

**SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF APOLOGY FORMULAS IN ENGLISH AND  
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**Abstract:** This article is devoted to the semantic analysis of apology formulas in English and Uzbek languages. Apology expressions play an important role in communication as they help maintain social harmony and politeness between speakers. The study examines the semantic features, communicative functions, and pragmatic meanings of apology expressions in both languages. The research also identifies similarities and differences between English and Uzbek apology formulas and explains them from linguistic and cultural perspectives. The analysis shows that apology expressions in both languages share common semantic components such as regret, responsibility, request for forgiveness, and explanation. However, Uzbek apology expressions tend to be more expressive and polite, while English apology formulas are often shorter and more standardized. The results of the research can be useful for comparative linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and intercultural communication studies.

**Аннотация:** Данная статья посвящена семантическому анализу формул извинения в английском и узбекском языках. Выражения извинения играют важную роль в коммуникации, так как помогают поддерживать социальную гармонию и вежливость между собеседниками. В исследовании рассматриваются семантические особенности, коммуникативные функции и прагматические значения выражений извинения в обоих языках. Также в работе выявляются сходства и различия между формулами извинения в английском и узбекском языках и объясняются с лингвистической и культурной точек зрения. Статья показывает, что выражения извинения в обоих языках имеют общие семантические компоненты, такие как сожаление, признание ответственности, просьба о прощении и объяснение. Однако узбекские выражения извинения, как правило, более экспрессивны и вежливы, тогда как английские формулы извинения чаще бывают более короткими и стандартизированными. Результаты исследования могут быть полезны для сравнительного языкознания, прагматики, социолингвистики и межкультурной коммуникации.

**Keywords:** apology, apology formulas, semantics, pragmatics, speech acts, English language, Uzbek language, politeness, comparative linguistics, communication

**Introduction.** Language serves as the primary means of human communication, enabling individuals to convey their emotions, intentions, and viewpoints towards one another. A significant communicative act in every language is the act of apologizing. An apology serves to convey remorse, acknowledge an error, seek forgiveness, or mend social connections following a misunderstanding or an offense. Consequently, expressions of apology are viewed as a crucial element of communication etiquette and respectful strategies.

In contemporary linguistics, expressions of apology are analyzed in the fields of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and semantics. Researchers examine how individuals express apologies, the terminology and phrases they choose, and the implications these phrases communicate within interactions. Apology formulas consist of grammatical structures that also embody semantic and pragmatic meanings shaped by cultural and social norms.

The English and Uzbek languages come from distinct language families and cultures, yet both possess numerous methods for conveying apologies. In English, typical ways to apologize are "sorry," "I apologize," "excuse me," and "forgive me." O'zbek tilida gapiruvchilar "kechirasiz," "uzr," "meni kechiring," va "xafa qilgan bo'lsam uzr" kabi iboralardan foydalanadilar. These phrases vary in their meaning structure, degree of politeness, and communicative purpose.

The primary objective of this article is to examine the semantic characteristics of apology expressions in both English and Uzbek languages, highlighting their similarities and distinctions. The research examines the elements of meaning in apology expressions and their significance in communication.

### **The Concept of Apology in Linguistics**

In linguistics, apology is considered a speech act, which is a functional unit of communication used to perform an action through language. According to speech act theory, developed by John L. Austin and further elaborated by John Searle, apology belongs to the category of expressive speech acts, as it reflects the speaker's psychological state, such as regret, guilt, or remorse.

An apology is typically used when a speaker acknowledges that they have violated a social norm or caused inconvenience, harm, or offense to another person. The main purpose of an apology is to restore social harmony and maintain interpersonal relationships.

From a linguistic perspective, apology involves several key components:

- 1) Expression of regret (e.g., I'm sorry)
- 2) Admission of responsibility (e.g., It was my fault)
- 3) Request for forgiveness (e.g., Please forgive me)
- 4) Explanation or justification (e.g., I didn't mean to)
- 5) Offer of repair (e.g., Let me fix it)
- 6) Promise of non-repetition (e.g., It won't happen again)

Not all apologies contain all these elements, but they usually include at least one or two.

