

## *Tanulmány*

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### **Apologizing Strategies in Hungarian\***

#### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to investigate the realization of apologizing strategies in Hungarian, with the help of an experimental method called MDCT (Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test). More specifically, the paper attempts to analyse the influence of two sociopragmatic factors – namely social power and gravity of the offense – on the apologizing strategies of Hungarian native speakers. The results show that social power as a socio-pragmatic factor plays an important role in the realization of Hungarian apologizing strategies, while gravity of the offense is not a determinant factor.

*Keywords:* speech act, apologizing, Hungarian

#### **1 Introduction**

In the relevant literature, the term apologizing is generally understood as a “social act” that typically “conveys affective meaning” (Holmes 1990: 155), for example it can express regret about what has happened to the hearer (the offended party) and it can also describe the effect the situation has had on him/her, as illustrated in the example below:

- (1) I am sorry. I was careless and caused your shirt to be stained. Please let me clean it for you  
(example from Thijittang 2010: 83)

Apologizing plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining relationships (Tavuchis 1991). Therefore, investigating the realization of apologizing strategies is of concern in speech act studies both intra- and interlingually, and also in the teaching or developing of pragmatic and communicative competence.

What we know about apologizing is largely based upon empirical studies. The first serious discussions and analyses emerged during the early 1980s. The most notable example of these empirical studies is the so called CCSARP project (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project 1989). In this project, an international research group investigated the realization of apologizing strategies in American English, Australian English, Canadian French, German and Hebrew. In the same period – outside the CCSARP project – many other studies were carried out on apologizing strategies, for example in Danish (Trosborg 1987), in New Zealand English (Holmes, 1990), in Japanese (Coulmas 1981) and in British English (Owen 1983). In recent years, there has also been an increasing amount of literature written on this topic,

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among others Wagner and Roebuck (2010), Flores Salgado (2011) and Filimonova (2016) conducted research on the realization strategies of apologizing, mainly from a cross-cultural perspective. Turning to Hungarian, the following studies were carried out concerning the realization of Hungarian apologizing strategies: Szili (2003) and Suszczyńska (1999, 2003) – using an open-ended discourse-completion test – dealt with the apologizing strategies of the whole Hungarian population, while Mászlainé Nagy (2007) attempted to investigate the apologizing strategies of children. Apologizing strategies in Hungarian as a foreign language were also investigated in a Japanese-Hungarian intercultural study (Németh 2015).

This detailed but not exhaustive list of previous studies indicates that apologizing is one of the main foci in speech act research because it is one of the basic functions of language (Ziesing 2000). As Ogiermann (2009: 45) also claims, this basic, “vital function of restoring and maintaining harmony could account for such popularity”.

As Ziesing (2000: 70) points out, the knowledge of “how and when to apologize in a cross-cultural context can, indeed, help bring peace to an ever shrinking world, reduce culture shock, and help us be happier (...)”, so it is not surprising that most of the above mentioned studies are interlingual or cross-cultural in nature and they are mostly restricted to the comparison of apologizing strategies between two languages. However, far too little attention has been paid to the intralingual analysis of apologizing, albeit it would be crucially important to place emphasis on the norms and rules of using speech acts inside one particular speech community as well.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate the speech act of apologizing in one particular language only, and that is Hungarian. More specifically, the paper attempts to examine Hungarian apologizing strategies with the help of an MDCT (Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test). The objective of the paper is to develop an understanding of the influence of sociopragmatic factors on Hungarian apologizing strategies. The investigated sociopragmatic factors are i) social power and ii) gravity of the offense.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 Theoretical background

While a variety of definitions of the term apologizing has been suggested, this paper will use the definition proposed by Blum-Kulka and House (1989), who see apologizing as an expressive, post-event speech act through which the speaker (the offender) tries to restore the ruined social harmony between him/herself and the hearer. The concept of face – developed by Brown and Levinson (1978) – plays an important role both in the realization and in the interpretation of apologizing, because – in terms of face – it is considered to be a two-direc-

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<sup>1</sup> Besides social power and gravity of the offense, Szili (2003) also studies the factor of social distance. To examine the relationship between these three factors or to analyse which factor has a bigger influence on the realization of apologizing strategies (for example in a regression model), it would be useful to investigate social distance as well. However, this current study does not aspire to scrutinize social distance as a determinant factor. This approach was chosen because this study is not interested in the mutual relationship between social power, social distance and gravity of the offense, it only aims to find out whether social power and gravity of the offense – as individual factors – have an influence on the Hungarian apologizing norms or not. Moreover, defining or measuring social distance is very challenging, as Koczogh claims (2012: 49) social distance “forms a continuum” and it “involves a variety of factors” (such as the frequency of interaction and the length of the relationship), *i.e.* it is problematic to consider it as an independent factor. This complexity makes the investigation of social distance very complicated, especially in a written experimental method such as the applied MDCT (it would be necessary to define and describe all the layers and aspects of it, in each and every situation of the experiment).

tional speech act; it is face-threatening for the speaker (who has to admit his/her mistake) while face-saving for the hearer (Szili 2003). In the case of example (1) this means that the speaker's confession of his/her fault reduces the value of his/her own face. Nevertheless, at the same time it compensates the hearer for the loss of his/her face (he/she had to experience some inconvenience or discomfort).

