The comparison is, however, not as straightforward as we would like for two main reasons. Firstly, there is the difficulty of finding corpora that are directly comparable. The influence of genre on the amount of apologising which occurs is very plainly visible in Figure 1 where rates of 'sorry' can be seen to be more than eight times higher in the Corpus of American Soap Operas than in the spoken section of COCA. The spoken section of COCA is made up of a greater number of more formal, e.g. radio, interviews than the demographic spoken

section of the BNC. We do not have a corpus of British Soap Operas to which we could compare the American corpus, and even if we did, these are not ordinary everyday interactions but scripted representations and dramatised events. The second difficulty concerns the comparison across languages: French spreads its apologies over a range of different IFIDs whereas English predominantly uses 'sorry'. Though *excuse* is the most widely used IFID in French, we need to take *désolé(e)(s), pardon* and *regrette* into account. And once again, if we wish to compare the BNC spoken demographic data with the French data, which corpus is the most nearly equivalent to the BNC? Rates of apology etymons across the four French spoken corpora vary widely as we can see in Figure 1. In terms of interactivity, the CLAPI Corpus is closest to the conversations in the spoken demographic section of the BNC (though CLAPI features conversations at work as well as in the home). The sum of the rates of occurrence of the four main IFIDs for apology in CLAPI is 186 per million words, while 'sorry' on its own occurs 447 times per million words in the BNC spoken demographic section. What is certainly true is that from a lexical semantic point of view, English opts for 'sorrow' and French for 'excuse' as the principal expression of apology. Despite their dissimilar non-illocutionary meanings, as both have now undergone conventionalisation (Ducrot's performative illusion), they have acquired the same illocutionary meaning. As we shall see in the next section, this process has not occurred in the expression of mock apology.

4.5 (In)sincere and mock apologies

In hundreds of corpus examples, across both English and French, I found very little evidence of mock apologies. Deutschmann (2003: 205) also found that only 3% of apologies in the BNC were sarcastic. 'Sorry but…' and *excuse mais…* looked promising – however, they generally preempt an FTA and thus figure as apologies or expressions of regret, rather than sarcastic or ironic usages. Examples (4)-(9) illustrate the way in which 'I'm sorry but…' is used to preface, and/or follow an FTA, in what Deutschmann refers to as face attack apologies.

(4) Well I'm sorry but my Daily Mirror was dev…delivered this morning without the television supplement.
(5) No erm but I'm sorry but whoever did that needs a fucking good kick in the head you know.
(6) I'm sorry but does anyone actually use Stoke Newington train station?
(7) I'm sorry but I just think that is outrageous!
(8) though she's such a slag, I'm sorry but she is.
(9) Your mum is mad, I'm sorry but she is.

The status of such uses as apologies is treated more thoroughly in Murphy (this issue). It is interesting that a number of his respondents considered this type of 'sorry' to constitute an apology. The apology appears to function at the speech act level where it might be glossed 'I'm sorry TO SAY THIS', in other words it is more of an expression of regret at being obliged to say something disobliging than of apology to the butts of the criticism: Stoke Newington station, the person who is a slag, 'your mum' and so on.

The more interactive the corpus, the likelier one is to find apology tokens – and also metalinguistic comment on apologies, and some sarcastic uses.

Example (10), an extract from the CLAPI corpus, features a pedagogical exchange between a teacher (CPE) and two school pupils, Brenton (BRE) and Denis (DEN). There has been a fight in which the boys insulted one another. They are brought before the teacher who explains that there is a right way to do an apology.

(10) **Corpus : Interactions cpe - élèves ==>** ***Transcription : Bureau CPE – bagarre***

CPE	bon et alors maintenant/ (0.6) _[à propos] des insultes/ vous avez l'intention d` faire quoi/ dans l'immédiat/ là/
BRE	[(.HH<) _]
DEN	s'excuser\
CPE	ouais/ par exem/ple (0.9) brenton/ (3.7) brenton/ °°j` m'ex (.) cu/se
CPE	hein/ hm hm\ tu bougonnes là/ (3.6) comment on fait/ pour s'excuser/
BRE	°ben je m'excu/se
CPE	oh ben NON/: ça des excuses toutes bredouillées comme ça/ [c'est pas des excu/:ses __] ça OUI DEUX MINUTES S'IL VOUS PLAIT\
XXX	[((on frappe à la porte))]
CPE	c'est pas des excuses ça\ (2.2) pour s'excuser/ on s` serre la main/ on s` regar:de (1.8) et on s'excuse\
DEN	j` m'excuse maintenant d` t'avoir insulté\ (2.1)
CPE	brenton/
BRE	°mais je mè- ch- °
CPE	NON/ tu regardes denis

