Apology as a Speech Act Set: Apology Strategies of Social Media Influencers in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Kaisa Uoti

Master's Thesis

English, Language Specialist Degree Program

School of Language and Translation Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Turku

March 2022

Master's Thesis

Language Specialist Degree Program, Department of English
Kaisa Uoti
Apology as a Speech Act Set: Apology Strategies of Social Media Influencers in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic
Number of pages: 65 pages

This thesis studies the apology strategies apparent in public apology posts of social media influencers which relate to the topic of the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2010s has seen the rise of influencers, seeing them acquire large followings and achieving celebrity status. Their high visibility means that the mistakes they make and the offenses they commit are also visible to not only their large following base, but also to the general public. The influencer apology has arguably formed into a genre of its own alongside more traditional genres of public apology, such as the apologies of politicians, entertainers, and other highly visible figures.

In this thesis this interesting and current topic is analyzed through speech act theory, and more precisely, along the categorization of apology strategies included in the apology as a speech act set laid out by Cohen and Olshtain. Twelve apology posts gathered from four different social media platforms are analyzed and the apology strategies apparent in them are categorized along a typology based on the one of Cohen and Olshtain as well as Blum-Kulka and Olshtain. This is done in order to find out what kind of different strategies are apparent in the apologies, and which strategies are used the most. Additional categories are added to account for and better study the specific context of the apologies as performed by social media influencers with the shared topic of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The results of the analysis indicate that the influencer apology posts all use multiple strategies, a result which aligns with earlier studies which have found that public apologies, in comparison to interpersonal apologies, include the use of a larger variety of different strategies. Of the six main strategies, all but one are apparent in the data. The strategy of offer of repair does not appear, which is offered the explanation that it is a highly context specific strategy, and that the strategy of promise of forbearance is seemingly used in its stead in the context studied.

The strategy of an acknowledgement of responsibility is found to be the most prominent strategy in the data. It is the only strategy to appear in all the posts in the data, and it also has the greatest number of occurrences, making up 40% of the total number of occurrences. This finding is in contrast to earlier research, which has found the strategy of the use of an explicit illocutionary force indicating device (i.e. explicit apology verbs such as "apologize" and "(be) sorry") to be the most prominent strategy. In future studies into the apology genre it will be interesting to analyze if this finding is replicable.

When examining the strategies relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is found that they include the speakers referencing the common experience and struggle of the pandemic in order to appeal to the hearers, as well as the speakers reminding the hearers of mitigating measures such as social distancing.

The thesis employs a cross-platform approach to the study of the material, providing an introductory look into the highly current and interesting topic of the Covid-19 related apologies of social media influencers. In the future, research could focus more narrowly on specific social media platforms or post types, or for a broader dataset, allowing for more balanced quantitative research, a corpus could be collected and utilized. As a multifaceted and significant phenomenon, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on language of all kinds will be an interesting and significant topic to study.

Key words: speech act theory, speech act, apology as a speech act set, apology, apology strategies, social media, influencer, Covid-19.

Table of contents

List of Figures and Tables

1   Introduction

Since the 1990s and the turn of the 21st century, the phenomenon of public apology has gained more and more prominence, both in the form of attention it has gained from the media and the public, and also in the seeming frequency and prevalence of these apologies (Lazare 2004). Among the traditional forms of public apologies which concern topics such as politics, sports, and entertainment, is a new type of apology which has begun to gain prominence since the 2010s, to the point where today it is argued to have formed its own distinct genre of apology: the influencer apology (Makalintal 2019; Weber 2019).

These publicly performed apologies are gaining prominence alongside the general rise of the phenomenon of online influencers, a diverse field of social media content creators who have been able to reach a large following online primarily through their personality. A highly important demographic for advertisers, the impact of influencers has grown exponentially in the last decade (Geyser 2021). This growth of influencers as highly visible public figures also means that the mistakes they make and the offenses they commit are also visible to not only their large following base, but also to the general public. Influencers have performed apologies that have had to do with offenses of a wide variety, from past content where they have used offensive language or perpetuated harmful stereotypes, to more present-day issues relating to interpersonal relationships with their followers or fellow influencers or product launches or brand partnerships gone wrong (Sung 2018; Makalintal 2019).

Since the start of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, the pandemic and topics relating to it has developed as a new type of influencer apology. Influencers have published apologies relating to breaking lockdown rules and travel advisories, attending large gatherings, and taking advantage of their celebrity status to acquire protective equipment and health services such as scarce Covid-19 tests and vaccinations. This phenomenon presents a combination of two highly timely and fascinating topics for research; the rise of the influencer apology and the Covid-19 pandemic and its effect on language use.

This thesis aims to study this phenomenon of social media influencer apologies relating to the Covid-19 pandemic through the lens of speech act theory. The apologies are analyzed through a typology of apology as a speech act set based on the research of Cohen and Olshtain (1981, 1983) and developed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). Through this typology, different apology strategies appearing in the apology posts are identified and analyzed. A dataset

comprised of twelve influencer apology posts across four social media platforms forms the material for analysis. This analysis will be conducted in order to answer to the following three research questions:

1. What kind of strategies of apologies as a speech act set are visible in the social media influencer apology posts?
2. Which strategies are more prominent than others in the data?
3. What strategies specific to the Covid-19 pandemic are apparent in the data?

Through these three research questions both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the data will be analyzed, the second of the questions having a more quantitative focus while the other two require a qualitative analysis of the data. The apology strategies apparent in the apology posts will be the focal point of analysis and this speech act focused approach will provide valuable insights into the apology genre which has been previously studied mostly from the viewpoint of image repair and crisis management. These recent studies, for example Sandlin and Gracyalny (2018), Lamsijärvi (2020) and Sandlin and Gracyalny (2020) show the current interest and the timeliness of the topic, the timeliness which is heightened by combining the issue with the topic of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following two sections of the thesis will be focused on background and theory. Section 2 introduces and elaborates on the concept of social media influencers as well as their apologies through a look into the history and development of the phenomena and previous research concerning them. The section will also touch on the topic of influencers during the Covid-19 pandemic, giving context to the material analyzed. Section 3 provides a theoretical chapter into the concept of apology and the ways it has been studied and analyzed through the discipline of speech act theory, highlighting the key early works of Austin (1962), Searle (1976), Fraser (1981) and most notably Cohen and Olshtain (1981, 1983) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and their concept of apology as a speech act set. The section will also include a look into previous research on public apologies in particular. The theoretical and background sections will be followed by a section on the material utilized in the thesis, with a focus on the search and selection criteria of the data, as well as the features of the dataset. The typology utilized in the analysis will be laid out in section 5, and in section 6 the results of this analysis will be presented. The Discussion section will include closer analysis and elaboration on the findings of the analysis, and the findings will also be reflected on and compared with results of previous studies. Finally, the methodology and material used in the thesis will be reflected on and future directions for research will be considered.

2 Social media influencers

The term "social media influencer" as understood in the popular discourse originated around 2015 (Giles 2018, 156), and refers to a person who "is able to generate interest in something (such as a consumer product) by posting about it" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). The field of social media influencers is very diverse, consisting of bloggers, artists, trainers, models, comedians etc., the connecting factor between all of them being that they have gained recognition (online and subsequently beyond that) initially on their own by attracting a following on their social media accounts (Saul 2016). Different from more traditional celebrities such as actors, athletes, politicians, or musicians that have gained recognition and fame primarily and at least initially through their work and skills, influencers' fame has been gained natively on the internet and comes first and foremost from their personality (Abidin 2018, 4). It must be noted that this distinction is not always clear cut, for example, a traditional celebrity such as an actor or a musician may gain their fame through their work but still uphold their celebrity status and the public's attention even if they have not been active in their profession for a time (Abidin 2018, 4). It is also not uncommon for influencers to move into more traditional paths of celebrity, such as releasing music or starring in a film, but that usually comes after they have already established their following on the internet (Wilson, 2021; Schulman, 2018).

Even if the specific term of a social media influencer only reached the public lexicon in the mid-2010s, the associated phenomenon has existed for longer (Abidin 2018, 73). These earlier forms of the mid-2000s and early 2010s existed on blogs and websites such as LiveJournal and Blogspot, where bloggers could amass large followings and were then able to earn a revenue through paid ad space and sponsorships and collaborations with brands (Abidin 2018, 74). As social media platforms such as YouTube (founded in 2005), Twitter (founded in 2006) and Instagram (founded in 2010) grew in popularity, these early influencers made a natural transition to those platforms to maintain and expand their audience (Abidin 2018, 88). The development and growth of the image-sharing platform Instagram in particular has been cited as being a catalyst for the large increase of social media influencers in the 2010s (Marwick, 2015; Giles 2018, 156), its specific features of aesthetic presentation combined with social interaction allowing its users to "build personal narratives and showcase identities that attract audiences" (Jin et al. 2019, 568).

In general, social media platforms create an environment where the opportunity and the potential for ordinary people to amass a large following and audience is much heightened (Abidin 2018, xix). Fame and popularity can now be reached much easier even without the help of traditional gatekeepers such as producers and editors (Khamis et al. 2017, 198). Because of the influencers' origins as ordinary people, they are often viewed by their audience as being more authentic and relatable than traditional celebrities (Piehler et al. 2021, 1; Abidin 2015). Studies have seen social media users say that their purchasing behavior and decisions are more likely to be affected by social media influencers than traditional celebrities endorsing products on their social media accounts (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017, 5; Lou and Shupei 2019). The Instagram users participating in the study by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017, 5) stated that they trusted the influencers' opinions more because they seemed more "relatable" and "less superficial" than traditional celebrities.

These qualities of relatability and trustworthiness that social media influencers are seen to have, have made them integral to businesses and advertisers that capitalize on their influence over their audience in order to market products (Hearn and Schoenhoff 2016, 194). The influencer marketing industry has grown exponentially from being worth US$1.7 billion in 2016, to an estimated market size of US$13.8 billion in 2021 (Geyser 2021). Given this growing industry of influencer marketing, and their massive reach and online audience (Fallon and Medina 2021), it is clear that the influence and impact of social media influencers has become significant in society. As such, the actions of social media influencers have a wide audience and a potential to have a big impact on not only their followers, but also on the general social media audience and society at large. When a social media influencer acts in a way that violates social norms or causes offense, their specific audience and the internet community expect an apology to be made.

In the following section, the concept and brief history of social media influencer apologies is laid out, as are previous studies on the topic. This section then ends with a sub-section detailing the context of social media influencers in 2020, in connection to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.1   The phenomenon of an influencer apology

As has now been established, influencers are public figures whose actions have the possibility of impacting their large audience and the public in general. Because of their high visibility and large following, the public apologies performed by influencers have become widely

visible in online spaces in recent years, arguably forming into their own genre (Johnson 2021; Makalintal 2019). These apologies typically follow the public discovering an offense, past or recent, that the influencer has committed, which results in the influencer using their social media platforms to address the offense and the reaction it has caused (Johnson 2021). There are some cases where the apologies are performed proactively, without the influencer's audience calling for one, in effect functioning as confessions as well as apologies, but these are rarer, the reactive aspect usually being present (Loisa 2021).

Influencer apologies consist of posts of different formats and types, published on different social media platforms. Three notable post types include "apology videos," video-format posts published on YouTube (Makalintal 2019), "Notes app apologies," text-format apologies posted as a screen capture image from an iPhone note-taking app (Weber 2019), and video or text-format apologies posted onto Instagram as post or Stories (Haylock 2020; Diop 2020). The specific characteristics and features, as well as limitations of these post types will be further detailed in the Material section.

As already mentioned, the influencer apology has arguably formed into a genre of its own, with a recognizable format that stays largely consistent between different influencers and apologies (Johnson 2021; Makalintal 2019). The similarities of the different apology posts, published by different influencers, at different times and addressing a wide array of topics, have been noted by the influencers' audiences and the general social media using public. There are various online news and magazine articles listing the worst of influencer apologies (Haylock 2020; Skinner 2019) and YouTube videos and Tweets commenting on and analyzing apology posts (Rifenstine 2021; Smokey Glow 2021). With this perceived repetition and formulaic nature, what is intended to be a genuine expression of regret and assuming of responsibility by the influencer is increasingly seen as a cliché, an expected step for an influencer caught up in controversy to take (Johnson 2021; Makalintal 2019).

When it comes to the public's analysis and focus, the subgenre of YouTube apology videos has gained substantial attention over the years (Sung 2018; Makalintal 2019; Jennings 2021). It has been discussed in popular culture, both on and off social media. For example, the well-known sketch comedy show Saturday Night Live aired a satirical sketch "Viral Apology Video" in April 2021, which mocked the genre and the phenomenon of influencers often posting multiple different apologies throughout their careers, repeatedly apologizing for similar issues (Saturday Night Live, 2021). This can bring into doubt the seriousness and

genuineness of their previous apologies in the eyes of their audience (Jennings 2021). The phenomenon was also featured in a 2020 YouTube reality competition series "Instant Influencer" (Charles 2020), where the contestants were tasked with filming an apology video which would then be judged for how genuine and believable it would come off to their potential audience. The task was seen as practice for their possible future influencer careers, and the host of the series, YouTube beauty influencer James Charles, explained to the contestants that as they grow their following as influencers they "might either say or do something that people might not like or agree with, and eventually, you might have to apologize" (Charles 2020; Alexander, 2020). Charles himself is not unfamiliar with the topic; since the start of his influencer career in 2016, the makeup and beauty content creator has been involved in numerous controversies which has resulted in him posting a number of apology posts in the form of YouTube videos, Tweets, and Instagram Stories (O'Connor and Haylock, 2021).

Given the visibility and public attention on influencer apologies, there has been a rise in research studying them in recent years. These recent studies, consisting of peer-reviewed research as well as thesis works, have mainly focused on examining these apologies as crisis communication, and the image repair strategies apparent in them. The typology of image repair strategies laid out by Benoit (1995) has been recently used to analyze specifically YouTube apology videos by Lamsijärvi (2020), Karlsson (2020), and Sandlin and Gracyalny (2018). From the crisis communication viewpoint, apologies across social media platforms have been studied from YouTube influencers (Sandlin and Gracyalny, 2020), to corporations apologizing on Twitter (Page 2014) and Facebook (Hall 2020). There has been some recent research on influencer apologies focusing specifically on speech act theory and the concept of an apology as a speech act set, Loisa's (2021) recent thesis examining the apology strategies in YouTube apology videos. This thesis will build on the current interest and desire to study the linguistic features of the topic as exemplified by these recent studies. It also presents a specific topical focus, analyzing influencer apologies posted during, and relating to, the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 onwards. In the next section, the context of the pandemic and its connection to social media influencers is detailed, highlighting the selection of this topic focus.

2.2   Social media influencers and the Covid-19 pandemic

As the Covid-19 pandemic gained global reach in early 2020, bringing with it stay-at-home orders and lockdowns, it presented a new situation for influencers. In addition to their previously discussed relatability and authenticity, the appeal of many influencers also comes from their posts and through them, also their lives, being aspirational. They are seen as regular people who have been able to reach their status and are now leading exciting and enviable lives, which include travel, wellness treatments, luxury events and other experiences (Handley 2020). Because of the pandemic and the lockdowns it caused, these things were suddenly not available, as travel was restricted, businesses closed and people were urged to stay at home. The new situation meant that influencers needed to adjust their content to still maintain their audience as well as their income. For example, travel-focused influencers reported having to drastically change and adjust the content they post on their social media accounts, when planned projects and sponsorships with companies and tourism boards fell through (Hines 2020; Elliott 2020).

However, taking into account the previously noted fact that the field of influencers is very wide and diverse in terms of topic and focus of content, some influencers even saw their following and promotional opportunities grow during the start of the pandemic. Influencers whose content had already had a focus on topics such as health and education prior to the pandemic now utilized their platforms to raise awareness and to provide information to their audience, and were contacted by companies, health agencies and governments to do so (Hatch 2020). Throughout the pandemic, influencers in many parts of the world have been called up to share information and promote health measures such as social distancing, mask-wearing, and handwashing, and later as they became available, the Covid-19 vaccines (Heilweil 2020; Desaulniers 2020; Heikkilä 2020). They have appeared on campaigns funded by organizations such as UNESCO and the World Health Organization, as well as the United Kingdom National Health Service and the government of Finland (UNESCO 2020; Heilweil 2020; Heikkilä 2020) by creating health and safety conscious content on their own accounts and participating in public service announcements and informative campaigns.

Governments and health organizations recruiting influencers to help spread information about the pandemic shows the highly visible position of influencers in today's social media climate. But this position can also have its downsides. As highly visible figures with large platforms, influencers making mistakes and committing offenses during and relating to the pandemic has

received attention from the public and the media (Williams 2021; Dellatto 2020; Thompson 2020). These offenses that have been noted on both social and traditional news and magazine media concern topics of a couple different types. A large part of them has to do with influencers breaking travel or stay-at-home orders in some way. Influencers have traveled, internationally or within their countries, at times when travel has not been advised, or has even been prohibited (Williams 2021; Picheta 2021). Social media influencers have also been reported attending gatherings and parties at times when social distancing has been enforced and large gatherings have been prohibited (Thompson 2020; Williams 2021). The offenses have also included the influencers using their celebrity status in order to attain things their followers and the wide public have not been able to at the time, such as Covid-19 tests, personal protective equipment, or vaccines (Dellatto 2020; Campbell and Melendez 2021). During the time in early 2020 when the virus had not yet fully reached the West, some influencers caused offense by taking advantage of the novel and widely discussed topic by attempting to create viral and humorous content about it and endangering public safety in the process (Compton 2020; Merrett 2020).