Each of the empirical studies concerning speech acts usually provides a framework or classification model that determines the main strategies and patterns that are commonly used in the realization of the investigated speech act. The present study uses one of the most well-known classification model adapted from Olshtain and Cohen (1983: 22-23), that was also utilized in the CCSARP project (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 289).

The model divides apologizing strategies into five groups, these are the following (see Table 1):

<b>(1) Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs)</b>
a. An expression of regret
b. An offer of apology
c. A request for forgiveness
<b>(2) Taking on Responsibility [RESP]</b>
<b>(3) Explanation or Account [EXPL]</b>
<b>(4) Offer of Repair [REPR]</b>
<b>(5) Promise of Forbearance [FORB]</b>

Table 1: The Olshtain – Cohen classification model (1983)

The main strategies represented in the model and those relevant for the purposes of the current research are briefly described in the following sections. The relevant Hungarian and English examples are taken from Szili (2003) and Olshtain and Cohen (1983), respectively.

First of all, IFIDs are the most conventionalized and routinized apologizing strategies in Hungarian. They express the intention of apologizing explicitly and unambiguously. They normally include a performative verb that signals the act of apologizing (such as *apologize*, *excuse*, *sorry*) and they have an immediate illocutionary force. Hence, they can express the speech act of apologizing regardless of the nature of the given situation (Szili 2003). Olshtain and Cohen (1983) define three subcategories of IFIDs: expression of regret (*Sajnálom / I'm sorry*), offer of apology (*Bocsáss(on) meg! / I apologize*) and request for forgiveness (*Elnézést kérek / Excuse me, Bocsánatot kérek / Forgive me*).

Apart from IFIDs there are situation-dependent strategies as well (Olshtain and Cohen 1983, Szili 2003). These situation-dependent strategies are presented in Table 2.

<b>Taking on Responsibility</b>	
a. Self-blame	<i>Az én hibám / It is my fault.</i> <i>Tévedtem / My mistake.</i>
b. Expression of self-deficiency or self-dispraise	<i>Nem láttalak / I didn't see you.</i> <i>Elfelejtettem / I forgot.</i> <i>Olyan hülye vagyok / I'm such a dimwit!</i>
c. Justifying the hearer	<i>Minden okod megvan rá, hogy haragudj rám. /</i> <i>You're right to be angry.</i>
d. Lack of intent [INT]	<i>Nem szándékosan tettem. / I didn't mean it.</i>
e. Expression of embarrassment or shame [EMB]	<i>Szégyeltem magam. / I am ashamed.</i>

	<i>Szörnyen érzem magam (miatta). / I feel awful about it.</i>
<b>Explanation or Account [EXPL]</b>	<i>Borzalmas volt a közlekedés. / The traffic was terrible.</i>
<b>Offer of Repair [REPR]</b>	<i>Megtérítem a károdát / I'll pay for the damage.</i>
<b>Promise of Forbearance [FORB]</b>	<i>Nem fog még egyszer előfordulni. / It won't happen again.</i>

Table 2: Situation-dependent apologizing strategies with examples from the Olshtain – Cohen classification model (1983) and from Suszczyńska (1999)

The most noteworthy situation-dependent strategy is taking on responsibility. The Olshtain – Cohen model (1983) defines 4 subtypes of this category, namely a. self-blame strategies, b. expression of self-deficiency, c. justification strategies and d. lack of intent strategies (see Table 2). However, in this study I adopt Suszczyńska's (1999) perspective, who distinguishes between implicit (RESPI) and explicit (RESPE) taking on responsibility strategies (see Table 3). In the case of RESPE strategies, the speaker candidly admits that (s)he committed a mistake or offended the hearer with his/her previous behaviour. Common examples of RESPE are *It is my fault / Az én hibám, I did it / Én tettem, My mistake / Tévedtem* etc.