'CPE	right well then now/ (0.6) _[about] these insults/ what are you going to do/ straight away/ now/
BRE	[(.HH<) _]
DEN	apologise\
CPE	yeah/ for exam/ple (0.9) brenton/ (3.7) brenton/ °°I'm so(.)rry
CPE	what/ hm hm\ you're muttering/ (3.6) what do you do/ to say sorry/
BRE	°OK I'm so/rry
CPE	yeah but NO/: saying sorry mumbled like that/ [that's not apologising __] that's YES TWO MINUTES PLEASE \
XXX	[((someone knocks at the door))]
CPE	that's not an apology\ (2.2) to apologise/ you shake hands/ you look at each other (1.8) and you say sorry\
DEN	I'm sorry now that I insulted you\ (2.1)
CPE	brenton/

BRE °but I'm so- °
CPE NO/ you look at denis'

The teacher asks what the pupils intend to do now and after a hesitatory breath [(.HH<) _] from Brenton, Denis replies 'apologise'. There are pauses while Brenton is prompted to apologise and the teacher asks him why he is mumbling. He mutters 'OK, I'm sorry'. The teacher expostulates : 'NO, apologies mumbled like that are not apologies; to apologise, you shake hands, you look at each other and you say sorry'. Denis complies with 'I apologise now for having insulted you'. There is a 2 second pause followed by a prompt 'Brenton' from the teacher, Brenton again mutters some partial sounds but is interrupted by the teacher saying 'NO, you look at Denis…'

This exchange illustrates very well that there is a sincerity condition which makes an apology what it is, even though we cannot tell whether Denis is sincerely sincere. The incident demonstrates that apologies are learnt behaviour which educators and parents attempt to inculcate in their young charges. Brenton cannot bring himself to apologise for all the teacher's efforts, demonstrating that the performance of an insincere, but polite, act does not come easily to all.

The CLAPI corpus features situations which lead to conflict, such as mediation meetings concerning the payment of rent. Extract (11) is a good illustration of these conflict situations and one in which we find a mock polite, sarcastic, apology:

(11) CLAPI Corpus : **Négociation sur les loyers - commission de conciliation**

RGI ne croyez pas qu` je sois agressif je défends simplement les intérêts de mon de mon mandant\ un point c'est tout\ (.) mais comme dit monsieur avec juste raison et intelligence **j` m'excuse** attention vous pouvez dire le contraire/ [je pense]
CSCV [j` vous r`mercie]beaucoup d` vot` remarque] [monsieur]
RGI [je pa-]
CSCV v`s êtes extrêmement aimable [(inaud.)]
RGI [non non non non mais] mais pas du tout monsieur [attention/]
CSCV [j` vous] r`mer[cie beaucoup/] c'est [très agréable] de&
CNL [non mais\]
CSCV s'entendre dire que [(inaud.)\ y en a] un qui est intelligent et les autres pas merci beaucoup
RGI [je dis] (../..)

'RGI don't think I'm being aggressive I'm simply defending the interests of my of my client\ that's all\ (.) but as the gentleman says quite reasonably and intelligently **sorry** listen you can say the opposite/ [I think]
CSCV [Thanks]very much for your remark] [sir]
RGI [I'm tal-]

CSCV you're extremely kind [(inaud.)]
RGI [no no no no but] but not at all sir [listen/]
CSCV [Thank] you[very much/] it's [very nice] to&
CNL [no but\]
CSCV to hear that [(inaud.)\ there's] someone who's intelligent and others who aren't thanks very much
RGI [I'm saying] (../..)'