Both of the phenomena discussed here – influencers being recruited by governments and agencies to promote safety measures, and their offences which relate to the pandemic in various ways gaining public attention – highlight the fact that influencers, as the name suggests, are highly influential and visible figures to their audience and the public at large. Governments and agencies recognize their power in reaching an audience, most often consisting of young people, that might not tune into more traditional information channels, such as newspapers and the evening news (Heikkilä 2020). They are seen as vital in disseminating important information to these audiences. But on the other hand, this high visibility can also extend to the errors influencers make, making them visible to their large audience. In addition to making their offenses more visible, this can also cause the possibility of a situation where their audience is influenced by their actions. This is why it is interesting to take a closer look at the apologies the influencers publish concerning the Covid-19 pandemic, and to study them linguistically as speech acts with their own features and characteristics. The following section provides a theoretical explanation on the concept of apology, its study and the main researchers and concepts regarding it. The theoretical basis for the methodology of this thesis will also be outlaid, and previous studies on public apologies especially will be highlighted.

3   Linguistic study of apologies

This section provides the theoretical background on the concept and phenomenon of apology, as well as its study, by highlighting various previous research. The origins and key concepts of speech act theory are outlaid, followed by the theory and typology for the study of apologies as a speech act set. The section ends with a focus on the study on public apologies.

3.1   Studying apologies

In his book *On Apology*, Aaron Lazare (2004, 10) describes offering and accepting apologies as "one of the most profound human interactions." He describes apologies as having the power to heal grudges and humiliations, generate forgiveness and "remove desire for vengeance on part of the offended party" (ibid.) When it comes to the offending party, they can relieve guilt and shame and lessen the fear of retaliation. According to him, the ideal result of the act of apology is to reconcile and restore broken relationships (Lazare 2004, 10). In describing the definition and the basic form of an apology, Lazare describes it as "an encounter between two parties in which one party, the offender, acknowledges responsibility for an offense or grievance and expresses regret or remorse to a second party, the aggrieved" (Lazare 2004, 21). Cohen and Olshtain (1983, 20) define apology as an act called for if behavior has taken place which has violated social norms. When an utterance or action (or lack thereof) has resulted in one or more persons perceiving themselves as offended, the culpable person (or multiple persons, or an entity such as a company) needs to apologize.

An apology can be seen as a type of a remedial interchange, a term coined by Erving Goffman (1971, 109). Remedial work is performed to "change the meaning that otherwise might be given to an act, transforming what could be seen as offensive into what can be seen as acceptable" (Goffman 1971, 109). By performing remedial interchanges such as apologies, accounts and requests, the speaker can act to lessen the responsibility connected to themselves. Owen (1983, 22) describes remedial interchanges as acts which are "concerned specifically with repairing damage to face, where face-preservation itself becomes the object of the conversation for a time, however short".

Defining and categorizing apologies can be difficult, as they can appear in a wide variety of different forms, ranging from the direct and explicit (*I am sorry*) to indirect (*That was a dumb thing to do*). A reason behind all these varying forms apologies take is that more than most speech acts, apologies place psychological burdens on the offender, as well as on the

recipient, though to a lesser degree (Lakoff 2015, 295). Since apologies are made to express regret for offending someone, they infer cost to the face of the speaker and support for the hearer (Owen 1983, 374). To restore the face of the offended party, the offender must communicate their regret, an act which is highly hearer-supportive and often even humiliating (ibid.) But it is possible for the speaker to mitigate this threat to their face by justifying and explaining reasons for their offending act, which results in the more indirect forms apologies can appear in.

Among the many different perspectives and approaches one can take when studying apologies, this thesis will focus on the view of apology as a speech act set. This approach, detailed in the next section, is based on the work of speech act theory, pioneered by Austin (1962) and developed by Searle (1969, 1972). The focus on the specific speech act of apology, and the features of an apology as a speech act set has been further studied by Fraser (1981), Cohen and Olshtain (1981, 1983), as well as Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984).

3.2   Apology as a speech act

Speech act theory is attributed to the Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin, who formed the basic ideas of the theory in the 1930s and presented them in lectures in the 1950s, the content of which was published posthumously in *How to Do Things with Words* in 1962 (Huang 2007, 93). The central principle of speech act theory is the idea that an utterance is an action performed in the context of social conventions and institutions; saying is doing, and words are deeds (Austin 1962, 94; Huang 2007, 93).

Central to Austin's speech act theory is the threefold distinction among the acts a speaker performs simultaneously while producing an utterance. These three are (1) the locutionary act (the production of an utterance, "saying something"), (2) the illocutionary act (the action the speaker aims to accomplish in the course of performing an utterance) and (3) the perlocutionary act (the effect the utterance may have) (Austin 1962, 99; Huang 2007, 102). The locutionary act is the words we say, the illocutionary act the action we intend the words to produce, and the perlocutionary act represents the consequence or outcome of speaking, whether intended or not. For example: when uttering the phrase "*It's getting pretty cold in here*," the locutionary act is comprised of the specific words which make up the meaningful utterance. Depending on the situational context, the illocutionary act performed by this utterance may for example be a request for the hearer to close a window or to turn down the

air conditioning. Finally, the perlocutionary act is the effect the utterance had, so for example, the window now being closed.

Austin's ideas were later developed, refined and systematized by his Oxford pupil John R. Searle, an American philosopher. He expanded on Austin's typology of speech acts, proposing the classification of illocutionary acts into the following five categories:

1. Representatives

2. Directives

3. Commissives

4. Expressives

5. Declarations

(Searle 1976, 10-14)

Apologies, which are the focus of this thesis, are classified into the category of expressives. The illocutionary point of the speech acts within this category is to express "the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content" (Searle 1976, 12). That is to say, they include an expression of how the speaker feels about the current situation. In the case of apologies, the sincerity condition in its simplicity means that the speaker regrets the offending action or its consequences (Ogiermann 2009, 46). In addition to apologies, this category also includes speech acts such as congratulating, thanking, and complaining. What sets apologizing apart from the rest of the speech acts in this category is their remedial nature, which was discussed in the previous section.

3.2.1 Semantic formulae for the speech act of apology

Fraser (1981) links his study of apologies to Austin's speech act theory, stating that: "an apology is incontestably a type of illocutionary act" (Fraser 1981, 261.) Fraser's analysis of apologies considers two aspects: firstly, he analyzes what are customarily understood to be the beliefs of the person apologizing, and what they must convey for an apology to be made. He lays out the following four speaker conditions of an apology. Firstly, it is presumed that the speaker believes that some act has been performed (or conversely has been neglected to be performed) prior to the time of speaking. Secondly, it is assumed that the speaker thinks that the act personally offended the hearer. Thirdly, it is assumed that the speaker believes they were at least partly responsible for the offense. Finally, it is assumed that the speaker

genuinely feels regret for the act that they committed, which offended the hearer (Fraser 1981, 261). While he lays out these four conditions, Fraser also acknowledges that an apology may be made just in case two of the most basic of these conditions are met; if the speaker acknowledges responsibility for having performed the offending act, and if they convey regret for the offence which followed it. Note that only regret over the offence caused is necessary for this condition to be filled, regret over the act itself is not entirely necessary. In short, according to Fraser, to apologize is to do two things: "take responsibility for an offensive act, and express regret for the offense committed, though not necessarily for the act itself" (Fraser 1981, 262).

The second focus of Fraser's analysis, and the one highly relevant to this thesis, is the examination of strategies one can employ to carry out an apology (Fraser 1981, 260). These strategies, which he calls *the semantic formulae*, form a valuable basis for the methodology of this thesis. When asking the question "What can one say in order to apologize?" Fraser offers the following nine strategies and their examples as the semantic formulae for the speech act of apology:

Strategy 1: Announcing that you are apologizing

"I (hereby) apologize for…"

Strategy 2: Stating one's obligation to apologize

"I must apologize for…"

Strategy 3: Offering to apologize

"I would like to offer my apology to you for…"

Strategy 4: Requesting the hearer accept an apology

"Please accept my apology for…"

Strategy 5: Expressing regret for the offense

"I'm (truly/very/so/terribly) sorry for…"

Strategy 6: Requesting forgiveness for the offense

"Please forgive me for…"

Strategy 7: Acknowledging responsibility for the offending act

"That was my fault."

Strategy 8: Promising forbearance from a similar offending act

"I promise you that that will never happen again."

Strategy 9: Offering redress

"Please let me pay for the damage I've done."

(Fraser 1981, 263)

Each of the semantic formula consists of a linguistic element such as a word, phrase, or sentence, which meets a certain semantic criterion, or strategy. These strategies may be used alone or be combined to perform an apology. For example, the utterance *I'm really sorry for breaking your window, please forgive me, I promise to pay for it* combines strategies 5, 6, and 9.

3.2.2 Apology as a speech act set

In studying sociocultural competence and cultural appropriateness of non-native speakers of a language, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) expanded on Fraser's semantic formulae. The speech act of apology was taken as an opportunity to study if non-native speakers are perhaps more likely to use specific apology strategies, or to omit or misuse the strategies in a way a native speaker would be less likely to (Cohen and Olshtain 1981, 115). Later in "Apology: A Speech-Act Set" (1983), the idea was expanded further, and the study of speech acts was seen as a way to provide "a better understanding and new insights into the interdependence of linguistic forms and sociocultural context" (Cohen and Olshtain 1983, 19). The aim of the research was focused on describing the maximal potential set of semantic formulae for each speech act, be they apologies, requests, complaints et cetera. This could be accomplished by formulating and describing ***a speech act set*** for each particular speech act (Cohen and Olshtain 1983, 20). The speech act set would consist of the major semantic formulae, any one of which alone could be a sufficient minimal element to signify the particular speech act. (ibid.). A combination of some of the formulas or all of them would also be possible (Cohen and Olshtain 1983, 20).

Cohen and Olshtain acknowledge that describing a complete, concrete speech act set requires considerable research and that it can be seen as an idealistic goal. They also note that the speech act set is likely to be culture-, language-, and situation specific, any of those factors affecting the strategies used by speakers. With these considerations in mind, they set out to

lay out the following semantic formulae for the speech act of apology (specifically in a situation in which the offender perceives a need to apologize):

1.   An expression of an apology

2.   An explanation or account of the situation

3.   An acknowledgement of responsibility

4.   An offer of repair

5.   A promise of forbearance

(Cohen and Olshtain 1983, 21)

Cohen and Olshtain explain that in most cases, the use of just one of these formulae is sufficient in performing an apology, but using multiple formulae in combination can create an apology of higher intensity (Cohen and Olshtain 1983, 22). This feature of apologies containing multiple formulae has also been described as their "fulsomeness," where an apology performed by utilizing multiple formulae is described as being more "fulsome" than an apology only containing few formulae being utilized (Murphy 2015, 192).

The first formula, "an expression of an apology" contains apologies which are direct and which utilize apology verbs. These "apology verbs" are an example of what Searle calls *illocutionary force indicating devices* (IFID). These are elements of linguistic devices which indicate that the utterance is performed with a particular illocutionary force, or that it represents a performance of a certain illocutionary act (Searle 1969, 30). Examples of these in English include the use of rising intonation and the interrogative verb form to mark a question. In addition to intonation and the mood of the verb, word order, punctuation and performative verbs can also function as IFIDs in English (ibid.). The apology verbs referenced by Cohen and Olshtain are among these performative verbs. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, 207) lay out a list of performative verbs which act as explicit and direct IFIDs for the speech act of apology:

1.   (be) sorry

2.   excuse

3.   apologize

4.   forgive

5.   regret

6.   pardon

(Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, 207.)

The second formula, "an explanation or account of the situation" may be provided in addition, or also in lieu of an expression of an apology. The third formula "an acknowledgement of responsibility" is chosen by the speaker when they recognize responsibility for the offense. It also includes the following four subformulae:

(a) accepting the blame (*It is my fault*)

(b) expressing self-deficiency (*I wasn't thinking*)

(c) recognizing the other person as deserving apology (*You are right*)

(d) expressing lack of intent (*I didn't mean to*)

(Cohen and Olshtain 1983, 23.)

The last two formulae, "an offer of repair" and "promise of forbearance" are highly situation specific and hence occur only if the specific discourse situation calls for such formulae (Cohen and Olshtain 1983, 23). For example, an offer of repair such as *I'll pay for the damages* is appropriate when apologizing for damaged property, and a promise of forbearance such as *I won't do it again* would be used in a situation where a repeated offence can be seen as a possibility.

These semantic formulae and the categorization of strategies form the basis for the methodology and categorization of the data in this thesis. The methodology will be further explained in section 4.

3.3 Public apologies

The framework of apology as a speech act set laid out by Cohen and Olshtain (1983) has been utilized in numerous further studies. Many of these studies have a cross-cultural focus, as did the original study, and mostly focus on everyday language and interpersonal, i.e. face-to-face, apologies. For example, Bataineh and Bataineh (2008) studied and compared the apology strategies utilized by students who are native speakers of American English and native speakers of Jordanian Arabic. Jones and Adrefiza (2017) examine the sociocultural, pragmatic, and gender differences of expressing the speech act of apology, comparing native speakers of Australian English and Bahasa Indonesian. Compared to the large number of studies which have focused on these apologies taking place in the private domain, there has

been less research which has focused on applying this framework and methodology to public apologies (Page 2014, 7). Nevertheless, it has been argued that the same approach which has been used to study apologies as speech act sets in everyday conversation, can be also applied to examining public apologies (Murphy 2015, 175).

Public apologies have gained focus and prominence in media and in society at large from the 1990s and the beginning of the twentieth century onwards (Lazare 2004, 13). From celebrities apologizing for their misconduct to heads of state apologizing on behalf of the government for its past offenses, public apologies have undoubtedly become a common and widely recognizable phenomenon in the past twenty years. This "new culture of public apology" (Lazare 2004, 13; Mills 2001) has seen an increase in studies analyzing public apologies. These studies have approached public apologies from numerous points of view and from difference fields, from sociolinguistics and philosophy to political science and law.

In the field of linguistics and pragmatics, the Cohen and Olshtain (1983) typology has also been applied to the study of public apologies. For example, Page (2014), utilized the framework in analyzing corporate apologies posted on Twitter. Her study combined the framework of apology strategies as they appear in Blum-Kulka (1989, 157), with Benoit's (1995) strategies of image repair, which was mentioned earlier in section 2.1 of this thesis. In addition, Kampf (2009) studied how public figures utilize the different apology strategies in the framework in order to minimize their responsibility for the offense.

Murphy (2015) examined apology speech acts performed in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom. His analysis was also based on the apology strategy typology as it appears in Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) but he amended it to better fit the specific context and topic of his material. He argued that in his specific context, among the IFID performative verbs listed in the typology, only the performative verb "to apologize" explicitly indicates the illocutionary force of apologizing (Murphy 2015, 183.) He also amended the original typology to account for the difference between direct and indirect forms of apology, for example, making a distinction between a statement of intent (*I would like to apologize*) and a direct statement of apology (*I apologize*) (Murphy 2015, 184). In this way a connection is also drawn to the earlier typology of Fraser (1981, 263). In her thesis, Beaudin (2018) expanded further on Murphy's framework, amending it again to fit her data of three genres of public apologies (corporate, historical political and celebrity apologies), adding categories of

"apology avoidance (fauxpology) strategies" and focusing more on the strategies of minimizing responsibility, in the vein of Kampf (2009).

Given these examples of the framework laid out by Cohen and Olshtain (1983) being utilized in analyzing public apology and the ways it has been amended to fit the specific situational context and genre of the research data, this thesis also includes some additions to the categorization. This is done to account for the features and context of social media influencer apologies on the topic of the Covid-19 pandemic. The framework used in this thesis will be described in the Methods section.

4 Material

The material for this thesis is comprised of social media posts made by online influencers which feature apologies relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, the background for which was detailed in Section 2. The offenses apologized for included attending crowded parties and gatherings which broke current health advisories, traveling while it was not advised, and breaking lockdown restrictions and other safety regulations. The data were collected across multiple social media platforms, the dataset consisting of posts from Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and Twitter. This approach provides a cross-platform look at apologies all relating to the same topic. This approach was taken in order to get a wider look at the timely and fairly recent topic, and to perform an introductory analysis of apologies across platforms and across media, with both video and text format posts being included. The considerations for as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the approach will be laid out in this section.