RESPI strategies – also known as self-strategies – are originally not part of the Olshtain-Cohen classification. These strategies always contain self-depreciation with reference to the incompleteness of the individual and usually admit the insufficiency and the imperfection of the speaker (apologizer). RESPI strategies always humiliate the apologizer since (s)he has to acknowledge his/her imperfection to the hearer. Nonetheless, when using a RESPI, compared to other situation-dependent strategies, the possibility of losing the speaker's face is limited. This is due to the nature of this strategy, since using it means that the apologizer typically refers to the most accepted human weaknesses. As a consequence of this, RESPI is a reasonably popular strategy among Hungarian native speakers (Suszczyńska 1999). Well-known examples of RESPI are *I forgot it / Elfelejtettem, It got out of my mind / Kiment a fejemből, I am clumsy / Ügyetlen vagyok, I am stupid / Hülye vagyok, I was careless / Figyelmetlen voltam.*

As for the expression of shame or embarrassment (EMB; such as *Szégyeltem magam / I am ashamed*), it is classified as an IFID by Szili (2003) but others, such as Suszczyńska (1999: 1056) and Jeffries (2007: 52) categorize EMB as a subtype of RESP. This strategy is a rather unique characteristic of the Hungarian apologizing norms. It occurs in everyday language quite sporadically even in Hungarian because it involves the most sentiment-revealing and the most face-threatening forms of IFIDs. Therefore, it can be claimed that EMB – owing to its overtly face-threatening characteristics – is preferred only when the participants of the given situation have a close relationship with each other. EMB is typically used if the severity of the offense is huge and it is the speaker's firm intention to pray for forgiveness (Szili 2003).

The last subtype of the taking on responsibility group contains strategies that express lack of intent (INT). INT emphasizes the non-intentional character of an offense but it does not try to put the blame on others. When using INT the speaker implicitly acknowledges his/her involvement in the offense, still it is not considered particularly face-threatening (Ogiermann 2006: 12-13). As for Hungarian apologizing, Szili (2003) found that combined with an IFID INT can be rather frequent in a particular type of situation (when there is a relatively small social distance between the interlocutors (e.g. in the case of colleagues) but the gravity of the offense is big).

The second situation-dependent apologizing strategy is the explanation or giving an account strategy (EXPL). We categorize any apologizing strategy as an EXPL if the speaker (the offender) refers to or blames a speaker-independent, extenuating circumstance for the offense and with this, (s)he gives a (seemingly) objective reason for his/her offense or breaking the social norms. It is claimed that internationally EXPL is the least frequently used strategy (Olshtain and Cohen 1983). External mitigating circumstances or any objective reasons for the violation can be regarded as an EXPL apologizing strategy e.g. *Borzalmas volt a közlekedés. / The traffic was terrible.* Hungarians characteristically do not tend to admit their mistakes explicitly and generally they are not willing to accept responsibility for their offenses in an unequivocal manner, rather they prefer applying the EXPL strategy in a face-threatening situation (Szili 2003: 306). Inasmuch that EXPL is proved to be the most frequently used situation-dependent strategy among Hungarian speakers (Suszczyńska 1999).

Offer of repair strategy (REPR; e.g. *Megtérítem a károdat / I'll pay for the damage*) is the third situation-dependent apologizing strategy. REPR is fairly common in Hungarian apologizing norms. Notwithstanding, apart from being one of the most frequently used strategies, it is also the most situation-dependent one; it means that it can be defined as a spontaneous strategy rather than a conventional and routinized one (Szili 2003). FORB (such as *Nem fog még egyszer előfordulni. / It won't happen again.*) is less common than REPR, while it is very similar to it, in the sense that it is also more dependent on the given context. This paper treats the offer of repair and the promise of forbearance strategies as one group, firstly, because of their similar nature and secondly, since making a promise can be considered as a repair strategy as well.

Finally, Table 3 summarizes all the strategies mentioned and described above. Table 3 can be regarded as the modified Olshtain – Cohen classification model as it is used in this particular study.

<b>(1) IFIDs</b>
<b>(2) SITUATION-DEPENDENT STRATEGIES</b>
<b>Taking on Responsibility</b>
a. implicit self-strategies [RESPI] (e.g. self-deficiency, self-dispraise)
b. explicit taking on responsibility (e.g. self-blame) [RESPE]
c. lack of intent
d. expression of embarrassment [EMB]
<b>Explanation or Account</b>
<b>Offer of Repair / Promise of Forbearance</b>

Table 3: *The strategies investigated in the study (the modified Olshtain – Cohen model)*

It is patently obvious that the number of the strategies is very limited in this model. It should be noted that in the past 30 years apologizing research pointed out that the model should be modified and reconstructed, and new strategies should be introduced into the model (for new strategies see: Ístifçi 2009, Wagner & Roebuck 2010, Al Zumor 2011, and Filimonova 2016 among others). However, the model used here does not incorporate these new elements and does not strive for changing the model that radically. The reasons for not applying a more extended version of the model are the following. First, for the purposes of the current study the scarcely modified version of the Olshtain – Cohen classification model (see Table 3) is

satisfactory. Secondly, the model is proved to describe the Hungarian apologizing strategies well (Suszczyńska 1999:1056).

