

Verena Utikal

I am sorry - Honest and fake apologies

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“Entschuldigung” (*German*) or they stick to the English word “sorry” (*English*) or both. The German expression is more likely to be used in an honest apology. Messages that declare *intention* or blame a *wrong click* can only be found within the pool of dishonest apologies. There are no gender effects. These findings are confirmed by the regression in Table 4 (column 1).

	(1) honest apology	(2) forgive	(3) forgive
honest failure		0.165*** (0.0531)	0.163** (0.0659)
smiley	-0.178* (0.0925)		0.107 (0.133)
German	0.113** (0.0561)		0.00744 (0.102)
acceptance request	-0.0992 (0.0690)		0.0953 (0.0956)
guess	0.0258 (0.0331)		0.0371 (0.224)
solo wrong	0.215 (0.230)		0.0511 (0.338)
foreigner	-0.112 (0.0986)		-0.0979 (0.114)
wrong click			-0.203* (0.108)
intention			-0.117 (0.220)
male	0.0251 (0.0736)	-0.115** (0.0556)	-0.116** (0.0547)
solo solved		-0.0811 (0.0955)	-0.0860 (0.0950)
Observations	146	146	146
pseudo R-squared	0.06	0.03	0.06

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 4: Probit regressions, reporting marginal effects, with robust standard errors, standard errors in parentheses clustered on session, apologies only

Forgiveness after honest and fake apologies

Honest and fake apologies follow different patterns with respect to frequencies and contents. The logical follow-up question is whether player B’s forgiveness decisions is affected by these signals. Are players able to identify honest and fake apologies? Do they forgive more often after honest apologies? Table 3 (columns 2-3) present evidence that players can identify whether an apology is honest or fake. Honest apologies are forgiven significantly more often than fake ones even when controlling for specific contents of apologies.

4. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the differences between honest and fake apologies. First, honest and fake apologies come along with different costs. There are costs for the statement of an apology itself and additional costs if the apology is fake. The latter can be explained by lying aversion. An apology after an intentional failure can be seen as a lie. If people are lying averse, lying (and therefore apologizing) are costly. If the cost exceeds the expected gain obtained by forgiveness, lying-averse people will abstain from apologizing. Lying costs can also explain why there is different content in fake and honest apologies. Certain expressions (as the use of the English language) seem to be perceived as a smaller lie than the use of other expressions (as the use of the German language). A reason why also honest apologies are costly is guilt aversion. Some people just do not like to admit that they were wrong.

To summarize: An apology is no cheap talk but a signal. Although receivers of apologies have no information about the intention behind a failure, they can distinguish between fake and honest apologies. Following, forgiveness after an honest apology is more likely than after a fake apology.

5. Instructions (Player A)

Welcome to today's experiment. Please read the following instructions carefully. If you have any questions, please raise your hand. For your participation today you will receive 2 euros. Additionally you can earn money by your decisions and the decisions of others. Nobody will learn your identity. Neither will you learn the identity of the other participants.

During the experiment we do not use euros but points. The points you receive during the experiment will be exchanged into euros, whereas 100 points = 1 euro.

EXPERIMENT

In this experiment there are participants A and participants B. For the whole experiment you are participant A. You will be interacting with a randomly determined participant B.

1a) Solo Question

Every participant receives a multiple choice question with 4 possible questions. Only one answer is correct. If you answer this Solo Question correctly you will receive 10 points. If your answer is wrong, you will receive no points.

1b) Team Question

Participant A receives the same question also as a Team Question. If he answers the question correctly, both participants A and B receive 100 points. If his answer is wrong, participant A receives 140 points and participant B receives 50 points.

2) Solution

Participants A and B learn whether themselves answered the solo Solo Question correctly. They also learn whether participant A answered the Team Question correctly. However, they do not learn which answer was given.

3) Message

In case participant A answered the Team Question wrongly, participant A can send a message to participant B.

4) Forgiving

Participant B receives the message and can decide whether to forgive participant A. If he forgives, points do not change. If he does not forgive, participant B loses 30 points

5) End

Participant A and B learn their points they received in this round and a new round begins. There are 10 rounds in total. In every round the participants interact with a participant they have not interacted with before.

6. Literature

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THURGAU INSTITUTE
OF ECONOMICS
at the University of Konstanz

Hauptstr. 90
CH-8280 Kreuzlingen 2

Telefon: +41 (0)71 677 05 10
Telefax: +41 (0)71 677 05 11

info@twi-kreuzlingen.ch
www.twi-kreuzlingen.ch