4.1 Search and data selection criteria

The data were collected by using the Google search engine, utilizing search words "influencer," "Twitter," "TikTok," "Instagram" and "YouTube" paired with the search term "apology." The search results were then narrowed further by utilizing search terms "corona," "covid" and "covid-19". The search results were limited by their date of publishing to a time frame starting on January 1st 2020, until June 1st 2021, which was when the last of the data were accessed. This was done to find apology posts relating specifically to the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The searches brought up news and magazine articles reporting on influencer apologies, the articles including transcriptions, descriptions, excerpts, screen capture images and links to the apology posts (for example: Haasch, 2021; Knowles 2020; Haylock, 2020). Through these articles the apology posts were accessed.

The search was limited to only posts made by social media influencers; apologies posted on the social media platforms of "traditional" celebrities were not included. Traditional celebrities were omitted in order to narrow down the scope of this thesis. Celebrity apologies have been widely studied in the context of politicians (Theye 2008), athletes (Benoit 2013; Glantz 2009) and entertainers (Kauffman 2012). This thesis focuses on social media influencer apology posts as the topic of influencer apologies has gained public attention and been in focus of multiple studies recently, as detailed earlier in section 2 of this thesis.

As mentioned in section 2, the distinction between a traditional celebrity and an influencer is not always clear-cut, as celebrities such as actors and musicians may gain large social media followings and conversely social media influencers may move into more traditional forms of celebrity, such as launching an acting or music career once they have gained fame. In the data collection for this thesis, the distinction between an influencer and a traditional celebrity was made by studying the language used in the articles the posts were reported on. For example, the headline for the article on *Vulture* brought up in the search results reads "The Best, Fakest, and Most Teary Influencer Apologies of 2020" (Haylock, 2020). If the people reported on were referred to as "influencer" or "[name of a social media platform] star" in the text of the magazine and news articles, they were qualified as such in this thesis. The difference between a celebrity and an influencer, and today's changing and shifting definitions of those terms is an interesting discussion to follow (Jankowski 2021; Abidin 2018; Schouten et al. 2020), but in the context of this thesis, the more simplified divide based on word choice was made.

The data selection was limited to posts published by influencers with a follower or subscriber count of 100,000 or higher on the platform the apology post was published on, the sizes in audience varying from 157,000 to 25.5 million followers. The high follower count, the public social media accounts, and the apparent attention of media outlets on these influencers and their actions were taken as qualifiers that the people posting these apologies are public personalities, and their posts then also public. Consideration of research ethics and questions of privacy are highly relevant when it comes to collecting and using social media content as data for research. Ahteensuu (2019) discusses these implications and considerations in his article on the use of social media data in research, including a discussion on the distinction between public and personal social media posts. He posits that in order to make this distinction, it is important to consider the social media platform's user's aim when making a post. One must ask if the user has explicitly intended their material to be public (Ahteensuu 2019).

When it comes to the dataset collected for this thesis, and taking into account the abovementioned qualifiers, the large following, the publicly set posts, and the interest posed by the media, I argue that these posts are fair to use as research material in the context of this thesis. The apology posts are posted publicly and aimed at the influencers' audience (be it their followers in general, a specific person, or the society at large), so it would stand to reason that they intended these posts to be seen and received by the public. Nevertheless, in order to be respectful of the content creators and their privacy, and especially as the aim of

this thesis is not to pose value judgement on the actions of the individual making the apology posts but to focus strictly on the linguistic features and strategies, the identifying information of the posters will be omitted, and they will remain anonymous in the context of this thesis.

4.2   Description of data

The data consist of twelve posts made by influencers on the social media platforms Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and Twitter. The data include posts both in text and video format, the video formatted posts having been transcribed into text for analysis. The transcription was made by utilizing the auto-captioning features on YouTube and TikTok, and where these automatic captions were not available, the transcription was created by the author. All extralinguistic features, such as gestures, facial expressions, and visual components of the video format posts were excluded from the transcriptions in order to keep the focus of the analysis on the linguistic aspects of the apology posts. The extralinguistic elements of social media influencer apology posts and videos have been recently examined in studies analyzing them as crisis communication (Sandlin and Gracyalny 2020) and looking at their image repair strategies (Sandlin and Gracyalny 2018; Lamsijärvi 2020). The length of the posts in the data varies from just 31 words to 1,144 words, the average length of the posts being 261 words. All in all posts totaling 3,132 words were collected across four social media platforms. Table 1 showcases a list of the twelve posts included in the data, also including their platform of publication, post format and word count.

Data reference name	Platform of publication	Post format	Number of words
IGS1	Instagram	Video	153
IGS2	Instagram	Text	77
IGS3	Instagram	Video	364
IGS4	Instagram	Video	128
IGS5	Instagram	Video	206
IGS6	Instagram	Text	154
IG1	Instagram	Text	248
IG2	Instagram	Video	242
YT1	YouTube	Video	1144
YT2	YouTube	Text	99
TWT	Twitter	Text	31
TKT	TikTok	Video	286

Table 1. Data overview

The twelve posts which make up the data were selected by utilizing the search and selection criteria detailed in section 4.1. The data only include posts which could be directly accessed through source links on the articles published about them, or for which full transcriptions or screen-captures were available. This is a factor which limited the dataset notably, as many articles only paraphrased the apologies or merely included brief descriptions or snippets of their contents. This results in a fairly limited dataset, and this has to be kept in mind when examining the data and especially when performing a quantitative analysis.

Given the cross-platform approach and nature of the dataset, the differences between the different post types and the features and restrictions of the specific platforms they were posted on, must be considered. For example, Twitter posts are limited with a character limit (280 characters), resulting in shorter texts when compared to for example YouTube videos, which do not have similar limitations (Newton 2018). TikTok videos also have a time limit (3 minutes) and often include both video and textual elements, in the form of captions and additional information in text format on top of the video (Kan 2021). Instagram Stories also often include both video and text, as they range from images (with possible captioning) and mainly text-focused posts, to videos (Bainotti et al. 2020). Instagram Stories are also designed to only appear on the social media user's profile for 24 hours if they are not manually saved by them, a defining feature which will be discussed later in this section. More permanent Instagram posts can also include pictures, video, and text, which can appear both in an image format, or as a caption to the post.

These different features and limitations result in posts of varying lengths and character counts. This can make one-to-one comparison between the posts of different types challenging, a possible drawback to the cross-platform approach employed. It must then be noted that this thesis does not present a definitive study of every single social media influencer apology relating to Covid-19 across all of social media. What the cross-platform approach does allow for, and why the approach was seen as appropriate for the analysis presented in this thesis, is a broad introductory look at the timely and fairly recent post type and apology genre. It provides a starting point on which future research may be built on and expand upon.

The types of data will now be detailed, a dataset overview provided above in Table 1. Half of the posts, six, are in the form of Instagram Story posts (IGS). A post type available on the social media platform since 2016, Instagram Stories help users share "all the moments of your day, not just the ones you want to keep on your profile" (Instagram 2016). Bainotti et al.

(2020) describe the main features of these posts as being their narrative and documentarian style and their ephemerality; they are posts which are designed to only last on the user's profile for 24 hours. These posts can be manually archived by the user and saved to be featured on their profile as a "highlight" but in general, Instagram Stories are designed to only be up on a user's profile for a limited amount of time, in contrast to the traditional Instagram grid posts, which stay up on the user's profile indefinitely until the user decides to delete them. Out of the six Instagram Story posts in the data, only one had been manually saved by the influencer and left up on their profile. The rest of the posts were accessed through media outlets reporting on them, including transcriptions and descriptions of the posts.

The questions and considerations of utilizing ephemeral data like this in research are timely and relevant, the research constantly changing along the development of new technologies and features. Bainotti et al. study the nature and challenges of using Instagram Story posts as data for research, stating that their fleeting nature "makes these digital objects particularly challenging to study from a methodological perspective" (Bainotti et al. 2020, 4).

In addition to ephemeral Instagram Story posts, more permanent Instagram grid posts (IG) were also present in the data, two of them appearing. These posts are added directly onto the user's profile feed, often referred to as "the grid" because of the look of the page and its rows of square posts (Tanner 2020). The data also include two posts in the form of YouTube videos (YT). As was detailed previously in section 2.1, these YouTube apology videos have been the focus of much public and social media interest, as well as academic studies (for example Sandlin and Gracyalny 2020, Karlsson 2020, Loisa 2021). The posts collected in the dataset also include one Tweet published on Twitter (TWT) and one TikTok post (TKT).

The influencers that authored the apology posts will remain anonymous in this thesis, so the individual posts will be referred to by their platform and form of publication. For example, the Instagram Story posts will be marked by the abbreviation IGS, followed by a number indicating their order in a chronological list of the post by their date of publishing. Hence an Instagram Story post published by an influencer in September of 2020 will be marked as IGS3. Table 1 provides a list of all the posts in the data, including their reference names.

In this section, the material, its selection process and criteria has been detailed. In addition, the features of the data, as well as the ethical and practical considerations of analyzing it have been laid out. In the following section the method of analysis is laid out in detail.

5 Methods

The methodology of this thesis has its roots in the speech act theory developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1976). Since the thesis is concerned specifically with the speech act of apology, Fraser's (1981) semantic formulae for apologies as an expressive illocutionary act, and Cohen and Olshtain's (1981, 1983) semantic formulae for the apology as a speech act set form the basis of the categorization of apology strategies. The previous studies on public apologies and their semantic formulae and apology strategies by Page (2014), Murphy (2015) and Beaudin (2018) were also considered for the specific features of the genre of a public apology, as the studies of Cohen and Olshtain focused mainly on interpersonal apologies.

The typology used in this thesis to analyze and categorize the apology strategies apparent in the specific data of social media influencer apology posts is as follows:

1. Use of an explicit IFID

2. Explanation or account

    a. Excuse: speaker acknowledges fault, tries to mitigate

    b. Justification: speaker doesn't acknowledge fault

3. An acknowledgement of responsibility

    a. Subcategories by Cohen and Olshtain (1983, 23)

        i. Accepting the blame

        ii. Expressing self-deficiency

        iii. Recognizing the other person as deserving apology

        iv. Expressing lack of intent

    b. Specific influencer-related utterances

4. An offer of repair

5. A promise of forbearance

These five categories of strategies will provide an answer to the first two of the research questions posed in this thesis: "*What kind of apology strategies of apologies as a speech act set, are visible in the social media influencer apology posts?*" and "*Which strategies are more prominent than others in the data?*" Each of these categories and their subcategories will now be described, illustrated by example utterances from the data.

The first category of apology strategies mirrors the first semantic formula of Cohen and Olshtain (1983) as well as Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), in that it includes utterances which feature the use of explicit illocutionary force indicating devices. In the case of apologies these mean the performative verbs (1) (be) sorry, (2) excuse, (3) apologize, (4) forgive, (5) regret and (6) pardon, as detailed in Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, 22). These verbs can appear on their own (example 1.1), or as a part of more complex structures and verb phrases (example 1.3). They can also appear alongside intensifiers such as adverbials (example 1.2) and repetition of elements (example 1.4) (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984, 208).

> (1.1) *I'm sorry for anyone that I've offended or hurt* (IGS1)
>
> (1.2) *I genuinely am so sorry* (IGS4)
>
> (1.3) *I wanna apologize* (YT1)
>
> (1.4) *I am so so sorry* (IGS5)

The second category is also based on the typology of Cohen and Olshtain, including explanations and accounts of the offence in question. This category is further divided into two subcategories: excuses and justifications. The subcategory of excuse is made up of accounts and explanations wherein the speaker acknowledges their responsibility and fault for the offense, and that the offense was undesirable, but tries to lessen the blame attributed to themselves by referring to mitigating circumstances. A justification refers to a situation where the speaker does not acknowledge the offence or their responsibility, explaining how they were not in fact responsible for the offence caused (Trosborg 1995, 382). It must be noted that the distinction between an excuse and a justification may often be challenging to make, and that the specific context in which they appear may often be the only way to distinguish between them (Kasachkoff 1988, 21). Example (2.1) below shows an utterance categorized as an excuse, while (2.2) is categorized as a justification.

> (2.1) *I made this video to entertain people because I am a content creator and this is my job to entertain people* (IG2)
>
> (2.2) *There was not 50+ people there or whatever the stories are saying* (IGS5)

The third category, also included in the typology of Cohen and Olshtain, is the acknowledgement of responsibility. This category is also divided into two subcategories, the first of which then further divided into the categories borrowed from Cohen and Olshtain (1983, 23): (a) accepting the blame, (b) expressing self-deficiency, (c) recognizing the hearer

as deserving apology, and (d) expressing lack of intent. The strategies of acknowledging responsibility also include a situation-specific category of utterances referring to the responsibility related to the role of a social media influencer, and to the platform and audience that come with it, which was discussed earlier in the Background section. For example, the utterance (3.2) refers to the responsibility which stems from their position as an influencer with a considerable audience and a highly visible platform.

(3.1) *I meant absolutely no harm to anyone* (IG1)

(3.2) *I can't be ignorant with the platform I have* (YT1)

The fourth and fifth categories, an offer of repair, and a promise of forbearance appear in the typology as they did in Cohen and Olshtain (1983).

(5.1) *I will not be traveling anymore during this time* (IGS3)

(5.2) *It will not happen again* (IGS4)

Outside these five main categories, there is an additional, situational context specific category of strategies which is comprised of utterances relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. As this topic is a commonality among all the apology posts, all of them relating to the pandemic in one way or another, I found it necessary to add this additional category to showcase the specific situational context and topic of these apologies. This separate category is also useful in order to answer my third research question: "*What strategies specific to the Covid-19 pandemic are apparent in the data?*" The addition of these situation-specific categories is also featured in the works of Beaudin (2018, 39) and Murphy (2015, 183), hence why their inclusion in the typology of this thesis was seen as appropriate. The specific Covid-19 related features of the apologies were categories in the following way:

Covid-19 specific strategies:

a. Appealing to the common struggle of the pandemic

(6.1)   *We're just trying to navigate through this difficult time as I'm sure so many people are* (IGS1)

b. Reminding the audience of ways to mitigate the pandemic

(6.2)   *Stay safe, stay healthy, wash your hands, stay inside* (YT1)

In this section, the typology of categories used in this thesis has been laid out, including the categories based on the studies of apology as a speech act set by Cohen and Olshtain's (1981,

1983) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) as well as the additional categories included to fit the specific genre of social media influencer apologies relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the following Analysis section, the results of the analysis of the data by utilizing this methodology will be detailed.

6 Analysis

The results gathered from the data by utilizing the method detailed in the previous section will be laid out in this section. Firstly the overall and quantitative findings are presented, with the focus on the distribution of the strategies across posts and the "fulsomeness" of the apology posts. This term refers to how many different apology strategies appear in a post, with a post featuring a wider array of different strategies seen as more fulsome than a post that only utilizes a few. This quantitative focus aims to answer the second of the research questions presented in this thesis: *Which strategies are more prominent than others in the data?*

The subsections following the quantitative analysis present a detailed analysis of each of the typology categories, in the order in which they were introduced in the Methods section. This analysis will be qualitative in nature and answer the first of the thesis research questions: *What kind of strategies of apologies as a speech act set are visible in the social media influencer apology posts?* The third research question; *What strategies specific to the Covid-19 pandemic are apparent in the data?* is answered at the end of this section, with a discussion continuing on to the Discussion section.

Of the dual approach of qualitative and quantitative analysis, the qualitative approach is focused on in more detail. With two of the three research questions being of qualitative nature, this aspect is naturally the focus of analysis. The data is also analyzed quantitatively, in order to answer to the second research question, but while performing this analysis and looking at its results, it must be taken into account that the dataset is limited and not broad enough to make definitive and overarching conclusions about the apology post genre as a whole. With these considerations in mind, the following subsection includes an overview of the quantitative analysis of the data.