It very rarely happens that someone uses only one pure IFID strategy in an apologizing situation. Using strategy-sets is more common in everyday language use. The term strategy-set refers to the case when the offender uses more than one apologizing strategy in an apologizing situation. More particularly, in an apologizing strategy-set the IFID strategy with the performative verb is typically supplemented by one or more situation-dependent strategies. Choosing the most appropriate strategy or strategy-sets is always dependent on the sociopragmatic features of the given situation. (Szili 2003).

Szili (2003) also defines the most frequently used strategy-sets in Hungarian. Two notable examples of those strategy-sets are: IFID – RESPI – REPR (e.g. *Elnézést kérek, tanár úr. Elfelejtettem, de ha szükséges, visszamegyek érte. / I am sorry, Professor. I have forgotten it, but if it is necessary I can return for it.*) and IFID – RESPI – EXPL (e.g. *Ne haragudj, de teljesen kiment a fejemből holnapra megcsinálom. Jó? / Forgive me, it completely went out of my mind. I will finish it tomorrow, ok?*).

Since using a strategy-set is closer to the natural speech style of Hungarian native speakers, four hypothetical strategy-sets were constructed based on Szili's and Suszczyńska's findings. All strategy-sets start with an IFID, since Suszczyńska (1999) showed that Hungarian apologizing strategy-sets typically starts with an IFID. The tested strategy-sets are the followings:

**i) IFID + RESPI + EMB**

e.g. *Bocsánatot kérek, olyan hülye vagyok. Nagyon szégyellem magam.*

“I apologize, I am such an idiot. I am ashamed.”

As it was mentioned before, the strategy of implicit taking on responsibility is very common in Hungarian apologizing norms, because using it is less face-threatening than explicitly admitting our mistakes. It is combined with the expression of embarrassment strategy that is highly face-threatening. It is postulated that because of the presence of EMB this type of the strategy-sets will be the less popular among the Hungarian participants of the study. As it was pointed out earlier, EMB is a unique Hungarian apologizing strategy, not typical (or it cannot be found at all) in other languages, so investigating its behaviour can deepen our knowledge about the nature of Hungarian apologizing.

**ii) IFID + INT + EXPL**

e.g. *Nagyon sajnálom, nem akartam. Késsett a vonat.*

“I am so sorry, I did not mean to. The train was late.”

Giving an explanation is a strategy that again is very typical of Hungarian speakers (see above and also see Szili 2003) and it is assumed that its popularity is bigger than any of the other taking on responsibility strategies. EXPL is combined with a lack of intent strategy in order to soften its face-threatening nature.

**iii) IFID + RESPI + REPR/FORB**

e.g. *Sajnálom, elfelejtettem. Legközelebb nem fordul elő.*

“I am sorry, I forgot it. It won't happen again.”

This strategy-set was proved to be one of the most common strategy-sets in Hungarian (Szili 2003: 306) and it is worth comparing it with a very similar strategy-set, where the only difference lays in the nature of the taking on responsibility strategy, (see iv) below).

**iv) IFID + RESPE + REPR/FORB**

e.g. *Kérem, ne haragudjon, leöntöttem a kabátját kávéval. Kifizetem a tisztítatás díját.*

“Please, do not be angry because I spilled coffee on your coat. I will pay the cleaning bill.”

It is expected that the explicit taking on strategy (RESPE) is less popular among Hungarians than the strategy-set that contains a RESPI (implicit self-strategy).

### 3 Present Study

As mentioned above, the aim of this study is to check empirically whether social power and gravity of the offense have an impact on the realization of apologizing strategies in Hungarian. As Reiter claims “(...) apologies are dependent upon interaction between the seriousness of the offense and the social power” (Reiter 2000: 164). In this section these factors are introduced.

Generally, the findings of the relevant literature suggest a role for the so called socio-pragmatic factors in the choice of apologizing strategies. Based on Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) we differentiate two different types of these factors, social parameters and context-dependent factors. The first group includes the social parameters: gender, age, social distance and social power. As it was proved many times, social power plays a pivotal role in determining speech acts (Beebe, Takahashi & Uliss-Weltz 1990; Beebe & Zhang-Waring 2001; Kasper 1992; Wolfson 1989). However, the findings of Szili point out (Szili 2002a, 2002b, also cited in 2003: 294) that in the case of Hungarian, social distance has a bigger influence than social power on the realization of request and refusal strategies. This study attempts to find out whether or not social power – similarly to the factor of social distance (cf. Szili 2003) – affects the apologizing strategies of Hungarian native speakers.