In this extract, RGI claims that his listener (CSCV) should not think him aggressive, he is merely defending his constituent, but he goes on to suggest that his constituent (referred to as 'the gentleman') has put forward an argument justifiably and intelligently – at this point he apologises, and suggests that CSCV might say the opposite. CSCV interrupts to thank RGI for his remark and says he is very kind. RGI deflects this (sarcastic) comment with a series of four 'No' s and a 'don't mention it' while CSCV continues, repeating that he thanks him and that it's very nice to hear that there is someone who is intelligent and others are not, thanks a lot. The implication is that RGI has suggested that he (CSCV) is not intelligent which creates a mismatch with 'Thanks a lot', generating the ironic interpretation and the mock politeness. We do not know whether RGI's initial 'je m'excuse' is mock or genuine politeness – it is certainly arch in the context and leads to heavy sarcastic thanking from CSCV.

This is one of very few examples of mock politeness found in the corpora – rates overall are under 1% - and the ambiguity of the sarcasm is highlighted in the conventional deflection of the sarcastic compliment 'you're very kind' with 'not at all'. Does RGI not realise at this stage that CSCV's remark is sarcastic or is he just going along with things so as not to rock the boat and exacerbate a difficult situation? Up to this point the ambiguity of the sarcastic remark can be maintained and offence not overtly taken.

While both polite and impolite messages can be implied rather than stated, Leech (2014:224) suggests that

> the tendency to use implicature is probably stronger in the case of impoliteness, as it serves a defensive function. The speaker can claim not to have made an offensive remark, and the escalation of impoliteness into more violent confrontation can be averted.

Indeed, Leech (2014: 232) refers to sarcasm and irony as 'second-order pragmatic principles that exploit politeness'.

Irony can be conventionalised ('A fine friend YOU are') but this type of impoliteness is not semanticised or denotative. There is no 'performative illusion' (Ducrot, 1980), that is to say that the ironic, impolite, use of apology has not become part of the core meaning of, for example, 'sorry'. The impolite reading is only possible through the mismatch between the context and the apology IFID, it is pragmatic, not semantic.

5. Conclusions

There is clearly a great deal more fine-grained analysis required to distinguish between different forms of the basic IFIDs and how these vary according to context. The present corpus-based study, however, allows us come to some broad conclusions about the similarities and differences in linguistic apologies in English and French. Elements serving to apologise emerge diachronically from etymons which express sorrow, desolation, excuse, apology, regret and pardon. SORRY is much more common in English, EXCUSE more common in French, and there is a far larger range of variants in French than in English. There may be some variation across British and American English but situation/genre seems to be a more important factor than region in the frequency of apologies. Deutschmann (2003) concluded that a greater number of interlocutors led to more frequent apology lexemes. This is corroborated in the French data where the more interactive the data (i.e. in conversations with more than two speakers in the CLAPI Corpus), and the more conflict which arises, the higher the rate of apology etymons. There appears to be a shift towards fewer variants in more recent corpora of spoken French and the Quebec data in particular shows a preference for more anglicized choices (sorrow and excuse) than the more old-fashioned 'pardon' and 'regret' which feature in the European French corpora. It is interesting in this respect that the translations in the OPUS sub-titling corpus favour '*désolé*' over '*excuse*' in their translations of 'sorry' (53% versus 7.8%), despite the fact that '*excuse*' is commoner by far in the spoken corpora studied than '*désolé*' (56 versus 14 occurrences per million words in the CRFP). It may be that the scripted nature of the film data reduces the probability of finding the formulaic apology *excuse(z)-moi*. We might also posit that the translator is more influenced by the semantics of the Source Language etymon ('sorry' = *désolé(e)(s)*) than by how the speech act is normally performed in the Target Language.

Apologetic IFIDs are significantly more frequent in the British English corpora than in the French corpora. Ancarno (2015), too, found that public apologies were less frequent in the French than in the British data. With respect to mock politeness, we have noted that sarcastic or ironic uses are very rare in the data. Ironic uses can be conventionalised but they are not denotative. 'Sorry' in these contexts has not undergone Ducrot's 'performative illusion'. Mock polite/impolite ironic usages are not only rare, they are generally indirect, depend on implicature, and are far from being on record. The irony emerges from a mismatch between an apology and the context in which the apology appears. The lexical semantics remain apologetic while the pragmatic illocutionary force is the opposite, creating a potentially highly impolite interpretation.

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