6.1 Quantitative analysis of the data

The dataset is comprised of twelve social media posts, originally published in both text and video format, all in all 3,132 words in total. As can be seen in Table 1, there is some considerable difference in the length of these posts, the longest one having a word count of 1,144, and the shortest being comprised of just 31 words. These differences can at least in some part be explained by the different features and limitations of the different social media post types and platforms they were posted on, which was discussed in section 4.2. When attempting to perform a balanced comparison between the posts of different lengths, an

approach was taken where the total amount of occurrences of the strategies being used in a post were counted and these classified along the six broad categories presented in the Methods section. The proportional amount of each apology strategy type of the total 100% of all instances of the strategies used was then calculated, which enables a clearer comparison between the posts. This also allows for examination of how the different strategies were distributed among the posts and in what kind of combinations they appeared in. The results of this analysis can be seen in Figure 1.
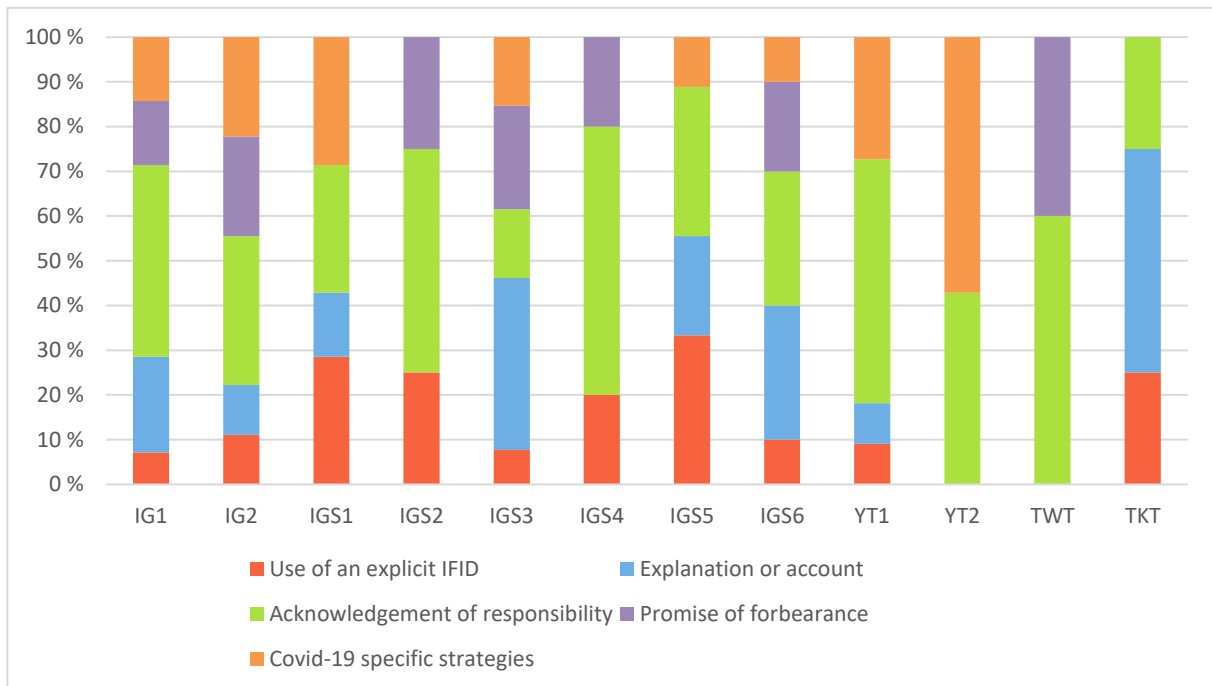

Figure 1: Distribution of apology strategy categories across the data

Before continuing the analysis of the distribution and of the different strategy categories in the data, it must first be noted that as can be seen in Figure 1., only five of the six broad categories presented in the Methods section appeared in the data. The category of an offer of repair did not occur in the posts. This finding will be discussed later in subsection 6.5 and in the Discussion section.

All in all the data feature 120 occurrences of apology strategies of all different types. Of the remaining five categories, the strategy of an acknowledgement of responsibility was the most widely present, the only strategy to appear in all twelve posts in the data. As can be seen in Figure 1, in most of the posts, the strategy made up a large portion of the total amount of strategy occurrences, its average portion being 23.5%. In five of the twelve posts it made up above 40% of all the occurrences. Out of the 120 total occurrences of apology strategies

across the posts, the strategy of an acknowledgement of responsibility was utilized 47 times. As can be seen in Figure 2, this presents 40% of all total occurrences. Explicit illocutionary force indicating devices were the strategy the second most broadly used to perform the speech act of apology, appearing in ten of the twelve posts. They make up 17% of the total occurrences, appearing 20 times in the data. Explanations were used to apologize 17 times across eight posts, promises of forbearance appeared in seven posts with 14 occurrences in total and Covid-19 specific strategies were apparent in eight posts with 20 total occurrences. The features and examples of the use of these strategies will be detailed further in their respective subcategories.
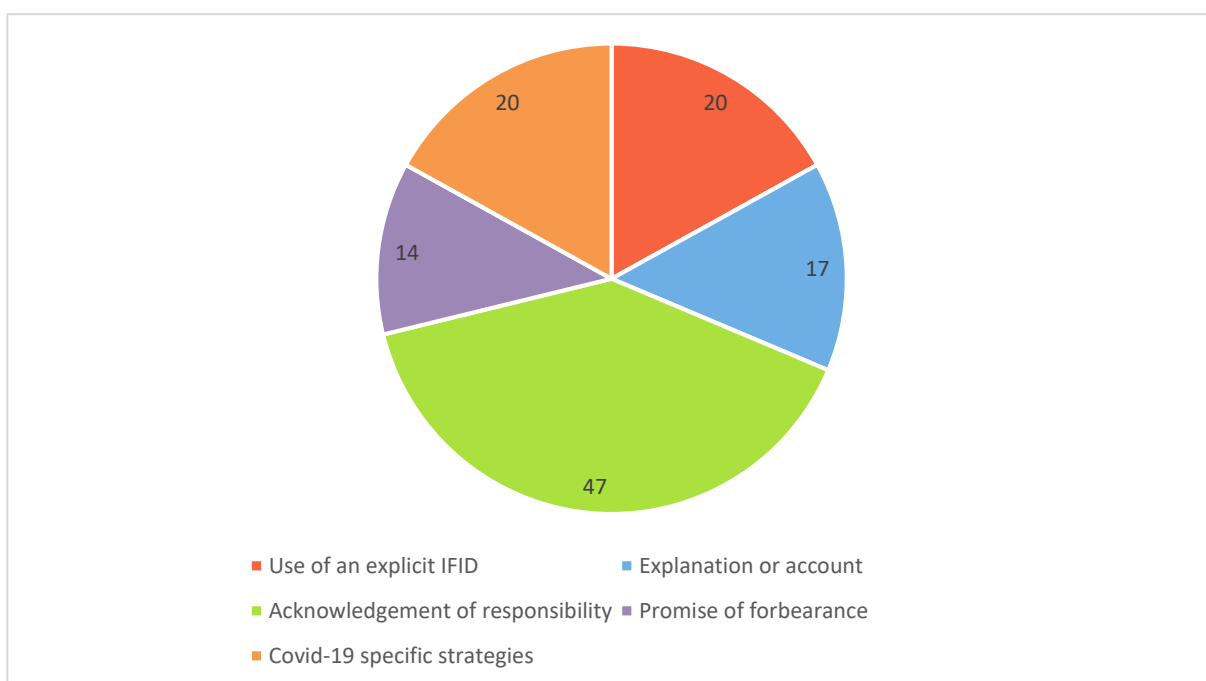

Figure 2: Total number of apology strategy occurrences in the data

When looking at the distribution of these categories and their fulsomeness, it can be seen in Figure 1 that all the posts utilized multiple strategies and they appeared in different combinations. When omitting the strategy of an offer of repair, on average, each post included 3.75 out of the remaining five main categories. Four of the twelve posts (IG1, IG2, IG3 and IGS6) utilized all five main strategies together to perform the speech act of apology. YT2 and TWT only utilized two of the strategies, but none of the posts examined utilized just one, all opting to utilize multiple strategies to perform the speech act of apology. Utilizing multiple strategies contribute to creating an apology of higher intensity and one that is more fulsome (Cohen and Olshtain 1983, 22). This finding is in line with previous research on public

apology (Murphy 2015, 192; Beaudin 2018, 107), and the similarities will be detailed further in the Discussion section.

Regarding the distribution of strategies, the ratio for the number of occurrences of apology strategies per sentence was calculated for each of the posts, by following the method utilized by Beaudin (2018, 107). The results for this analysis can be seen in Figure 3. In this analysis, an average ratio of 1.07 strategy occurrences per sentence was found, meaning that on average, the texts included one instance of an apology strategy use in each sentence. The ratio ranged from 0.33 (TKT) to a ratio of 2 (IGS4) occurrences per sentence. In the discussion section these findings will be elaborated on and compared to the findings of Beaudin.
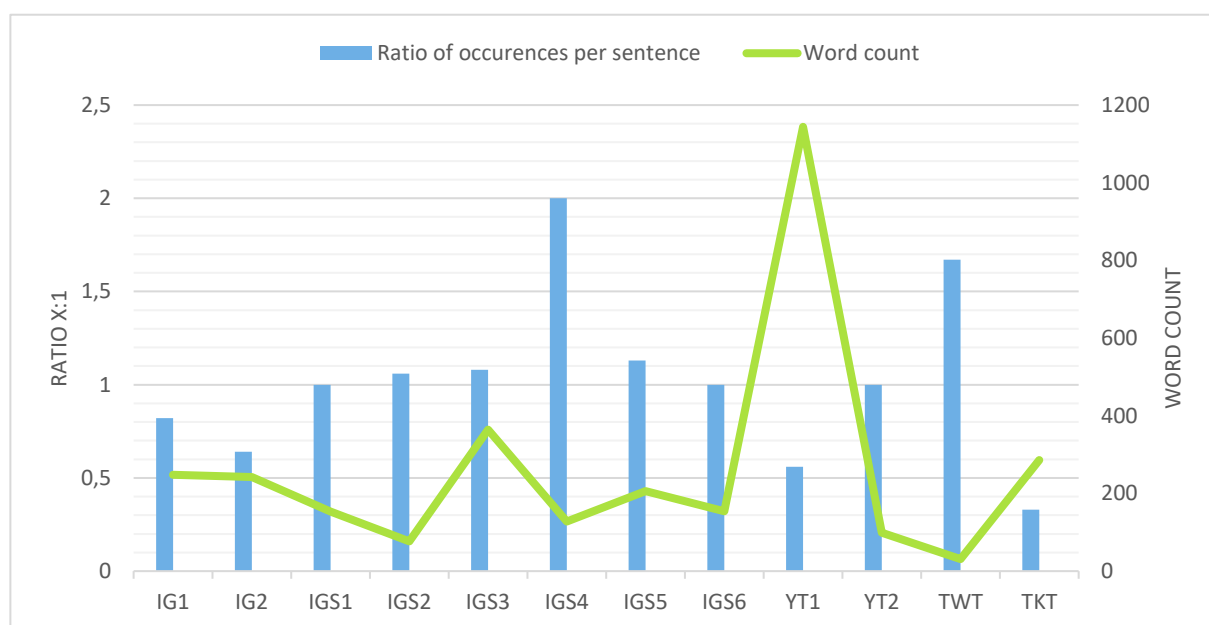
Figure 3: Ratio of occurrences per sentence

In the quantitative analysis of the data it has been seen that of the categories of apology strategies studied in the social media posts, the strategy of an acknowledgement of responsibility was found to be the most prominent, the only one of the strategies to appear in all posts in the material and the one with most total occurrences. In the following subsections each of the categories in the typology will be detailed and illustrated with examples from the data.

6.2 Use of an explicit IFID

The first strategy laid out in the typology of both Cohen and Olshtain (1983) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), is the use of an explicit IFID in the form of a performative apology verb. The dataset of the thesis saw in total of twenty instances of the use of the six verbs included in this category. Out of the six apology verbs, only two appeared in the data, those being "(be) sorry" and "apologize." The other four verbs, "excuse," "forgive, "regret" and "pardon" did not appear in the data. The apology verb "(be) sorry" was the most commonly used in the data, appearing eleven times and in half of the twelve posts. The verb "apologize" was featured eight times and in seven of the posts.

Out of the twenty instances of explicit IFIDs in the data, seven featured the apology verb on its own (example (1)). Seven featured the verb "(be) sorry" or "apologize" as a part of a larger verb phrase, along with the following constructions: "want to," "would like to," "will," and "would like to express" (examples (2) and (3)). The verbs appeared with intensifying adverbials in seven instances, these adverbials including: "so," "sincerely," "fully," "truly," and "genuinely" (examples (3) and (4)). Repetition of these adverbials was also utilized to further intensify the IFID, as can be seen in example (5). As can be seen in the examples, some overlap was apparent between these categories, with example (3) featuring both a more complex verb phrase and an intensifying adverbial, and example (4) including the use of two intensifying adverbials.

> (1) *I'm sorry if I made anyone fell singled out or made fun of* (YT1)
>
> (2) *I'd like to express how sorry I am for what I've done* (IG1)
>
> (3) *i want to fully apologize* (IGS2)
>
> (4) *And I genuinely am so sorry that that happened* (IGS4)
>
> (5) *I am so so sorry* (IGS5)

Out of the total six apology verbs laid out by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, 22), only two, "(be) sorry" and "apologize" appeared in the data. Additionally, all in all, this strategy was only the second most common in the data analyzed, which differs from many of the previous studies utilizing the typology, where the use of an explicit IFID is consistently the most common strategy used (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984; Holtgraves 1989). The details and implications of this will be discussed in the discussion section of this thesis.

6.3   An explanation or account

The second category in the typology, an explanation or account is divided into two subcategories. Altogether, this category appeared in the data seventeen times and was apparent in eight of the twelve posts. The distinction made between the subcategories of excuse and justification that was utilized in this analysis was as detailed earlier in the Methods section: the difference between the two was made on the basis of if the speaker acknowledges their fault and undesirability of the offense or not. Hence example (6) presents the subcategory of excuse, where the speaker acknowledges their fault but presents mitigating circumstances, wherein example (7) they deny their fault.

> (6) *Even though I have been wearing a mask in public and have tested negative*
> *multiple times, going to a party during a pandemic was a selfish & stupid*
> *decision* (YT2)

> (7) *Contrary to false narratives, I did not attend any large-scale ticketed events or*
> *bars* (IGS6)

This strategy was the most challenging one to categorize. Firstly in terms of determining what is considered the speaker merely recounting the context and background of a situation and what is them providing mitigating circumstances or justifications for an offense. Secondly, the line between what is considered an excuse and what is a justification was also oftentimes challenging to draw. It required deeper analysis of the overall context of the whole text, beyond focusing on isolated sentences or word choices, which was generally sufficient when identifying explicit apology verbs for example. Because of this, there was more room left for interpretation and subjectivity, which must be noted when examining the results of analysis. These implications will be discussed further in the Discussion section.

6.4   An acknowledgement of responsibility

As noted earlier, in many previous studies, the use of an explicit IFID has been noted as the most commonly utilized strategy in the speech act of apology. However, in analyzing the data of this thesis, it appeared that the strategy of an acknowledgement of responsibility was the strategy that appeared the most. The twelve posts included in the data included in total 47 instances of the strategy being used, with each post including at least one occurrence of this strategy. This strategy was the only one in the typology featured in every post in the data, where the use of an explicit IFID, the second most common, was found in ten of the twelve texts.

When examining the four sub-categories of acknowledgement of responsibility, the strategy of accepting blame was the most commonly appearing, with nineteen occurrences of the strategy across seven posts. As can be seen in the examples (8) and (9), this strategy was often realized by utilizing the words "accountable" and "responsibility", directly referring to the responsibility of the speaker over the offense. The strategy was also often realized in utterances featuring the word "wrong," as can be seen in example (10), with the speaker recognizing that the offense was undesirable. In addition to these most common wordings used, the utterances also featured the speaker expressing that they now acknowledge that their past actions were not right, featuring wordings such as "incorrect," "mistake" and "I shouldn't have" (example (11)).

(8) *i fully hold myself accountable for this* (IGS2)

(9) *I'm here taking full responsibility for all of that* (IGS4)

(10) *I know that what I did was wrong* (IG1)

(11) *I knew I shouldn't have gone in public* (YT1)

The strategy of expressing self-deficiency was also common, featuring in six posts, with eight total occurrences. The utterances often included adjectives describing the speaker's faults or self-deficiency in some way, which can be seen in examples (12) and (13), adjectives such as "irresponsible," "impulsive," "dumb," "stupid," and "selfish" appearing in the data. The utterances in this category also often included references to the speaker reflecting on their thoughts and intentions at the time of the offense, stating that they were "thoughtless" or "careless" and that they now realize their past faults and recognize their responsibility (example (14)).

(12) *going to a party during a pandemic was a selfish & stupid decision* (YT2)

(13) *it was a dumb thing to do* (TWT)

(14) *Without thinking, I shared the activity on my stories* (IG1)

The strategy of acknowledging the hearer of deserving an apology was apparent in five of the posts, appearing eight times. This strategy was realized in various different ways, addressing a specific hearer directly, as can be seen in example (15), or more generally referencing an audience that they see as deserving the apology (examples (16) and (17)). In example (18) the speaker not only acknowledges the hearer as deserving an apology, but also thanks them for demanding one.

(15) *appreciate you tyler* (TWT)

(16) *I know a lot of you are genuinely so hurt and so disappointed by this* (IGS4)

(17) *To those who were upset – I hear you, I really do* (IGS6)

(18) *Thank you for calling me out* (YT1)

Similarly to the strategy of expressing self-deficiency, the strategy of expressing lack of intent also has the speaker reflecting on their past actions and attributes. This category featured six utterances across four posts, which referenced the fact that the speakers' actions, or their consequences were not intentional. As can be seen in the examples (19) and (20), it was common for the speakers to not explicitly state that they did not intend the perform the offense, but instead that their intention was not to cause the reaction and consequences their actions had.