Power is a relationship between at least two persons, and it is nonreciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behaviour (Brown & Gilman, 1972: 255 cited in Spencer-Oatey 1996). According to another definition, the speaker is said to have power over the hearer “(...) in the degree that he is able to control the behaviour of the other” (ibid). As Hofstede points out social power can be interpreted as a “a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between B (boss) and S (subordinate) as perceived by the less powerful of the two, S” (Hofstede 2001: 83). Based on these definitions, the paper distinguishes two different levels of the factor of social power putting the emphasis on the reciprocity of the relationship: i) equal in rank – lack of social power – (e.g. friends) *i.e.* the relationship is reciprocal or ii) unequal in rank (superior-inferior relationship, e.g. boss-employee) when the relationship is nonreciprocal.

The other group of sociopragmatic factors involves the inner, contextual, speech-act dependent factors; these are different from speech act to speech act. Regarding apologizing, the most prominent contextual factor is gravity of the offense. Gravity of the offense is always determined by the damage – irrespective of being real or virtual – caused by the speaker (Hong 2008) by the help of which the necessary amount of face work can be estimated in the given situation (Al-Khaza'leh 2018). Among others Holmes (1990), Aijmer (1996) and Deutschmann (2003) also argue that this is the most influential contextual factor of all, since the offense itself (the topic of the repentance) is the key element that motivates the speech act of apologizing. Though a very detailed taxonomy of the different types of offenses are found in the above listed studies, it cannot be described in a greater detail here. In the study, based on Al-Khaza'leh's (2018) work, two levels of the gravity of the offense are defined: big

offense (also called as high offense) and small (low) offense. We consider an offense high, if it is highly imposed on the faces of the interlocutors in the situation (ibid).

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, the paper hypothesizes that social power and the gravity of the offense are factors that play a pivotal role in the usage/choice of Hungarian apologizing strategies.

### **3.1 Data collection**

Traditionally, the realization of speech acts and speech act strategy-sets have been measured mainly with the help of Written Discourse Completion Tests (WDCT). However, in this particular study, the so called MDCT method (Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Test) is applied. According to Liu (2004: 68), MDCT can be defined as a multiple-choice test “where the test taker is required to choose the correct response from the several given options”. The method of MDCT was chosen for the following reasons. First, MDCTs offer an effective way of collecting data as a selected-response type answer. It means that only the recognition (and not language production as in a WDCT) of the appropriate strategy or strategy-sets is expected from the participants. Hence, the researcher can choose and control the investigated strategies (in the present study these strategies are EXPL, EMB and the strategy of RESPE and RESPI). Secondly, attributed to the predominance of the WDCT method, MDCT is looked upon as a relatively new and cost-effective method in speech act studies.

The MDCT test was constructed to collect data on apologizing strategies of Hungarian native speakers. The test was a multiple-choice discourse completion test, it contained 12 target items and 12 distractors. Each target item comprised a situation with a dialogue that had to be completed with one of the provided four answers. The experiment used a 2x2 design, situations always represented one condition while exploring the effect of the following two sociopragmatic factors: i) social power (the participants of the situation are equal in rank or not) and ii) gravity of the offense (big or small). The individual conditions are listed below.

- i) The participants of the situation are not equal in rank and the gravity of the offense is big.
- ii) The participants of the situation are not equal in rank and the gravity of the offense is small.
- iii) The participants of the situation are equal in rank and the gravity of the offense is big.
- iv) The participants of the situation are equal in rank and the gravity of the offense is small.

The participants were asked to complete the dialogues, selecting one of the four provided answers that they found the most appropriate in the given situation. The answers were structured to include the following four strategy-sets (the detailed description of the strategy-sets and examples can be found in section 2):

- i) IFID + RESPI + EMB
- ii) IFID + RESPI + REPR/FORB
- iii) IFID + INT + EXPL
- iv) IFID + RESPE + REPR/FORB

Consider the following two examples below, taken from the questionnaire. The first example describes a situation where the participants are unequal in rank and the gravity of the offense is small, while in the second example the gravity of the offense is also small but the participants are equal in rank. Throughout the test, in all of the situations where the participants were equal in rank, the interlocutors were described as friends (no conversations



in between family members or strangers were used in the test), in order to keep the degree of intimacy constant. For the same reason, in unequal situations the participants were in a superior-inferior relationship (boss-employee or teacher-student relationships).

[1]

Rohan a folyosón, nekimegy valakinek és a lábára is rátapos. Mikor felnéz, rájön, hogy a főnökének ment neki.