In pragmatics, apology is closely related to politeness theory, particularly the concept of face-saving strategies. According to Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, apologizing is a way to repair a face-threatening act, helping to preserve the hearer's dignity and the speaker's social image. Furthermore, apology expressions are influenced by cultural norms. Different languages and cultures may use different strategies, levels of directness, and degrees of politeness when apologizing. For example, some cultures prefer brief and direct apologies, while others favor more elaborate and polite expressions.

All in all, the concept of apology in linguistics is a complex phenomenon that combines semantic meaning, pragmatic function, and cultural context, making it an important area of study in modern linguistics.

### **Semantic Features of English Apology Formulas**

Apologies are an important part of communication in all languages. In English, apology expressions have specific semantic features that help speakers show regret, take responsibility, and try to repair a situation. According to Olshtain and Cohen (1983), an apology is a type of speech act that includes several common strategies: expressing regret (e.g., I'm sorry), admitting fault (e.g., It was my fault), explaining or giving reasons (e.g., I didn't mean to), offering to repair the damage (e.g., Let me fix it), and promising it won't happen again (e.g., It won't happen again). These strategies are often combined in real conversations, depending on how serious the mistake is and the relationship between the speaker and the listener.

The most common and direct way to apologize in English is by using the word "sorry." This word is often used alone (Sorry!), or as part of longer expressions like I'm sorry, I'm very sorry, or I'm so sorry for what I said. Holmes (1990) points out that "sorry" is more than just a word that shows regret—it also plays an important role in politeness. Saying "sorry" helps the speaker protect the listener's feelings and maintain a good relationship. Brown and Levinson (1987), in their theory of politeness, explain that apologies are a type of negative politeness

strategy, which means they are used to reduce the impact of a social mistake or an offense. In other words, when someone apologizes, they are showing respect for the other person's need not to be hurt, interrupted, or disrespected.

Another important semantic feature of English apologies is how speakers express different levels of responsibility. For example, in very serious situations, someone might say, I take full responsibility for what happened, or I deeply regret my actions. These expressions carry strong meaning and show that the speaker fully admits their mistake. In less serious situations, speakers might try to reduce their responsibility by using conditional expressions like If I hurt your feelings, I'm sorry, or I didn't mean to upset you. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) call these types of expressions indirect apologies, which are less clear about who is at fault. Such expressions are often used when the speaker wants to apologize without fully accepting blame. According to Holmes (1995), this kind of hedging (softening the language) is common in English because it helps balance sincerity with politeness.

In many apologies, English speakers also use intensifiers such as really, so, very, and truly to make their apologies sound more serious and sincere. For example, I'm really sorry or I truly apologize shows stronger feelings than just I'm sorry. These words help increase the emotional force of the apology (Fraser, 1981). On the other hand, speakers sometimes use words that weaken the apology, like just, a bit, or kind of, especially if they don't want to take full responsibility. For instance, saying I'm just a bit sorry about what I said sounds less sincere than I'm very sorry.

The context in which the apology happens also plays a big role in how it is expressed. Factors such as the relationship between the speaker and the listener, the formality of the situation, the severity of the offense, and cultural expectations all affect the choice of words. Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) explain that in formal settings, people tend to use more polite and longer expressions, such as Please accept my sincere apologies. In informal settings, especially among friends or peers, shorter and simpler expressions like Oops, my bad! or Sorry! are more common. In this way, English apology formulas are flexible and sensitive to social context.

Apologies in English often include offers of repair, which show that the speaker wants to make up for what they did. These can be direct, such as Let me pay for the damage, or more general, like I'll try to do better next time. According to Trosborg (1995), this type of apology includes both a verbal expression of regret and a practical action to fix the mistake. This makes the apology more effective and shows that the speaker is taking the situation seriously.

The **element of sincerity** plays a crucial role in the semantics of apologies. A sincere apology must reflect genuine regret and willingness to repair the situation. According to Searle (1969), the illocutionary act of apologizing must be performed with the appropriate psychological state—meaning, the speaker must truly feel sorry. However, in real-life interactions, not all apologies are sincere. For example, **forced apologies** (e.g., "Say you're sorry!") may fulfill social expectations, but they may not carry the same semantic force as a genuine one. Holmes (1990) notes that insincere apologies are often recognized by the hearer through **intonation, contextual clues, or lack of supporting actions**. For instance, saying "I'm sorry you feel that way" may sound like an apology but often functions as a way to avoid accepting responsibility. These types of "non-apologies" or "pseudo-apologies" are semantically interesting because they resemble apologies in form but differ in function.