(19) *I meant absolutely no harm to anyone* (IG1)

(20) *I never in a million years wanted to hurt anyone* (IGS1)

The category of acknowledgement of responsibility also includes the sub-category of social media influencer specific strategies. There were seven instances of these strategies apparent in the data, most of them referencing the influencers' platform and status as someone with a large audience. In the utterances the speakers acknowledge their responsibility and state that as an influencer, they ought to act as an example to their audience and that they therefore must be careful with their actions. These utterances included references to the influencer's large viewer base, with references to their "platform," "community," and "audience" (examples (21) and (22)). The speakers also state that as influencers they ought to act as an example to their audience and because of their visible position, they must hold themselves especially accountable for the things they say and do (example (23).

(21) *I can't be ignorant with the platform I have* (YT1)

(22) *unsafe partying is not something I want to promote to my audience* (YT2)

(23) *i need to be a better example and person* (IGS2)

With 47 occurrences of the strategy of an acknowledgement of repair appearing in the data, it is overwhelmingly the most prominent strategy used in the data, making up 40% of the total amount of strategy occurrences. The prominence of this strategy will be explored in the Discussion section.

6.5   An offer of repair

The data of twelve social media influencer apology posts did not include any instances of the strategy of an offer of repair being used. As stated in the theory section of this thesis, the categories of an offer of repair and a promise of forbearance are highly situation-specific and their use depends on the specific discourse situation. The data seems to present a discourse situation and context in which the strategy of an offer of repair is not utilized. Although, it must of course be recognized that as the dataset is limited, this finding does not offer definitive proof that offers of repair are absent from all social media influencer apologies. This finding will be discussed and expanded further in the Discussion section.

6.6   A promise of forbearance

The strategy of promise of forbearance appeared in seven of the twelve posts, with fourteen utterances in total. A common feature of the utterances in this category was the referencing of the future; the auxiliary verb "will" was included in nine out of the fourteen utterances (see example (24)). This shows the strategy's function of assuring the hearer that the speaker will not repeat the offense in the future. Another common feature of the utterances in this category were the references to the speaker learning and gaining more knowledge (examples (25) and (26)). Example (26) also features the speaker stating that they have "felt the repercussions" of the offense and as a result are learning from it. As was previously noted, the strategy of expressing self-deficiency was utilized by the speakers to highlight their previous thoughtlessness and traits that they recognize and regret as of present, so the use of utterances which state that they have learned from the experience and will continue to do so, can be seen as a connection between the two strategies.

(24) *I will not be doing that anymore* (IGS3)

(25) *I have learnt from it* (IG1)

(26) *I've felt the repercussions of my mistake and I'll continue taking this time to reflect & learn* (IGS6)

6.7   Covid-19 specific strategies

In addition to the typology of five categories as laid out by Cohen and Olshtain, the analysis for this thesis also included an additional category of Covid-19 specific utterances. This was done to get a better look at the strategies connecting specifically to the topic of the pandemic

and to link to the third research question posed: *What strategies specific to the Covid-19 pandemic are apparent in the data?* Given this separate focus, some of the utterances included in this category have overlap with the five categories in the typology. For example, an utterance may have features of an explanation or a promise of forbearance (Example (27)), but as it includes a specific reference to the pandemic and the measures relating to it, it was included in this category. In situations where overlap between this category and the five main categories was found, the occurrences were classified and only counted into this specific category. This was done to give focus to the topic and to answer the third research question, and also in order to make sure the quantitative aspect of the analysis remained balanced.

(27) *I'll continue to take matters seriously, and promote mitigation measures as I always have* (IGS6)

Out of the total of twelve apology posts analyzed, eight included strategies relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the strategy was utilized in twenty occurrences in total. The Covid-19 specific strategies were divided broadly into two subcategories. The first is the speaker appealing to the hearer by referring to the common experience and struggle of the pandemic. In the Cohen and Olshtain typology, these utterances could be categorized as belonging in the strategy of explanations and accounts. These utterances aim to explain the offenses by appealing to a common struggle that the hearers are familiar with, the aim being getting the hearer to perhaps empathize with the speaker. This aim can be clearly seen in example (28), where the speaker's use of the first-person pronouns and the reference to "many people" being in a similar difficult situation create an appeal to the hearer to understand the offense in this context. In example (29) the speaker refers to the common societal hardships and struggle the pandemic has caused and expresses their wish for the hearers that have been offended by the actions the speaker committed to "come together and learn from this experience" instead of focusing on the offense itself. Relating to the Cohen and Olshtain category of explanations and accounts, many utterances in this category include explanations of the mitigating measures the speaker has taken, as can be seen in example (30).

(28) *We're just trying to navigate through this difficult time as I'm sure so many people are* (IGS2)

(29) *the world is already so divided at this time, I would just like all of us to come together and learn through this experience* (IGS3)

(30) *I am taking this pandemic very seriously. I wear a mask. I work from home and I don't see my friends* (IG1)

The second strategy which was apparent across the utterances in this category was the speaker's appeal to their audience and followers at large, informing and reminding them of mitigation and safety measures they can take to combat the spread of Covid-19. In a way, this subcategory can be seen as having a link to the earlier discussed category of influencers acknowledging the responsibility they have to their large audience and following. Acknowledging their wide reach and large platform, the speakers use their posts to send a message to their audience, often clearly and directly addressing the message to their followers, as can be seen in examples (31) and (32). There were also instances in the data where the influencers included educational and instructional content about mitigating measures in their apology posts, example (33) featuring an utterance from a video format post where the influencer included an informative graphic about social distancing best practices.

(31) *Let's all obey the rules of the health protocol together for the better of us* (IG2)

(32) *Stay safe, stay healthy, wash your hands, stay inside* (YT1)

(33) *Here's an example of social distancing if you guys don't know what that is you guys should be staying inside right now and here's why* (YT1)

It is interesting to note that even as some posts include these messages about safety and mitigation measures, all the posts in the data are comprised of apologies for offences which relate – directly or indirectly – to the breaking of safety protocols or best practices. As outlaid in section 4, the posts feature apologies for attending gatherings which broke health regulations, for traveling while it was not advised, and breaking lockdown restrictions and other safety regulations. Given this context, these reminders and safety messages to the audience can also be seen as the influencers telling their audience to not repeat their mistakes, a sentiment that is clear in example (34). This once again relates back to the influencers acknowledging their position as highly visible and influential personalities with large audiences that are observing their actions.

(34) *I encourage you guys to be smarter than I was* (YT2)

The previous subsections have detailed the different realizations of the different strategies in the data. This has been done in order to answer the primary research question: *What kind of strategies of apologies as a speech act set are visible in the social media influencer apology posts?* It has been found that five categories of strategies appear in the data, and examples have been showcased to highlight the different instances of the use of these strategies. In the

following section, these findings are discussed further. They are compared and contrasted with previous studies and the implications, and the possible reasonings and explanations of the findings are also discussed.

7 Discussion

The findings of analysis are further detailed and discussed in this section. The results of previous studies are highlighted to compare and contrast them to the findings of the thesis. The differences and similarities are discussed and the possible interpretations and explanations for them are laid out. The section will finish with reflections on the material and methods utilized in this thesis and thoughts on the future research on the topic.

The following sections include discussion on the four main findings of the analysis. Firstly discussed is the finding that in contrast to earlier research, the strategy of explicit IFID use was not the most prominent one used in the data. Second, the prominent position of the strategy of acknowledgement of responsibility is discussed. Thirdly the Covid-19 specific apology strategies are discussed. Fourthly the aspects of public apologies apparent in the results that are in line with previous studies will be reviewed. Following these subsections, the challenges and possible drawbacks of the methodology utilized will be discussed.

7.1 The role of explicit IFID use in the findings

The first main finding of the thesis concerns the category of apology strategy that was found to be the most prevalent in the data. This aspect was studied in order to answer the first research question of the thesis, and the finding is that the category of an acknowledgement of responsibility is the most prevalent strategy in the data. However in contrast, in previous studies that have employed a similar method to study the frequency of different apology strategies, "a formulaic expression of apology", which lines up with the category of the use of an explicit IFID in this thesis, has been generally noted as the most frequently occurring strategy (Meier 1998, 216). Additionally, among the formulaic expressions, an expression containing some form of the verb "(be) sorry" has been found to be the most predominant one, a finding supported by the work of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Owen (1983) and apparent in the analysis of Holmes (1990) and Meier (1992). For example, in her study of interpersonal apologies of New Zealand English speakers, Holmes (1990, 167) found that some form of "sorry" accounted for 75% of the instances of the strategies used in her data, it being the overwhelmingly most prominent strategy utilized.

When comparing the Holmes study to the results of this thesis, there are some similarities in the sense that "(be) sorry" was also the most prominent explicit apology verb in the data analyzed. However, there was not a similar prominence of that strategy across all the posts in

the data and over all the other strategies. In the data, "(be) sorry" appeared in six of the posts, and IFIDs in general did not appear in all of the posts, only in 10 out of the total 12. As can be seen in Figure 1. in section 6.1., the total proportional usage of IFIDs among the strategies used in the posts was not the largest, only exceeding 30% of the strategies used in a post on one instance.

In the case of "apologize", the only other apology verb which appeared in the data, it has been found to be used less frequently than "(be) sorry" in the studies of Cohen and Olshtain (1981), Holmes (1990) and Owen (1983) (Meier 1998, 217). However, it should be noted that these studies analyzed interpersonal apologies and in contrast, in his study of public parliamentary apologies, Murphy (2015, 193) found a relatively high rate of "apologize" being utilized. Murphy attributed this difference to the "formal sounding nature" of the utterance, which would explain its infrequency in casual day-to-day talk (ibid.). The data analyzed in this thesis can be seen as occupying a middle position between interpersonal and public parliamentary apologies. The apologies are posted on public accounts and aimed at the public, but many of them adopt a conversational tone, relating back to the perceived relatability and authenticity of the influencers which was mentioned in section 2. With these considerations in mind, the finding that "apologize" was less prominently used than "(be) sorry", though not by a large margin, would place the results in the middle ground of those of the previous studies.

While the findings regarding explicit IFID use followed some of the trends found in previous research, all in all they diverged in that the strategy was not found to be the most prominent. Only two of the six explicit apology verbs as laid out by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984, 22) appeared in the data, and the prominence of the strategy over the others as examined by Holmes (1990, 167) was not apparent. In future studies looking at this genre of apology it will be interesting to see if this finding will also be visible on a larger scale, and what it can indicate about the genre of influencer apologies. A future study of apologies having to do with different topics could also be useful to analyze if the prominence of IFIDs varies depending on the topic.

7.2 The prominence of acknowledgement of responsibility in the findings

As has been discussed, unlike in many previous studies utilizing the methodology, the apology strategy that was the most prominent in the data for this thesis was the strategy of an acknowledgement of responsibility. This strategy was the only one of the main five strategies to appear in all twelve of the posts analyzed, and all in all it was utilized in 47 occurrences.

The number of occurrences of this strategy including its five subcategories was over twice as much as the occurrences of the strategies of the use of an explicit IFID (20 occurrences), the strategy of explanation or account (17 occurrences) and the Covid-19 specific strategies (20 occurrences). In this subsection the implications and possible explanations for this finding are discussed, as are the possibilities for future elaboration and studies.

Like was detailed earlier in section 3.1., apologies generally imply cost to the face of the speaker and support for the hearer (Owen 1983, 374). This aspect is especially clear in the strategy of an acknowledgement of responsibility, where the speaker chooses to take on responsibility and recognize their own fault, an act which is face-threatening to the speaker and intended to appease the hearer (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, 207). It is interesting to note then that this strategy, with its uncomfortable and face-threatening nature towards the speaker, is the one most prevalent in the data studied. In examining the instances of the subcategory of an expression of self-deficiency used in the data, it has been previously noted that the strategy was often realized by the speaker using adjectives such as "stupid," "irresponsible," "careless," "dumb" etc. to refer to themselves. This can be seen as an especially face threatening act, as the speaker directly lays out their flaws and deficiencies for the hearer. Though face threatening, the use of these self-demeaning adjectives could perhaps be viewed as the speaker appealing to the hearer and gaining their forgiveness through empathy by showing vulnerability. As was also considered in the previous subsection, the perceived view of the influencers being authentic and relatable to their audience could also help to possibly explain this phenomenon. In expressing vulnerability and acknowledging their flaws and deficiencies, the speakers cause harm to their own face and image but also become more relatable and authentic to the hearer.

In addition to this being a possible explanation for the use of the strategy of expressing self-deficiency, the speaker acknowledging their flaws in order to be seen by the audience as more authentic and relatable also ties with the subcategory of expressing lack of intent. The speakers acknowledge that they made mistakes and did not intend the harm their offence caused. By highlighting their lack of intent and also highlighting their personal flaws and lack of judgement, the speaker could be trying to lessen a view of the offense as something that was planned and purposefully committed, instead laying it out to the hearer as an accident and an anomaly to their usual actions. This strategy was specifically focused on and labeled as a "defense: 'not like me'" by Beaudin (2018, 39) in her thesis on public apologies across three different genres (corporate, historical political and celebrity apologies). This strategy,

belonging to the category of "apology avoidance (fauxpology) strategies", a definition she coined for her analysis, was seen mostly used in celebrity apologies, where it was seen being used in order to present the speaker's offence as a deviation from their character and their usual behavior. Given the link between the concepts of an influencer and a celebrity that has been discussed earlier in this thesis, it seems consistent that similar strategies can be seen used in these posts.

Even though the already discussed subcategories of expressing self-deficiency and lack of intent were utilized in multiple posts, nearly half of the strategies used that fell into this category were explicit and direct admissions and accepting of blame: nine of the twelve posts included this strategy. The relative prominence of such a direct and face threatening strategy can be considered in comparison to earlier research. Murphy (2015, 198) noted that in his study of parliamentary apologies, the apologies that could be considered more serious by the larger public were more likely to see the use of the strategy of accepting blame. Hence in apologies regarding one member of parliament insulting another it was seen to occur rarely, but it was apparent in most of the apologies having to do with financial wrongdoing (ibid.). Following this logic, since the apologies analyzed in this thesis were performed publicly on social media and have to do with issues of public safety and a pandemic which concerns not only the influencers' audience but also the public at large, it could explain why this strategy is so widely apparent in the data. As their offenses have to do with a topic which concerns the public on a major scale, the influencers are willing to acknowledge and accept their blame directly even though it is face threatening.

In this subsection possible explanations have been laid out for the prominence of the strategy of an acknowledgement of responsibility found in the data. The speakers' expressions of self-deficiency could be seen as a way to maintain their image of authenticity and relatability for their audience, and their expressions of lack of intent could be seen as an effort to describe the offense as a simply uninformed and unintended mistake, not a reflection of their true character. The prevalence of direct acceptance of blame could be seen as linked to the topic of public safety and a pandemic which concerns the public at a wide scale. As the scale of this thesis is limited, repeated future studies will be necessary in order to tell if this finding of this strategy's prominence is true for the genre of influencer apologies at large.

7.3   Discussing the Covid-19 specific strategies

Given that the third research question posed in this thesis is: *What strategies specific to the Covid-19 pandemic are apparent in the data?* it is key to discuss the findings outlaid in section 6.7. The analysis found that the Covid-19 specific strategies could be roughly divided into two main subcategories; the speaker's appeal to the hearer by referring to the common experience and struggle of the pandemic, and the speaker's appeal to their audience to inform them of Covid-19 mitigation measures.

The first of these two subcategories was often realized by the speakers referring to the commonalities between them and the hearer in a worldwide crisis situation. This strategy can be seen as having similarities to the expressions of self-deficiency and lack of intent which were discussed in the previous sub-section. In both cases the speaker can be viewed as attempting to make themselves and their actions relatable and understandable to the hearer and to gain their sympathy. As was detailed in section 2, authenticity is a key element in the popularity and likeability of online influencers; they are seen as regular people who have been able to achieve their position through their own hard work and likeable personality. By appealing to the hearer by referring to the same hardships they are also dealing with, the speakers are maintaining their position as "just regular people" who are going through the same thing the hearers are.

The second sub-strategy, the speaker informing and reminding the hearer of Covid-19 mitigation measures, links in turn to the influencer specific acknowledgements of responsibility. The speakers are aware of their position and their large audience and are attempting to show their acknowledgement of the responsibility brought on by this position by offering their audience safety information. However, as was noted in section 6.7, this strategy could be seen as contradictory. Keeping in mind the context in which the apology posts were published, it is curious to see these appeals and reminders for keeping up mitigation measures included in apologies which concern the breach of safety regulations in some form. This could be seen as insincere, seeing the influencers guide their audience to follow rules they themselves have been shown to not follow. Is the use of this strategy simply the influencers regretting their offenses and telling their audience not to repeat their mistakes, or from a more cynical view, is it merely the influencers wanting to maintain their image by including these safety reminders despite their actions?

The Covid-19 pandemic and the apologies relating to it are both very current topics, and for that reason there has not yet been wide-ranging research on this topic, and specifically focusing on the aspect of apology as a speech act set. In future studies the topic could be elaborated on by utilizing a larger dataset to examine if the strategies and sub strategies found in this thesis can be seen as more widely apparent in this apology genre.