- Elnézést, nem akartam. Nagyon sietek, azt se tudom, hol áll a fejem. - **IFID + INT + EXPL**
- Nagyon sajnálom, hogy a lábára léptem. Legközelebb a lábam elé fogok nézni. - **IFID + RESPE + REPR**
- Bocsásson meg, nagyon figyelmetlen voltam. Hogy tehetném jóvá? - **IFID + RESPI + REPR**
- Bocsánat, olyan vakki vagyok. Most egy kicsit szégyellem magam. - **IFID + RESPI + EMB**

While running in the corridor you run into someone and step on his/her feet. Looking up, you realize that you bumped into your boss. In a situation like this, you would say:

- Excuse me, I did not mean it. I am in a hurry and I am being rushed off my feet. - **IFID+ INT + EXPL**
- I am terribly sorry for stepping on your feet. Next time I will be more careful. - **IFID + RESPE + REPR**
- Please forgive me, I am very careless. How can I make it good? - **IFID + RESPI + REPR**
- I am sorry, I am as blind as a bat. I am a bit ashamed of myself. - **IFID + RESPI + EMB**

[2]

Barátjával találkozót beszélt meg, Ön késik 15 percet. Mikor barátja megkérdezi, mi történt, Ön ezt mondja:

- Nagyon sajnálom, a közlekedés tehet róla, hatalmas a dugó. - **IFID + INT + EXPL**
- Bocsánatot kérek, amiért elkéstem. Legközelebb majd jobban figyelek. Na, gyere, meghívlak egy sütire. **IFID + RESPE + REPR**
- Ne haragudj, mostanában olyan figyelmetlen vagyok. Máskor nem fordul elő. **IFID + RESPI + REPR**
- Bocsáss meg, annyira szerencsétlen vagyok. Úgy szégyellem magam. - **IFID + RESPI + EMB**

You are having an appointment with your friend and you are 15 minutes late. When your friend ask what had happened with you, your answer would be:

- I am so sorry, there is a big traffic jam in the city. - **IFID + INT + EXPL**
- I am sorry for being late. I will be more punctual next time. Let's go, I am inviting you for a cake. - **IFID + RESPE + REPR/FORB**
- Do not be angry please, I am so careless lately. It won't happen again. - **IFID + RESPI + REPR/FORB**
- Forgive me, I am so miserable. I am so ashamed of myself. - **IFID + RESPI + EMB**

### 3.2 Participants

123 Hungarian native speakers (age range 18 – 71 years) participated in this study. However, the distribution of male and female subjects was not balanced, so with the help of a random number generator two smaller randomized groups were created<sup>2</sup>. The composition of the new group is 28 participants altogether, 14 males and 14 females from 18 – 50 years (average age: 28.9). The study aspired to be balanced both in the distribution of males and females and in the distribution of age groups as well. Moreover, it also attempted to work with subjects with various social backgrounds, thus blue-collar workers (19%), white-collar workers (28%), students (31%) and teachers (22%) also participated in the research.

<sup>2</sup> The necessity for creating a randomized sample is also attributed to the applied statistical procedure (chi-square test, see below). When running the test with all the 123 participants, the observed value in most of the cells were less than five, so in order to overcome the limitations of the test, it was needed to work with a randomized group.

### 3.3 Results

The results of the test are shown in Table 4, which presents the overall distribution of the investigated strategy-sets. It is shown that EMB is the least common of all the investigated strategies, but when the interlocutors are equal in rank, a higher frequency is discernible. It is also apparent that the strategy of implicit taking on responsibility is also less common, especially compared to RESPE (taking on responsibility explicitly). As Table 4 illustrates, EXPL is widely used, particularly in more face-threatening situations (unequal interlocutors), but it does not reach the frequency of RESPE, which – besides being quite popular – has a more balanced distribution in contrast to other strategies.

	<b>IFID+RESPI+EMB</b>	<b>IFID+RESPI+REPR/FORB</b>	<b>IFID+INT+EXPL</b>	<b>IFID+RESPE+REPR/FORB</b>
<b>EQUALS, SMALL OFFENSE</b>	12 (14%)	26 (31%)	12 (14%)	34 (41%)
<b>EQUALS, BIG OFFENSE</b>	9 (11%)	15 (18%)	24 (28%)	36 (43%)
<b>UNEQUALS, SMALL OFFENSE</b>	3 (3.5%)	8 (9.5%)	39 (46%)	34 (41%)
<b>UNEQUALS, BIG OFFENSE</b>	2 (2.5%)	13 (15.5%)	39 (46%)	30 (36%)

Table 4: The overall frequency of strategy-sets

The frequency of the four strategy-sets in the case of both sociopragmatic factors was compared with the help of the chi-square test (see Figure 1 and 2). The results testify that the distributions of apologizing strategy-sets across conditions are significantly different if the determinant factor is social power ( $\chi^2(3) = 0.008$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This means that the social power of the conversation partners plays an important role in the choice of Hungarian apologizing strategies.

