Apologies by Individual Citizens for Political Situations

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   Research on apologies has focused on two main types: personal apologies for a range of social infractions by individuals (e.g. Olshtain 1989, Meier 1998), and institutional apologies for larger-scope problems (e.g. Zhang 2003, Battistella 2016). We analyze a third type, apologies by individual citizens for political situations. One example is opinion column apologies for actions of U.S. President Trump. Another is apologies on the multimedia website sorryeverybody.com for the 2004 re-election of George W. Bush.

   Building on our previous research (e.g. Kuha & Riddle 2017), we show that such columns and webpage postings contain typical elements of personal apologies, and we provide a multimedia discourse analysis of their forms and functions. Specifically, we discuss the styles used in nearly 2,000 apologies, analyzing personal, family, and pet photos, postcards, and drawings from sorryeverybody.com, as well as elements of typography, spelling, word choice, reference to or avoidance of agency via lexical and grammatical means, level of (in)formality, and the use of speech acts such as offering, invitation, condemnation, insulting, and promising, plus humor and irony, in the entire body of linguistic data. For example (1) includes such personal and informal linguistic elements as first person singular and second person pronouns, contractions, a literal head act with a regional slang intensifier, plus an offer of food as reparation, and a conventional typographical indication of kisses and hugs. It is accompanied by a photo of a young woman holding a sign with the message and making a face indicating regret and dismay.:

   1. I'm wicked sorry. I'll make you all cookies   XOXO (Sorryeverybody.com posting)

In example 2, from a journalist's online column, the first head act has a more formal tone (*please accept this American's apology*), but the remainder aligns the individual American with others (*we*), and addresses the world in a personal way, using a second, more informal head act (*We're really sorry*) intensified with the somewhat informal (in this context) adverb *really* (e.g. as opposed to *very*), and it makes an appeal for emotional support (*keep us in your thoughts*), employing a conventional formula (with pronoun and addressee variations) often used in cases of serious problems, illness, or death. The remainder of (2) cited here criticizes Trump harshly, positioning the apologizer as a good person and deserving of forgiveness for Trump's election and the consequent results.

   2. Dear world, please accept this American's apology for Trump's first year in the White House. We're really sorry and we hope you can keep us in your thoughts until some sort of catastrophe removes this demagogue from the presidency…

   We argue that such elements frame the apologies as appeals to friends, although they are literally addressed to strangers, and that their formulations include attempts to disarm critics and save face.

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