7.4   Comparing the findings with previous research on public apology

In section 6.1. the distribution of strategies and the fulsomeness of the data were detailed. This subsection includes analysis of these findings, as well as analysis of additional minor findings. All of these will be analyzed along previous research on the genre of public apologies.

In her thesis focused on the study of public apologies across different genres (corporate, historical political and celebrity apologies) Beaudin (2018, 107) noted that public apologies seem to be more fulsome than interpersonal apologies, based on a comparison between the results of her study and the results found by Holmes (1989 and 1990). For example, Beaudin found that celebrity apologies included an average of 9.33 different strategies (of a total of 27 different strategies in her typology) while in the interpersonal apologies studied by Holmes (1989, 199), the average was only 1.66. The result was similar in the study of Murphy (2015, 192) where the parliamentary apologies of the members of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom included an average of 3.98 strategies. In the data of this thesis, a similar trend was apparent. Across the twelve posts, an average of 5.83 strategies were used (including all subcategories, the highest possible number of strategies per post being 15).

Regarding the distribution of strategies, Beaudin (2018, 107) analyzed the ratio of apology strategies to the number of sentences in an apology text, finding that the shorter apologies had on average more strategies per sentence than the longer ones. As was previously highlighted in section 6.1., these ratios were also calculated for every apology post in the data, and an average ratio of 1.07 occurrences per sentence was found. Some of the findings followed the ones of Beaudin; for example, the longest of the posts, YT1 with 1,144 words had a ratio of 0.56, where a shorter post, IGS4 with only 128 words had the highest ratio of 2 occurrences of the strategies per sentence. But as can be seen in Figure 2., there is not a clear correlation between the length of the text and its ratio as was found by Beaudin. For example, the word counts for the posts IG1 (248), IG2 (242), IGS5 (206) and TKT (286) are relatively similar, but they have differing ratios; 0.82, 0.64, 1.13 and 0.33 respectively.

There are also some limitations to the data that make this analysis challenging. While texts of varying lengths are apparent in the data, since it is only consisted of twelve texts, broad and general conclusions cannot be made. For example, the data only includes one text of more than 1,000 words so while it appears that in the case of the one longer text analyzed there is a lower ratio of apology strategy occurrences per sentence, this should not lead to a generalization that the same is true with all longer influencer apology texts. The method of calculating the ratio by sentence is also challenging, given that a large amount of the data consists of transcribed spoken language, which leaves more room for subjectivity when determining sentence breaks. In analyzing spoken language, the approach of marking sentences as analytic units is difficult and because of this not widely used (Miller, 1995). In future studies this ratio could be studied using a wide corpus of apology texts of varying lengths, preferably originally published in text format, in order to limit the subjectivity in determining the sentence breaks.

In addition to the patterns of distribution and fulsomeness that characterize public apologies, the differences of the strategies utilized in them in comparison to interpersonal apologies have also been noted in previous studies. In his analysis of apologies performed in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, Murphy (2015, 194) noted a relatively high amount of the strategy of explanation or account. He explained this difference in the prevalence of this strategy in comparison to the interpersonal apologies studied by Cohen and Olshtain and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain by the difference in the context in which the apologies were performed. In a face-to-face apology, there is rarely a need for an explanation of the offense, as the participants involved in the apology are usually aware of what the offense was, given that in most cases, an apology directly follows the offense. In contrast, a public apology is often less immediate. The participant structure is also different between an interpersonal apology and a public apology, be it a parliamentary apology Murphy studied, or an influencer apology studied in this thesis. A public apology involves more participants than an interpersonal apology, including multiple hearers as well as overhearers who the apology is not directly addressed at and who may not be aware of the details of the offense (Murphy 2015, 194). In Murphy's study, these overhearers included members of parliament who were not aware of the offence and the public that saw the recordings of the parliament session but were not previously familiar with the details of the offence. In the case of social media apology posts, in addition to the intended hearers the apology is directed at – the influencers' follower base and fans – there are also overhearers who are less connected to the apology,

such as the general social media following public that come across these posts on social media, on their news feeds or through sharing and media outlets reporting on them. The influencers are often aware that their apology posts can reach a wide audience, so they include explanations and accounts of the offenses in order to make the context clear to viewers who may not be aware of it.

When reflecting the findings of the analysis with the findings of previous studies of the genre of public apologies, it is found that there are both findings that are in line with previous research and also findings that are inconclusive or unclear as to if they fully align with previous studies. The analysis of the data seems to support the finding that public apologies are more fulsome than interpersonal ones and that they include a relatively higher proportion of explanations and accounts. When it comes to the analysis of the ratio of apology strategy occurrences per sentence in the apology texts, the results seem to in part align with the findings of previous research, but since the data is limited, these findings should not be seen as definitive. In the following subsection, the overall methodology and the data utilized for this thesis is discussed and its limitations and potential improvements to it are reflected on.

7.5   Reflecting on the material and method

To conclude the Discussion section of the thesis, this subsection includes a discussion and consideration of the material selected and the methodology utilized, as well as limitations of the study. Firstly the typology and categorization utilized in the thesis analysis is discussed, followed then by reflection on the data. The section will finish with some thoughts for future directions of study on the topic.

The methodology utilized in the thesis was closely based on the typology of semantic formulae for the speech act of apology developed by Cohen and Olshtain (1981, 1983) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). Categories were added to account for the specific features of both social media influencers as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, but all in all the main features of the typology remained the same. This typology has been widely used to study both interpersonal as well as public apologies. However, some of the later studies, especially ones focusing on public apologies, have amended the typology in some ways, arguing it is done in order to better suit the apology genre. For example, while the work of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) included a list of six apology verbs in the category of explicit IFIDs ((be) sorry, excuse, apologize, forgive, regret and pardon), it has been argued by some studies that not all of these verbs truly function as such. Murphy (2015, 184) suggests that among these

explicit apology verbs, only "apologize" has the role of explicitly indicating apology. He argues that while the other verbs listed can be used to perform apologies, they do not always carry with them the explicit indicator of apology, and should therefore be understood instead as verbs which conventionally implicate apology (ibid.) In his analysis of parliamentary apologies in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, he amends the methodology of Cohen and Olshtain (1983) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) along these lines, only including "apologize" as an explicit apology verb, regarding the other apology verbs as conventional indirect apology formulae (Murphy 2015, 186).

Murphy also argues that the earlier typology takes too simplistic of a view, not accounting for nuance and different degrees of explicitness. He aligns more with the categories of Fraser (as outlaid in section 3.2.1), where a distinction was made not by just the presence of IFIDs, but also by their degree of directness. For example, Fraser's typology of essential formulae includes different categories for the use of apology verbs in the context of the speaker performing an apology indirectly by utilizing a speech act of statement of intention, desire, or expressing their obligation (Fraser 1981, 263). This ties into Murphy's already mentioned distinction of the verb "apologize" as the sole marker of explicit apology, and of the other apology verbs as only conventional indirect apology formulae. He argues that when not making this distinction between direct expressions of apology that are performed using "apologize" and more indirect expressions, such as statements of intent and obligation, nuances of the speaker's intention could be missed in analysis (Murphy 2015, 185).

The methodology and findings of this thesis can then be reflected on through this view. The typology utilized did not feature this distinction argued for by Murphy, instead following the original typology more closely. Given that indirect expressions, namely statements of intent, were visible in the data (section 6.2) and considered expressions of IFIDs by the typology used in the thesis, it is important to recognize that with this different categorization of strategies the results of analysis could be different. In future studies on the topic and with a similar dataset this difference of the two typologies is an interesting methodological topic to consider when undertaking research.

Since the original typology of semantic formulae was followed closely in analyzing the data, all five original main formulae were searched for in the apology posts. However, it was found that in the material, the strategy of an offer of repair did not appear at all, while the strategy of a promise of forbearance did appear. These two strategies are linked by Cohen and Olshtain

(1983, 23) and identified as highly situation specific. Hence an offer of repair is relevant and likely to happen in a situation where an offense has caused physical injury or other concrete damage, and conversely, a promise of forbearance is relevant in a case where the speaker could have avoided the offense but did not do so. Given that all the apologies studied concerned offenses having to do with the Covid-19 pandemic and mostly had to do with the speaker's disregarding of rules and safely regulations, the prominence of promises of forbearance over offers of repair is understandable. In the case of apologizing for, for example not following travel advisories or lockdown rules, there is not necessarily any physical damage done that the speaker could offer to repair. Instead it is the case where the offense could have been avoided if the speaker had acted differently, and with a promise of forbearance the speaker is telling the hearer that they will learn and will not repeat the offense again. This specific context seems to explain this finding, however, more research on the specific genre of influencer Covid-19 apologies is needed to see if this trend is more widely apparent.

Out of the categories employed to study and classify the difference strategies, the category of an explanation or account proved the most challenging when conducting the analysis. As was previously mentioned in section 6.3 of the analysis, unlike for example the identification of explicit apology verbs, categorizing utterances in the posts into this category, and further to its subcategories of excuse and justification, required deeper examining of the post as a whole text. A broader examination of the text and the whole context was necessary to assess the intention and meaning of a sentence, for example in determining whether its intention was to provide mitigating circumstances or to merely provide an account of the context. The working definition for the differentiation between an excuse and a justification was also a challenge to formulate, as the previous categorizations the method was based on did not offer detailed definitions for it and mostly offered examples having to do with the genre of interpersonal daily apologies instead of those performed publicly. These challenges ought to then be kept in mind when considering the findings of this strategy. Future studies could undertake efforts to focus on the method for recognizing and classifying this strategy in order to create a more normative and less subjective way of classifying it.

The search and data selection and a description of the data analyzed in the thesis has been detailed earlier in section 4. As was mentioned, the data collection proved challenging and featured ethical considerations of the influencers and their privacy before the analysis could commence. The aspect of ephemerality which was apparent with Instagram Story posts which

made up a large portion of all the posts, was also a topic that required thought and analysis, as featured in section 4.2. Because of this ephemerality, many of the apology posts were accessed indirectly through online news and magazine articles reporting on them, including transcriptions, descriptions, screen capture images and links to the original posts. This method of data collection was of course not ideal and a direct accessing of the posts from the profiles of the influencers would have been preferrable. However, because of the ephemeral nature of the posts, the indirect approach to data collection was deployed while trying to ensure that the data collected remained as close to the original unaltered text as possible. As social media and its technologies and features develop, research methods must also do so, and it will be interesting to follow the development of the research methodology regarding ephemeral online data.

A cross-platform approach has been taken in this thesis, the data consisting of influencer apology posts across four different social media. This approach was taken in order to include different post types and to get a wider introductory picture of the timely phenomenon of Covid-19 related apologies across platforms. However, as the dataset is limited to only twelve posts in total, and as they were selected through news media articles reporting on them instead of systematically searching the social media platforms for all influencer Covid-19 apologies, there has not been a particular focus on the platform specific features and specificities found in the posts and the posts from different platforms have not been compared. This has also been done because the number of posts from different platforms is not equal, with Instagram posts making up more than half of all posts in the data.

Because of the cross-platform approach, the dataset includes posts of varying lengths and formats, as was detailed in section 4.2. This had to be considered when analyzing the data and the different lengths of the posts had to be taken into account in the quantitative analysis of the occurrences of apology strategies. This is also a reason why a comparative analysis of different posts has not been focused on, as it would not have provided fair results because of the difference in the length of the apology texts. The inclusion of both written and spoken texts had to also be considered in analysis, and as was mentioned in the previous subsection, it provided some challenges in analyzing the distribution and the strategy occurrence per sentence ratio in the texts.

However, I argue that the cross-platform approach still proved useful and beneficial for the analysis of the thesis. The topic of the Covid-19 pandemic related apology posts published by

social media influencers is a new and very timely topic, and the purpose of this thesis is to provide an introductory look into the topic and genre of apology by focusing on a relatively small sampling of data collected from different platforms to get a picture of the phenomenon on social media on a broader scale. In future studies, a more focused and narrower approach may be taken, focusing on just one social media platform or post type. For example, the post type of Instagram Story Posts was seen in the analysis to contain a wide array of different post styles and types; the posts included in the data included images, text, and video. As more research on this topic and apology genre develops over time and more data is collected, I could see the emergence of larger corpus-based studies also being possible. More comprehensive and larger datasets could also enable fairer comparative studies.

8   Conclusion

This thesis undertook an analysis of the apology strategies apparent in the apology posts published by social media influencers. The goal of the thesis was to answer three research questions, the first of which being: *What kind of strategies of apologies as a speech act set are visible in the social media influencer apology posts?* Apology strategies from four of the five main categories of essential formulae laid out by Cohen and Olshtain (1981, 1983) were found in the data and were in the order of prominence: an acknowledgement of responsibility, a use of an explicit IFID, an explanation or account, and a promise of forbearance. The strategy of an offer of repair was not found to appear in the data. The second research question was: *Which strategies are more prominent than others in the data?* It was found in the analysis that the strategy of an acknowledgement of responsibility is the most prominent apology strategy in the data, contrary to a majority of previous research on apologies as a speech act set. In addition to the five original categories, an additional category of Covid-19 specific strategies was added into the typology to answer to the third research question: *What strategies specific to the Covid-19 pandemic are apparent in the data?* It was found that these Covid-19 related strategies include appeals to the hearer by references to the common experience and struggle of the pandemic as well as the speaker informing and reminding the hearer of Covid-19 mitigation measures.

The past few years have seen a rise in research into both social media influencers and as well as their apologies. Studying these apologies through speech act theory and looking at them as speech act sets gives insights into the apology strategies apparent in them, as well as seeing these texts as representatives of the genre of public apologies. The large following and highly visible status, as well as the ever-growing economic impact of influencers, gives an importance to the study of the language of their content. Joint with this topic of the language of influencer apologies is the very timely, multi-faceted, and worldwide topic of the Covid-19 pandemic whose effects and influences on different texts and text genres is an important phenomenon to study. Combining these two topics and studying them from the point of view of speech act theory provides a timely look at the text and apology genre, while also filling a gap in research and introducing the subject for future research.

As already touched on briefly in the Discussion, there are multiple possible directions for the study of specifically Covid-19 related influencer apologies or influencer apologies in general. By utilizing a larger dataset, possibly a corpus, the genre could be examined on a wider scale

and more sound quantitative research could be performed. The ephemeral nature of social media posts as research data is also another interesting topic for future research as well as a topic of consideration when it comes to research methodology and ethics. As social media and its features develop, it will be interesting to examine the change in research methods alongside it. Lastly, the Covid-19 pandemic will surely present plenty of opportunities for linguistic research, given its worldwide impact on language and texts of different types.

References

Abidin, Crystal. 2015. "Communicative ♡ Intimacies: Influencers and Perceived Interconnectedness." *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 8.

Abidin, Crystal. 2018. *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Ahteensuu, Marko. 2019. "Käytätkö somedataa tutkimuksessasi?" Vastuullinen tiede. Accessed 28 September, 2021. https://vastuullinentiede.fi/fi/tutkimustyo/kaytatko-somedataa-tutkimuksessasi.

Alexander, Julia. 2020. "Wannabe influencers are being trained to film a believable YouTube apology video." The Verge. Accessed 15 December, 2021. https://www.theverge.com/2020/5/13/21256087/james-charles-youtube-instant-influencer-apology-video-drama-controversy.

Austin, John Langshaw. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Vol. 88. London, UK: Oxford University Press.

Bainotti, Lucia, Alessandro Caliandro, and Alessandro Gandini. 2020. "From Archive Cultures to Ephemeral Content, and Back: Studying Instagram Stories with Digital Methods." *New Media & Society*.

Bataineh, R. F. and R.F. Bataineh. 2008. "A cross-cultural comparison of apologies by native speakers of American English and Jordanian Arabic." *Journal of Pragmatics* 40, 792–821.

Beaudin, Laura M. 2018. "I am sorry, we are sorry: A critical analysis of discursive strategies in contemporary public apologies." Master's Thesis. McMaster University, Canada.

Benoit, William L. 1982. "Richard M. Nixon's Rhetorical Strategies in His Public Statements on Watergate." *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 47: 192–211.

Benoit, William L. 2013. "Tiger Woods' Image Repair: Could He Hit One out of the Rough?," in *Repairing the Athlete's Image: Studies in Sports Image Restoration*, by Joseph Blaney, Lance Lippert, and Scott Smith. Lanham, Md: Lexington Books: 89–96.

Benoit, William. 1995. *Accounts, Excuses and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, and Elite Olshtain. 1984. "Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP)". *Applied Linguistics* 5 (3): 196–213.

Blum-Kulka, Shoshana. 1989. *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Campbell, Larrison and Pilar Melendez. 2021. "A SoulCycle Influencer Crowed About Getting the Vaccine and All Hell Broke Loose." Daily Beast. Accessed 5 February, 2022. https://www.thedailybeast.com/soul-cycle-influencer-stacey-griffith-posted-a-vaccine-ig-and-all-hell-broke-loose.

Charles, James. 2020. "I have to apologize for this--- - Instant Influencer." YouTube video. Accessed 15 December, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGL7ealeXpw&list=PLtlV6iOFdL-xf_pkAq_BMZ5PKSFzt4Rxd&index=3.