As regards the frequency of the EMB strategy, Figure 1 indicates that in the case of unequal participants it was sporadic, but when the participants of the situation were equal in rank its frequency was a bit higher (but compared to the frequency of other strategies it is still low). Regarding the strategy of explaining (EXPL), RESPE and RESPI (taking on responsibility explicitly and implicitly), the results indicate that Hungarian speakers used RESPE more than RESPI or EXPL. As for EXPL, it is also observable that it is more frequent when the interlocutors are unequal – *i.e.* the situation is more face-threatening – than in situations where the participants are equal (less face-threatening situation).

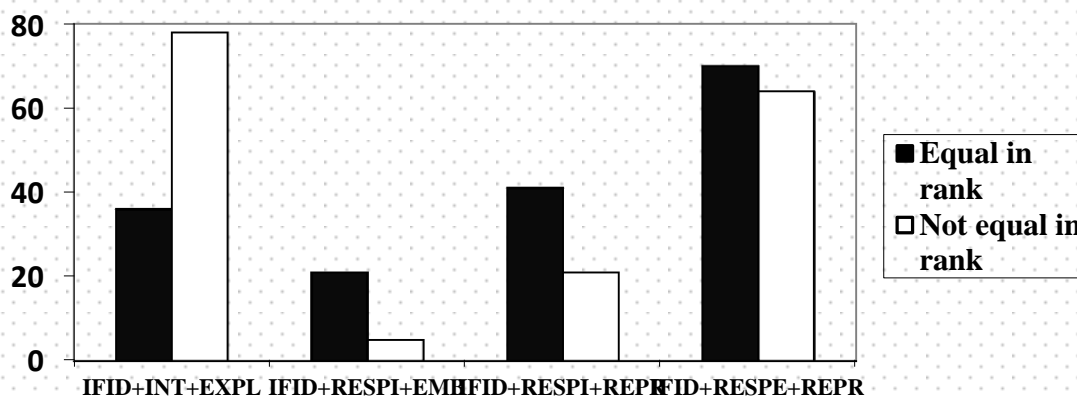


Figure 1: The influence of the social status factor on the distribution of apologizing strategies

Turning to the other factor, no statistically significant differences were found in the distribution of apologizing strategy-sets if the investigated factor is the gravity of the offense ( $\chi^2(3)=0.477$ ,  $p>0.05$ ; see Figure 2).

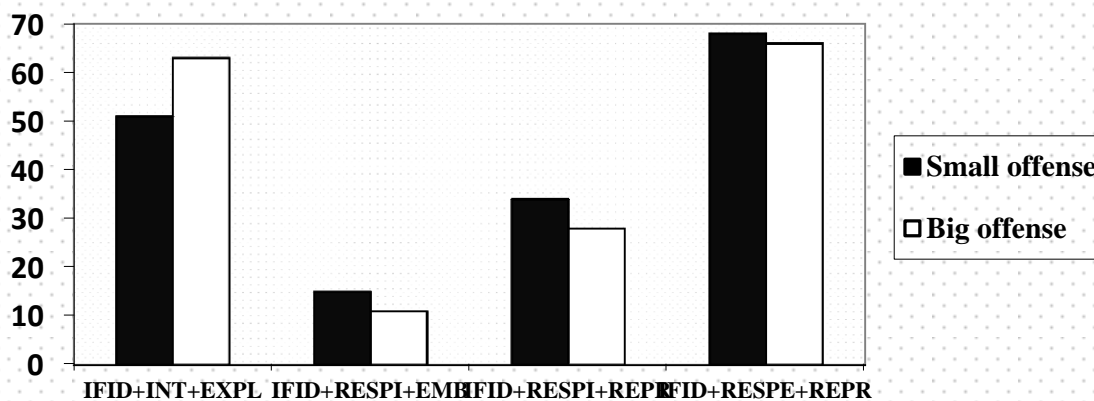


Figure 2: The influence of the gravity of the offense factor on the distribution of apologizing strategies

### 3.4 Discussion

The research question of this study was whether or not the gravity of the offense and social power play an important role in the choice of Hungarian apologizing strategies. As several reports have shown and as it was also mentioned in the literature review, social power is a sociopragmatic factor that correlates significantly with apologizing strategy selection in German, Spanish and in English (Meier 1997, Beebe & Zhang-Waring 2001, Reiter 2000 among others). The results of this study show that statistically significant differences can be found in the frequency distribution of apologizing strategies with social power as a determinant factor in Hungarian, too. The reason for the inconsistency between the results of this study and the findings of previous literature (Szili 2003) may be due to the different methods applied in the experiments. There is a possibility that power relations and differences are underrepresented in a WDCT (Szili 2003) where the participants have to produce the investigated speech acts themselves and hence the given answers are more hypothetical than in an MDCT (where several options are provided and the participants have to choose the most appropriate one).