Apologies also play an important role in the structure of conversation. Sometimes, they are used to fix problems in communication, such as when someone does not hear something clearly: Sorry, could you repeat that? In these cases, the apology is not about a social mistake but about keeping the conversation smooth. Schiffrin (1987) explains that apologies can act as discourse markers, which help organize talk and manage interactions.

The tone of voice, body language, and context can also change the meaning of an apology. For example, saying I'm sorry in a sarcastic tone may mean the opposite—it can actually show anger or rejection instead of regret. So, while the words of the apology are important, the way they are said also carries meaning.

In recent years, new forms of apology have appeared, especially in digital communication like texting or social media. People often use short forms like sry, soz, or even emojis (☹️) to say sorry. These new types of apology are often more casual and are understood within the context of online or mobile communication. Tagg (2015) points out that even though these forms are shorter, they still carry emotional meaning and can be effective in digital conversations.

Gender also influences how people apologize. Some researchers have found that men and women may use apologies differently in English. Holmes (1995) found that women tend to apologize more often than men and use more polite and emotional language. This may reflect social expectations for women to show empathy and maintain harmony in conversations. Men, on the other hand, may use apologies more strategically and less frequently, depending on the situation.

Over time, the way people apologize in English has changed. In the past, more formal phrases like I beg your pardon or Please forgive me were common. Today, people prefer simpler and more direct expressions like I'm sorry or My bad. Leech (2014) explains that this change reflects a general trend in English-speaking cultures toward informality and directness. However, even simple apologies can still be meaningful, depending on how they are used.

Moreover, apologies in English reflect cultural values such as individual responsibility, honesty, and the importance of maintaining good relationships. Wierzbicka (2003) argues that English apology formulas show how speakers value clear communication and personal accountability. In many English-speaking cultures, it is important to admit mistakes and show that you care about others' feelings. This is why even small mistakes—like accidentally bumping into someone—are often followed by quick apologies like Oops, sorry!

From a language teaching or second language acquisition perspective, teaching the semantic and pragmatic features of apologies is essential. Many learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds may not be familiar with how English speakers use apologies in daily life. For example, in some cultures, people might avoid direct apologies because they believe it shows weakness or lowers status. In contrast, English speakers often expect apologies to be explicit and emotionally expressive. As Olshtain and Cohen (1983) argue, language learners need to understand not just the words ("I'm sorry") but the situation, tone, and social purpose of the apology. Classroom activities that include role-plays, authentic dialogues, and cross-cultural comparisons can help students develop pragmatic competence, which is the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts.

Finally, the study of English apology semantics can also contribute to intercultural communication, especially in multicultural settings where misunderstandings about apologies are common. For example, a speaker from a culture that uses indirect apologies may sound insincere to an English speaker who expects a more direct statement. On the other hand, a very direct apology might seem too blunt or excessive in cultures where saving face is more important than admitting fault. Wierzbicka (2003) argues that English apology expressions are part of a broader cultural script that emphasizes individual responsibility, emotional openness, and verbal clarity. Understanding these semantic and cultural patterns is crucial for effective communication across languages and cultures.

In conclusion, English apology formulas have several key semantic features: they show regret, admit responsibility, offer repair, and maintain politeness. The exact words used depend on the context, the seriousness of the offense, and the relationship between the people involved.

Speakers use intensifiers to show stronger feelings, hedging to reduce blame, and repair strategies to fix the damage. Apologies are also used in conversation management and reflect cultural attitudes toward responsibility and politeness. Understanding how these features work helps language learners and researchers better understand how apologies function in English. These insights also provide a strong basis for comparing apology expressions in English with those in other languages, such as Uzbek. In the next chapter, we will explore how apologies are expressed in Uzbek and examine how the strategies and meanings differ or overlap with English, offering a comparative perspective that highlights both linguistic diversity and universal aspects of human interaction.