Cohen, Andrew and Elite Olshtain. 1981. "Developing a Measure of Sociocultural Competence: The Case of Apology." *Language Learning*, 31: 113–134.

Cohen, Andrew and Elite Olshtain. 1983. "Apology: A Speech-Act Set." In *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*, edited by Nessa Wolfson and Elliot Judd, 18–35. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Compton, Natalie B. 2020. "An Instagram Personality Suggested He Had Coronavirus on a Plane. The Viral Stunt Got Him Arrested." The Washington Post. Accessed 5 February, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2020/02/05/an-instagram-personality-said-he-had-coronavirus-plane-failed-viral-stunt-got-him-arrested/.

Dellatto, Marisa. 2020. "Influencer Uses Personal Connections to Get Coronavirus Test." New York Post. Accessed 5 February, 2022. https://nypost.com/2020/03/17/influencer-uses-personal-connections-to-get-coronavirus-test/.

Desaulniers, Stephen. 2020. "How Instagram Influencers Are Trying to Slow the Spread of Coronavirus." CNBC. Accessed 16 December, 2021. https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/10/coronavirus-instagram-influencers-try-to-slow-covid-19-spread.html.

Diop, Arimeta. 2020. "It's the End of the iPhone-Notes-App-Apology Era." Vanity Fair. Accessed 14 December, 2021. https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2020/06/notes-app-apology-instagram.

Djafarova, Elmira, and Chloe Rushworth. 2017. "Exploring the Credibility of Online Celebrities' Instagram Profiles in Influencing the Purchase Decisions of Young Female Users." *Computers in Human Behavior* 68: 1–7.

Elliott, Hannah. 2020. "When the Picture Isn't Pretty: How Influencers Are Adapting to Lockdown." Bloomberg News. Accessed 16 December, 2021. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-01/how-social-media-influencers-are-affected-by-coronavirus-shutdown.

Fallon, Nicole and Jacqueline Medina. 2021. "Get Connected: Top 5 Social Media Influencers in 9 Industries." CO by U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Accessed 3 January, 2022. https://www.uschamber.com/co/grow/marketing/top-social-media-influencers.

Fraser, Bruce. 1981. "On Apologizing" In *Conversational Routine,* edited by Florian Coulmas, 259-272. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter Mouton.

Geyser, Werner. 2021."The State of Influencer Marketing 2021: Benchmark Report," Influencer Marketing Hub. Accessed 17 November, 2021. https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report-2021/.

Giles, David. 2018. *Twenty-First Century Celebrity: Fame in Digital Culture.* Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Glantz, M. 2009. "The Floyd Landis Doping Scandal: Implications for Image Repair Discourse." *Public Relations Review* 30: 157–63.

Goffman, Erving. 1971. *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

Haasch, Palmer. 2021. "Two influencers face possible deportation from Bali after a viral fake-mask prank video." Insider. Accessed 20 December, 2021. https://www.insider.com/two-influencers-face-deportation-from-bali-fake-mask-viral-video-2021-4.

Handley, Lucy. 2020. "'We're binge-eating chips not quinoa': How influencers have pivoted in generation lockdown." CNBC. Accessed 16 December, 2021. https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/21/how-influencers-have-adapted-to-the-coronavirus-lockdown.html.

Hatch, Megan. 2020. "Social Media Stars Promote Comfort During COVID-19." VOA. Accessed 16 December, 2021. https://www.voanews.com/a/student-union_social-media-stars-promote-comfort-during-covid-19/6189178.html.

Haylock, Zoe. 2020. "The Best, Fakest, and Most Teary Influencer Apologies of 2020." *Vulture.* Accessed 14 March, 2021. www.vulture.com/2020/12/influencer-apologies-2020-shane-dawson-jenna-marbles.html.

Hearn, A. and Schoenhoff, S., 2016. "From celebrity to influencer: tracing the diffusion of celebrity value across the data stream." In *A Companion to Celebrity* P. David Marshall and S. Redmond, eds.. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 194–212.

Heikkilä, Melissa. 2020. "Finland taps social media influencers during coronavirus crisis." Politico. Accessed 16 December, 2021. https://www.politico.eu/article/finland-taps-influencers-as-critical-actors-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/.

Heilweil, Rebecca. 2020. "How influencers are being recruited to promote the Covid-19 vaccine." Vox Recode. Accessed 16 December, 2021. https://www.vox.com/recode/22174135/covid-19-vaccine-pfizer-celebrities-influencer-marketing.

Hines, Morgan. 2020. "'Adapted overnight': How travel influencers' worlds were changed by COVID-19 pandemic." USA Today Travel. Accessed 16 December, 2021. https://eu.usatoday.com/story/travel/2020/10/26/travel-influencers-flourishing-spite-covid-19-pandemic/5698421002/.

Holmes, Janet. 1989. "Sex Differences and Apologies: One Aspect of Communicative Competence." *Applied Linguistics* 10, Issue 2: 194–213. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/10.2.194

Holmes, Janet. 1990. "Apologies in New Zealand English." Language in Society 19, no. 2: 33–199.

Holtgraves, T. 1989. "The form and function of remedial moves: reported use, psychological reality and perceived effectiveness." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 8, no: 1: 1–16.

Huang, Yan. 2007. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Instagram. 2016. "Introducing Instagram Stories." Instagram (blog). Accessed 28 September, 2021. https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-instagram-stories.

Jankowski, Paul. 2021. "Not All Influencers Are Celebrities...Not All Celebrities Are Influencers, Part 2." Forbes. Accessed 28 September, 2021. https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauljankowski/2021/03/05/not-all-influencers-are-celebritiesnot-all-celebrities-are-influencers-part-2/.

Jennings, Rebecca. 2021. "The Never-Ending Cycle of Youtuber Apology Videos." Vox. Accessed 15 December, 2021. https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2021/4/6/22368819/james-charles-david-dobrik-apology-video-youtube-snl.

Jin, S. Venus, Aziz Muqaddam, and Ehri Ryu. 2019. "Instafamous and Social Media Influencer Marketing." *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 37, no. 5: 567–579.

Johnson, Amber. 2021. "Influencer Apologies All Sound the Same for a Reason." Her Campus. Accessed 14 December 14, 2021. https://www.hercampus.com/culture/influencer-apology-video-trend-youtube/.

Jones, Jeremy and Adrefiza. "Comparing apologies in Australian English and Bahasa Indonesia: Cultural and Gender Perspectives." *Journal of Politeness Research* 13: 119–89.

Kampf, Zohar. 2009. "Public (Non-) Apologies: The Discourse of Minimizing Responsibility." *Lexical Contrast in Discourse* 41, no. 11: 2257–2270.

Kan, Michael. 2021. "TikTok Extends Video Time Limit to 3 Minutes." PC Magazine. Accessed 5 February, 2022. https://uk.pcmag.com/social-media/134269/tiktok-extends-video-time-limit-to-3-minutes.

Karlsson, Gabriella. 2020. "The YouTube Apology: Analysing the image repair strategies and emotional labour of saying sorry online." Master's Thesis. Malmö University.

Kasachkoff, Tziporah. 1988. "Explaining and Justifying." *Informal Logic* 10 no.1: 21–30.

Kauffman, James. 2012."Hooray for Hollywood? The 2011 Golden Globes and Ricky Gervais' Image Repair Strategies." *Public Relations Review* 38, no. 1: 46–50.

Khamis, Susie, Lawrence Ang, and Raymond Welling. 2017. "Self-Branding, 'Micro-Celebrity' and the Rise of Social Media Influencers." *Celebrity Studies* 8, no. 2: 191–208.

Knowles, Hannah. 2020. "Cornell students petition to have freshman TikTok star expelled for flouting coronavirus rules." The Washington Post. Accessed 20 December, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/08/26/cornell-jessica-zhang-coronavirus-tiktok/.

Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. 2015. "Nine Ways of Looking at Apologies: The Necessity for Interdisciplinary Theory and Method in Discourse Analysis." In *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, edited by Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton and Deborah Schiffrin: 293-308. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Lamsijärvi, Elina. 2020. ""I Have Made a Severe and Continuous Lapse in My Judgement": Image Repair Strategies and Non-Apology Features in Apologies on YouTube." Master's Thesis. University of Oulu.

Lazare, Aaron. 2004. *On Apology*. Cary: Oxford University Press.

Loisa, Janina J. 2021. ""I'm Just Letting Everyone Know That I'm an Idiot": Apology Strategies in YouTubers' Apology Videos." Master's Thesis. University of Eastern Finland.

Lou, Chen, and Shupei Yuan. 2019. "Influencer Marketing: How Message Value and Credibility Affect Consumer Trust of Branded Content on Social Media." *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 19, no. 1: 58–73.

Makalintal, Bettina. 2019. "How YouTubers turned the apology video into a genre." Vice. Accessed 3 March, 2021. https://www.vice.com/en/article/ywykzb/how-youtubers-james-charles-jaclyn-hill-pewdiepie-turned-the-apology-video-into-a-genre.

Marwick, Alice E. 2015 "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy." *Public culture* 27, no. 1: 137–160.

Meier, A.J. 1992. "A Sociopragmatic Contrastive Study of Repair Work in Austrian German and American English." Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Vienna.

Meier, A.J. 1998. "Apologies: What Do We Know?" *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 8, no. 2: 215–231.

Merrett, Robyn. 2020. "Influencer Who Participated in Toilet Licking Challenge Says He Tested Positive for Coronavirus." People. Accessed 5 February, 2020. https://people.com/human-interest/influencer-who-participated-in-toilet-licking-challenge-says-he-tested-positive-for-coronavirus/.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. n.d. "influencer." Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Accessed November 16, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/influencer.

Miller, Jim. 1995. "Does Spoken Language Have Sentences?" *In Grammar and Meaning: Essays in Honour of Sir John Lyons*, edited by F. R. Palmer: 116–135. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511620638.007.

Mills, P. 2001. "The New Culture of Apology", *Dissent*, Fall. http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=913.

Murphy, James. 2015. "Revisiting the Apology as A Speech Act the Case of Parliamentary Apologies." *Journal of Language and Politics* 14 (2): 175–204.

Newton, Casey. 2018. "Twitter just doubled the character limit for tweets to 280." The Verge. Accessed 20 December, 2021. https://www.theverge.com/2017/9/26/16363912/twitter-character-limit-increase-280-test.

O'Connor, Florence and Zoe Haylock. 2021. "A Complete Timeline of the James Charles Allegations and Controversies." Vulture. Accessed 15 December, 2021. https://www.vulture.com/2021/05/james-charles-allegations-controversies-timeline.html.

Ogiermann, Eva. 2009. *On Apologising in Negative and Positive Politeness Cultures*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Company.

Owen, Marion. 1983. *Apologies and Remedial Interchanges: A Study of Language Use in Social Interaction.* Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc.

Page, Ruth. 2014. "Saying 'Sorry': Corporate Apologies Posted on Twitter" *Journal of Pragmatics* 62: 30–45.

Picheta, Rob. 2021. "As Young People Itch to Leave Lockdown, British Health Leaders Face a New Challenge: Influencers." CNN Travel. Accessed 5 February, 2022. https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/influencers-pandemic-travel-social-media-scli-gbr-intl-cmd/index.html.

Piehler, Rico, Michael Schade, Julia Sinnig, and Christoph Burmann. 2021. "Traditional or 'Instafamous' Celebrity? Role of Origin of Fame in Social Media Influencer Marketing." *Journal of Strategic Marketing*.

Rifenstine. 2021. "The Moronic Methodology of Apology Videos | What Youtuber's Should Edit OUT." YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fc336GqtVLY.

Sandlin, J.K. and M.L. Gracyalny. 2018. "Seeking Sincerity, Finding Forgiveness: YouTube Apologies as Image Repair." *Public Relations Review* 44, no. 3: 393–406.

Sandlin, J.K. and M.L. Gracyalny. 2020. "Fandom, Forgiveness and Future Support: YouTube Apologies as Crisis Communication." *Journal of Communication Management* 24, no. 1: 1–18.

Saturday Night Live. 2021. "Viral Apology Video – SNL." YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVo_6rGSiyI.

Saul, Heather. 2016. "Instafamous: Meet the Social Media Influencers Redefining Celebrity," *The Independent.* Accessed 16 November, 2021. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/instagram-model-natasha-oakley-iskra-lawrence-kayla-itsines-kendall-jenner-jordyn-woods-a6907551.html.

Schouten, Alexander, Loes Janssen, and Maegan Verspaget. 2020. "Celebrity vs. Influencer Endorsements in Advertising: The Role of Identification, Credibility, and Product-Endorser Fit." *International Journal of Advertising* 39, no. 2: 258–281.

Schulman, Alissa. 2018. "Studios Are Now Looking for Actors Who Are Insta-Famous." New York Post. Accessed 13 December, 2021. https://nypost.com/2018/05/27/studios-are-now-looking-for-actors-who-are-insta-famous/.

Searle, John R. 1969. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, John R. 1976. "The Classification of Illocutionary Acts." *Language in Society* 5(1): 1–14.

Skinner, Paige. 2019. "YouTubers Have Turned Terrible Apology Videos into a Genre. These Are the Worst." Los Angeles Magazine. Accessed 15 December, 2021. https://www.lamag.com/culturefiles/youtube-apology-videos/.

Smokey Glow. 2021. "Ranking Youtuber Apology Videos! *SPOILER ALERT: They're All Bad*" YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEestBs0Ttk.

Sung, Morgan. 2018. "The art of the YouTube apology video." Mashable. Accessed 5 February, 2022. https://mashable.com/article/youtube-apology-video-laura-lee-gabriel-zamora-jeffree-star.

Tanner, Jonathon. 2020. "Makeover Your Instagram Grid Layout." Social Media College. Accessed 5 February, 2022. https://www.socialmediacollege.com/blog/instagram-grid-layouts/.

Theye, Kirsten. 2008. "Shoot, I'm Sorry: An Examination of Narrative Functions and Effectiveness within Dick Cheney's Hunting Accident Apologia." *Southern Communication Journal* 73: 160–77.

Thompson, Dillon. 2020. "Influencers allegedly test positive for COVID-19 after 'irresponsible' house parties: 'Y'all caused an outbreak'." Yahoo! Life. Accessed 5 February, 2022. https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/influencers-allegedly-getting-sick-parties-154930094.html?guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAEAs-0OSFdfNn83-KOw3KsJcHAUzjjetH4u7gCheVnO2TaYbQZCsUay3eJJmFtPh03fHgzdIav4slgHDzjaGVUfjY5Kf-7AiMObZcScWLjBVgMuKWaS2xI7yza3R7qJeVcaHT6dWEMzzFpZHC63VYhkBoTzafH3__aL4zPXJo2qd&guccounter=2.

Trosborg, Anna. 1995. *Interlanguage Pragmatics: Requests, Complaints, and Apologies*. Vol. 7. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc.

UNESCO. 2020. "UNESCO experts led young media influencers to promote COVID-19 awareness campaign for community safety and fighting Disinfodemic." UNESCO. Accessed 5 February, 2022. https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-experts-led-young-media-influencers-promote-covid-19-awareness-campaign-community-safety.

Weber, Lindsey. 2019. "How We Apologize Now." The New York Times. Accessed 12 April, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/12/style/notes-app-celebrity-statements.html.

Williams, Mae. 2021. "All the influencers who holidayed and partied despite COVID-19 restrictions." Dazed. Accessed 13 December, 2021. https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/51568/1/all-the-influencers-who-holidayed-and-partied-despite-covid-19-restrictions.

Wilson, Leigh M. 2021. "Influencers-Turned-Singers Will Continue Forever." The Harvard Crimson. Accessed 13 December, 2021. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2021/3/30/addison-rae-influencer-singer-think-piece/.

Appendix

Finnish summary

Tämä pro gradu- tutkielma keskittyy tutkimaan sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien julkaisemia anteeksipyyntöjä, jotka liittyvät aiheeltaan Covid-19-pandemiaan. Tutkimusmateriaali koostuu kahdestatoista anteeksipyyntöjulkaisusta, jotka on koottu neljältä eri sosiaalisen median alustalta. Tutkimusmenetelmä perustuu puheaktiteoriaan ja anteeksipyyntöjä tarkastellaan noudattaen Cohenin ja Olshtainin (1981, 1983) sekä Blum-Kulkan ja Olshtainin (1984) kehittämää anteeksipyyntöjen puheaktin typologiaa. Analyysin tavoite on vastata seuraavaan kolmeen tutkimuskysymykseen:

1. Minkälaisia anteeksipyyntöstrategioita sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien anteeksipyyntöjulkaisuissa esiintyy?