Nonetheless, the study has been unable to demonstrate the same effect of the gravity of the offense factor, in other words, gravity of the offense did not result in statistically significant differences in the frequency distribution of Hungarian apologizing strategies under scrutiny. These results do not support the findings of previous research (Holmes 1990, Aijmer 1996, Deutschmann 2003 among others) according to which the gravity of the offense is the most influential contextual factor in New Zealand English and British English. Regarding Hungarian, it was also found that “[apology] choices in the data were influenced by such contextual factors as the offence type and its seriousness” (Suszczyńska 2005), so based on Suszczyńska’s findings it was expected that gravity of the offense is a contributing factor in Hungarian apologizing norms. However, it should be noted that this study investigates only a limited number of definite strategy-sets, and at this point it is impossible to say whether the results would be the same with different strategy-sets or not. Thus, gravity of the offense therefore should remain an important issue for future research since the application of a multiple-choice discourse completion test only cannot provide enough explanatory power for

this inconsistency between the results of this study and previous research. Further data collection is required to determine exactly how the gravity of the offense factor affects Hungarian apologizing strategies in general (in contrast with the results of this study that are very specific).

The most striking results to emerge from the data are connected to the frequency of the investigated strategies. As it was mentioned above, the application of the expression of shame or embarrassment strategy is the most face-threatening strategy for the apologizer, so its frequency is lower compared to other strategies. At the same time, using EMB turns out to be more typical in situations where the speaker and the hearer are equal in rank, *i.e.* without a certain level of trust or intimacy between the interlocutors, EMB will not appear in apologizing situations. Furthermore, it is also found that EMB is rarely used when the speaker is in an inferior position. Regarding the frequency of EXPL as an apologizing strategy, it is higher than the frequency of RESPE (explicit taking on responsibility) in the Hungarian apologizing norms, while the application of RESPI (implicit taking on responsibility) is more frequent than RESPE among Hungarian native speakers.

There are two possible explanations for these results. Firstly, Hungarian apologizing norms may be similar to international apologizing trends (according to which RESPE is the second most popular of all the apologizing strategies) than it was originally assumed by previous literature (cf. studies in the CCSARP project 1989). Secondly, another explanation for these results may be attributed to the nature of the applied methodology. Previous literature has mainly applied the WDCT method that requires language production, not recognition. Consequently, differences in the research methods can account for the results obtained here.

It should also be noted that compared to RESPI or EXPL strategies, the explicit taking on responsibility strategy is less dependent on the face-threatening nature of the given situation. The strategy-sets containing a RESPE strategy are more popular when the interlocutors in the tested situations were equal in rank (see Table 4). In other words, applying self-strategies (pointing out our weaknesses) is less face-threatening if the hearer and the speaker are equal in rank. In contrast, the strategy of EXPL proved to be more popular in more face-threatening situations, when the participants of the situation were in a superior-inferior relationship. This is a quite natural behaviour, since speakers in an inferior position aspire to save their face by blaming any external circumstances, rather than threatening their own face by referring to their mistakes and frailties.

## 4 Conclusion

This paper investigated the realization of Hungarian apologizing strategies in a specific manner (focusing on four specific strategy-sets). More exactly, the purpose of the study was to analyse the recognition of particular apologizing strategies in Hungarian and two sociopragmatic factors – social power and gravity of the offense – that may play an important role in their final realization. The results strengthened the hypothesis that social power is an important factor in the choice of Hungarian apologizing strategies. The results also proved that the strategy of expressing embarrassment is indeed the most face-threatening apologizing strategy in Hungarian apologizing norms.

However, the results also suggest that firstly, gravity of the offense is not a significant sociopragmatic factor in the choice of Hungarian apologizing strategies (at least for the ones explored in this study) and secondly, the strategy of explicit taking on responsibility is more frequent than the other situation-dependent strategies. These results are inconsistent with the

existent literature, especially with the findings of Szili (2003). There are two likely causes for this inconsistency. Firstly, the different results may be due to the different participants of the studies, only university students participated in Szili's research (while the age of the participants in this study varied from 18-50). Secondly, the discrepancy can be attributed to the applied method as well that was entirely different from that of Szili (since this study used a recognition task, while Szili used a production task; moreover this study worked with only the aforementioned four strategy-sets, disregarding other infrequent but still existent strategies).

Further investigation and experimentation into this topic is strongly recommended. In future research it might be possible to use different experimental methods (such as a discourse completion test or a role-play – measuring language production – with similar or the same situations) to answer the questions that remain unanswered at present. It would also be interesting to compare the results of the present study with naturally occurring data (e.g. using a spoken corpus for data collection). Another possible area of future research would be to explore the behaviour of other strategy-sets that occur frequently in Hungarian.

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