2. Mitkä strategiat ovat muita yleisempiä?

3. Mitä erityisesti Covid-19- pandemiaan liittyviä strategioita esiintyy?

Vaikuttajat ovat laaja kenttä sosiaalisen median sisällöntuottajia, jotka ovat niin sanotuista perinteisistä julkisuuden henkilöistä poiketen saavuttaneet suosionsa internetissä, pääasiassa oman luonteensa ja persoonallisuutensa avulla. Vaikuttajat ovat ammattiryhmänä tärkeä mainostajille ja heidän yleisönsä ja vaikutusvaltansa ovat kasvaneet eksponentiaalisesti viimeisen kymmenen vuoden aikana. Vaikuttajien nousu näkyviksi julkisuuden henkilöiksi tarkoittaa sitä, että heidän anteeksipyyntöä vaativat tekonsa ovat näkyviä sekä heidän seuraajilleen että myös suurelle yleisölle. Vaikuttajien anteeksipyynnöt ovatkin 2010-luvulla nousseet julkisten anteeksipyyntöjen lajiksi muiden yleisten lajien, kuten politiikkaan, urheiluun ja viihdemaailmaan liittyvien anteeksipyyntöjen rinnalle.

Vaikuttajien anteeksipyyntöjen aiheet ovat vaihdelleet loukkaavasta kielenkäytöstä ja teoista henkilösuhteisiin ja epäonnistuneeseen brändiyhteistyöhön. Covid-19-pandemian laajennuttua maailmanlaajuiseksi vuoden 2020 alussa pandemia ja siihen liittyvät aiheet ovat muotoutuneet uudeksi vaikuttajien anteeksipyyntöjen lajiksi. Vaikuttajat ovat pyytäneet anteeksi rikottuaan sulkurajoituksia ja matkustussuosituksia, osallistuttuaan yleisötapahtumiin ja suuriin kokoontumisiin ja hyväksikäytettyään statustaan julkisuuden henkilöinä saadakseen henkilösuojaimia ja terveyspalveluita, kuten testejä ja rokotteita, joista on muuten ollut pulaa.

Tutkielma käsitteleekin näitä kahta ajankohtaista aihetta, sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien anteeksipyyntöjä ja Covid-19 pandemiaa, kielitieteen perspektiivistä.

Sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien anteeksipyyntöjä on tutkittu viime vuosina esimerkiksi kriisinhallinnan ja imagonkorjaustyön näkökulmasta, mutta myös niiden tutkimusta puheaktiteorian perspektiivistä on esiintynyt muutamissa tuoreissa opinnäytetöissä. Tämä osoittaa kiinnostuksen aiheeseen, sekä myös aiheen ajankohtaisuuden. Liittämällä tutkimukseen fokuksen Covid-19 pandemiaan, ajankohtaisuus tulee yhä enemmän esille.

Puheaktiteoria juontaa juurensa Austinin (1962) töihin, ja sitä on myöhemmin kehittänyt Searle (1976.) Teorian pääajatus on, että kielellinen lausuma on myös akti sen kontekstissa ja kulttuuristen vaikutusten viitekehyksessä. Toisin sanoen sanominen on tekemistä ja sanat ovat tekoja. Keskeistä teoriassa on kolmijako lokutiivisiin, illokutiivisiin ja perlokutiivisiin akteihin, jotka suoritetaan samanaikaisesti lausumassa. Lokutiivinen akti koostuu itse sanoista, illokutiivinen akti toiminnasta, joita sanojen toivotaan aiheuttavan ja perlokutiivinen akti lausuman seuraamuksista olivat ne tahallisia tai eivät. Searle jaotteli illokutiiviset aktit kategorioihin, ja tutkielman aihe, anteeksipyynnöt, sijoittuvat siinä "ekspressiivien" kategoriaan. Nämä puheaktit sisältävät puhujan ilmaisun siitä, mitä tunteita tilanne heissä herättää. Anteeksipyyntöjen lisäksi kategoriaan kuuluvat myös onnittelemisen, kiittämisen ja valittamisen puheaktit. Anteeksipyynnöt erottaa näistä muista niiden korjaava pyrkimys; niiden avulla puhuja pyrkii vähentämään tilanteen vakavuutta vähentäen näin myös omaa vastuutaan tapahtuneesta.

Tutkiessaan toisen kielen puhujien sosiokulttuurista kompetenssia ja kulttuurista asianmukaisuutta Cohen ja Olshtain (1981) tutkivat anteeksipyyntöjä puheakteina. Haluttiin tutkia käyttävätkö muuta kuin englantia äidinkielenään puhuvat äidinkielen puhujiin verrattuna anteeksipyyntöstrategioita eri tavoin: käyttävätkö he eri strategioita, välttävätkö he tiettyjen strategioiden käyttöä tai kenties väärinkäyttävätkö he niitä joillain tavoin? Seuraavassa tutkimuksessaan vuonna 1983 Cohen ja Olshtain keskittyivät laatimaan ja kuvailemaan joka puheaktille niille ominaista puheaktijoukkoa (*speech act set*.) Tämä koostuu semanttisista tekijöistä, jotka yhdessä tai erikseen ilmaisevat tiettyä puheaktia, kuten anteeksipyyntöä. Tämä anteeksipyyntöstrategioiden typologia luo pohjan tutkielman tutkimusmetodille ja kategorisoinnille. Viiden Cohenin ja Olshtainin peruskategorian lisäksi luokitteluun lisättiin kaksi lisäkategoriaa, jotka liittyvät anteeksipyyntöjen kontekstiin, eli sosiaalisen median vaikuttajiin ja Covid-19 pandemiaan. Tämä kontekstikohtainen lisäys on

perusteltua, sillä vastaavaa esiintyy myös aiemmissa tutkimuksissa, joissa on pyritty paremmin tarkastelemaan anteeksipyyntöjä niiden tietyissä konteksteissa. Esimerkkeinä Murphy (2015) ja Beaudin (2018.)

Tutkielmassa käytetään seuraavaa anteeksipyyntöstrategioiden typologiaa:

1. Eksplisiittisen illokutiivisen aktin ilmaisijan (EIAI) käyttö

2. Selitys tai kuvaus

    a. Puolustus: puhuja myöntää syyllisyyden, pyrkii lieventämään

    b. Oikeutus: puhuja ei myönnä syyllisyyttä

3. Vastuun myöntäminen

    a. Cohenin ja Olshtainin (1983) alakategoriat

        i. Syyllisyyden myöntäminen

        ii. Omien puutteiden myöntäminen

        iii. Anteeksipyynnön aiheellisuuden myöntäminen kuulijalle

        iv. Aikeettomuuden ilmaiseminen

    b. Vaikuttajiin liittyvät ilmaisut

4. Lupaus hyvittämisestä

5. Lupaus kehityksestä

6. Covid-19 pandemiaan liittyvät strategiat

Ensimmäinen kategoria eksplisiittisen illokutiivisen aktin ilmaisijan käyttö (*use of an explicit illocutionary fortea indication device*) sisältää anteeksipyynnön illokutiivisen aktin ilmaisevien suorien performatiivisten verbien käytön. Näiksi laskettiin verbit "*(be) sorry*", "*excuse*", "*apologize*", "*forgive*", "*regret*" ja "*pardon.*" Toiseen kategoriaan kuuluvat puolustuksen (*excuse*) ja oikeutuksen (*justification*) alakategoriat, joiden ero on siinä, myöntääkö puhuja syyllisyytensä vai ei. Vastuun myöntämisen pääkategoriaan (*an acknowledgement of responsibility*) kuuluvat Cohenin ja Olshtainin typologian alakategoriat sekä erillinen lisätty alakategoria: sosiaalisen median vaikuttajiin liittyvät ilmaisut. Näitä ovat

esimerkiksi ilmaisut, joissa puhuja viittaa näkyvyytensä ja suuren yleisönsä mukanaan tuomaan vastuuseen. Lupaus hyvittämisestä (*offer of repair*) tarkoittaa ilmaisuja, joissa puhuja tarjoutuu hyvittämään, korjaamaan tai korvaamaan aiheuttamaansa vahinkoa. Lupauksessa kehityksestä (*promise of forbearance*) puhuja taas lupaa parantaa käytöstään ja ilmaisee, että on oppinut virheestään. Covid-19 pandemiaan liittyvien strategioiden kategoriaan kuuluvat ilmaukset, joissa puhuja vetoaa kuulijaan viittaamalla jaettuun pandemiakokemukseen, sekä ilmaukset, joissa puhujat muistuttavat kuulijoita terveysturvallisuudesta.

Typologian avulla suoritettu tutkimus tuotti seuraavat tulokset, jotka on eritelty niitä vastaavien tutkimuskysymysten mukaan. Ensinnäkin tutkimuksessa selvisi, että sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien anteeksipyyntöjulkaisuissa esiintyy moninaisia anteeksipyyntöstrategioita. Eri strategioita esiintyy aineistossa yhteensä 120 esiintymiskertaa. Jokaisessa julkaisussa käytettiin vähintään kahta eri strategiaa, ja neljässä niissä käytettiin jopa viittä eri pääkategoriaa. Aineistossa ei esiintynyt lupaus hyvittämisestä -kategoriaa, mikä voi selittyä sillä, että kategoria on hyvin tilannekohtainen ja korvautuu usein lupaus kehityksestä -strategian käytöllä. Tämä näkyi tutkimusaineistossa. Korvautuminen johtui todennäköisesti siitä, että anteeksipyynnöt eivät liittyneet tilanteisiin, joihin liittyi suoraa materiaalista vahinkoa, jota puhuja voisi helposti tarjoutua korvaamaan. Voisikin päätellä, että ainakin tämän materiaalin kohdalla tapojen parantaminen ja oppimisen ja muutoksen korostaminen on yleisempää kuin materiaalisten korjausten ja hyvitysten lupaaminen. Kun tarkastellaan viittä strategiaa, joita esiintyi aineistossa (lupaus hyvittämisestä -kategoria pois lukien) nähdään, että keskiarvoisesti joka julkaisu sisältää 3,75 eri strategian käyttöä. Tekstien strategioiden monipuolisuus noudattelee aiempia tutkimustuloksia, joiden mukaan julkisissa anteeksipyynnöissä esiintyy laajempaa strategioiden moninaisuutta kuin henkilökohtaisissa/kasvokkaisissa anteeksipyynnöissä.

Tutkimuksessa analysoitiin myös, kuinka usein strategioita julkaisuissa käytettiin, laskemalla tekstien virkkeiden lukumäärän ja strategioiden käyttökertojen suhde. Tämän mukaan aineistossa käytettiin keskimäärin 1,07 strategiaa per virke. Käyttö vaihteli 0,33 strategiasta/virke kahteen strategiaan/virke. Beaudin'n (2018) aiempi tutkimus esittää, että pitkissä anteeksipyyntöteksteissä suhdeluku on keskimäärin pienempi kuin lyhyissä. Vaikka joidenkin satunnaisten löydösten valossa voisi päätellä tämän näkyvän tutkimusmateriaalissa, ei analyysissä kuitenkaan löytynyt laajaa perustetta tälle löydökselle. Tätä hankaloitti myös materiaalin suppeus: se sisältää vain yhden pitkän yli tuhatsanaisen tekstin, joten vaikka

materiaalin yhden pitkän tekstin kohdalla kategorioiden käyttösuhde oli pienempi kuin lyhyissä teksteissä, ei sen silti voida nähdä osoittavan yleistettävissä olevaa tulosta.

Toiseen tutkimuskysymykseen yleisimmästä anteeksipyyntöstrategiasta vastaa löydös, jonka mukaan vastuun myöntämisen strategia alakategorioineen oli tutkimusmateriaalissa eniten käytetty strategia. Se esiintyi 47 kertaa vastaten 40 % kaikista 120 käyttökerrasta. Sitä käytettiin sekä eniten että myös laajimmin, sillä se oli ainoa strategia, jota esiintyi jokaisessa kahdestatoista julkaisussa. Tulos poikkeaa aiempien tutkimusten tuloksista, sillä aiemmin on laajasti todettu EIAI:n käytön olevan yleisin strategia. Tässä tutkimuksessa tämä strategia oli vasta toiseksi yleisin, sillä sitä esiintyi 20 kertaa ja kymmenessä julkaisussa. Tämän löydöksen syy voi olla siinä, miten aineisto poikkeaa aihealueeltaan ja tyyliltään aiempien tutkimusten aineistoista, jotka ovat suurilta osin keskittyneet henkilökohtaisiin/kasvokkaisiin anteeksipyyntöihin. Tulokset eri performatiivisten anteeksipyyntöverbien käytöstä aineistossa sijoittuvat henkilökohtaisten/kasvokkaisten anteeksipyyntöjen ja julkisten, mutta virallisten poliittisten anteeksipyyntöjen välimaastoon.

Vastuun myöntämisen strategian yleisyydelle pohdittiin mahdollisia syitä ja selityksiä. Myöntäessään omia puutteitaan puhujat voivat pyrkiä ylläpitämään autenttista ja samaistuttavaa vaikutelmaa, jonka he kohdistavat yleisölleen. Autenttisuus ja samaistuttavuus ovat merkittäviä vaikuttajien suosion tekijöitä. Aikeettomuuden ilmaisemisen strategian avulla loukkaavaa tekoa voidaan pyrkiä kuvailemaan tahattomana ja tietämättömyydestä johtuvana virheenä, joka ei kuvasta puhujan luonteenlaatua. Suoran syyllisyyden myöntämisen strategian yleisyyttä voi selittää anteeksipyyntöjen aihe, joka liittyy yleiseen turvallisuuteen ja koko yhteiskuntaa koskevaan pandemiaan. Aiemmissa tutkimuksissa on todettu, että suora syyllisyyden myöntäminen on sitä yleisempää, mitä vakavampi aihe tai rike on kyseessä (esimerkkinä Murphyn (2015) tutkimuksen löytämä ero henkilöiden välisten loukkauksen ja talousrikosten välillä.) Covid-19-pandemiaan liittyvät rikkeet koetaan vakaviksi ja suoran syyllisyyden myöntämisen vaativiksi.

Etsittäessä vastausta kolmanteen tutkimuskysymykseen tarkasteltiin Covid-19 pandemiaan tehtyjä viittauksia ja niihin liittyviä strategioita. Tätä strategiaa käytettiin 20 kertaa, ja sitä esiintyi kahdeksassa kahdestatoista julkaisusta. Strategian ilmaisut voidaan jakaa kahteen eri alakategoriaan. Ensimmäiseen kuuluvat ilmaisut, joissa puhuja vetoaa kuulijaan viittaamalla yhteiseen pandemiakokemukseen ja epätavalliseen tilanteeseen. Viittaamalla kuulijalle tuttuihin vaikeuksiin ja haasteisiin puhuja voi pyrkiä saamaan kuulijan sympatiat puolelleen ja

selittämään samalla tekonsa asiayhteyttä. Toiseen alakategoriaan kuuluvat ilmaisut, joissa puhuja muistuttaa kuulijaa terveysturvallisuudesta ja viruksen leviämisen ehkäisykeinoista, kuten sosiaalisista etäisyyksistä ja rokotteista. Käyttäessään tätä strategiaa puhujat vaikuttavat tunnistavan vastuunsa vaikuttajana, jolla on suuri yleisö, ja kehottavat näin yleisöään toimimaan viruksen leviämisen ehkäisemiseksi.

Tutkimustulokset ja varsinkin aiemmista tutkimuksista poikkeavat löydökset ovat kiinnostavia ja kertovat paljon uudesta ja ajankohtaisesta ilmiöstä. On kuitenkin huomattava, että tutkimusmateriaali on rajallinen koostuen vain kahdestatoista tekstistä, joiden yhteenlaskettu sanamäärä on 3132 sanaa. Tulevissa tutkimuksissa voidaan käyttää laajempaa tutkimusaineistoa, tai korpusta, johon olisi kerätty vaikuttajien anteeksipyyntötekstejä laajalla otannalla. Näin varsinkin kvantitatiivinen tutkimus olisi entistä mahdollisempaa. Tulevissa tutkimuksissa voisi myös keskittyä tarkemmin tiettyyn sosiaalisen median alustaan tai julkaisulajiin, jolloin lähtökohdat olisivat paremmat tasapainoiselle vertailevalle tutkimukselle. Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin neljästä eri sosiaalisesta mediasta, mistä johtuen niiden pituudet olivat hyvin vaihtelevia, vaihdellen 1144 sanasta vain 31 sanan tekstiin. Tutkimusmateriaalin monimuotoisuuden takia ei ollut asianmukaista keskittyä liikaa vertailevaan analyysiin. Laaja alustojenvälinen tutkimusmetodi oli silti hyödyllinen, sillä se mahdollisti alustavan ja esittelevän näkökulman uuteen ja ajankohtaiseen aiheeseen tutkimalla tekstejä monista eri lähteistä ja julkaisumuodoissa.

Tutkielma tarjoaa esittelevän katsauksen ajankohtaiseen aiheeseen. Sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien vaikutuksen kasvaessa heidän anteeksipyyntöjensä tutkimus kielitieteen ja puheaktiteorian näkökulmasta on tulevaisuudessakin ajankohtainen ja kiinnostava aihe. Samaa voi sanoa myös Covid-19 pandemiasta, jonka vaikutus kieleen sen kaikissa eri muodoissa on aihe, josta varmasti riittää tutkimista vuosiksi eteenpäin.