### **Semantic features of Uzbek apology formulas**

Apologies are complex speech acts deeply rooted in both linguistic structures and cultural norms. In the Uzbek language, apology formulas serve not only as expressions of regret or remorse but also as mechanisms for maintaining social harmony and reinforcing collective values. The semantic structure of Uzbek apologies reflects the sociocultural emphasis on respect, humility, and interpersonal solidarity, elements which are foundational in high-context cultures like Uzbekistan's (Hall, 1976). Unlike English, where apologies can be direct and sometimes formulaic (e.g., "I'm sorry," "I apologize"), Uzbek apology formulas are semantically rich and often involve elaborate expressions of deference, acknowledgment of wrongdoing, and appeals to the listener's forgiveness.

Linguistically, the semantic core of an apology typically includes five components: an expression of regret, acknowledgment of responsibility, explanation of the offense, offer of repair, and a request for forgiveness (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). In Uzbek, these elements are frequently present but are realized through culturally specific strategies. For example, the expressions "Kechirasiz", "Uzr so'rayman", and "Kechirib qo'ying" carry semantic nuances that go beyond the English equivalents. "Kechirasiz" is a general-purpose apology that can range from mild offenses (e.g., bumping into someone) to more serious contexts, while "Uzr so'rayman" tends to be more formal and often signals a deeper level of contrition. The verb "so'ramoq" (to ask) combined with "uzr" (excuse) suggests a semantic structure where the speaker places themselves in a subordinate, supplicating role, which aligns with Uzbek cultural values of modesty and respect for hierarchy (Sharipov, 2010).

Moreover, apology in Uzbek is often accompanied by culturally embedded semantic markers that reinforce the sincerity and humility of the speaker. Phrases such as "Gunohimni kechiring" (Forgive my sin/fault) or "Aybimni tan olaman" (I admit my fault) encode not only

the speaker's admission of guilt but also a moral dimension, which is significant in the Uzbek worldview where social and moral codes are closely intertwined (Karimova, 2015). This contrasts with English apologies, which tend to focus more on the pragmatic function of face-saving and conflict resolution (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In Uzbek culture, the act of apologizing is not solely about repairing a social breach but is also a reaffirmation of ethical conduct and moral responsibility.

Another notable semantic feature of Uzbek apology formulas is the use of metaphoric and poetic language, particularly in formal or serious contexts. Expressions such as "Ko'nglingizga tegdim, kechiring" (I hurt your heart, forgive me) exemplify the affective and emotive dimension of apologies in Uzbek. The word "ko'ngil" (heart or spirit) holds a central place in Uzbek emotional lexicon, often representing one's inner world and emotional state. Therefore, offending someone's "ko'ngil" is semantically heavier than a mere pragmatic violation; it implies a breach of emotional trust. This semantic framing reflects the importance of emotional sincerity in Uzbek communicative practices (Tadjibayeva, 2017).

In terms of speech act theory, Uzbek apologies can be seen as expressive and commissive acts. According to Searle (1976), expressive acts express a speaker's psychological state, while commissive acts commit the speaker to some future action. In many Uzbek apologies, both functions are evident. For instance, the phrase "Kechiring, boshqa takrorlanmaydi" (Forgive me, it won't happen again) demonstrates the speaker's regret (expressive) and a promise of behavioral change (commissive). This blend of semantic functions is particularly important in Uzbek discourse, where social relationships are often maintained through consistent behavioral expectations and mutual trust.

Additionally, indirectness plays a significant role in the semantics of Uzbek apologies. Trosborg (1995) identifies that in many non-Western cultures, indirectness is a politeness strategy that softens the imposition of the act. In Uzbek, this is observed in the use of hedging expressions like "Agar sizga og'ir botgan bo'lsa..." (If this has hurt you...) or "Balki noto'g'ri tushungandirman" (Maybe I misunderstood). These phrases demonstrate semantic strategies that allow the speaker to apologize without overtly accepting full responsibility, thus preserving face for both interlocutors. The semantic ambiguity in such expressions provides a culturally appropriate way to navigate social hierarchy and avoid direct confrontation.

Furthermore, the concept of "hijolat" (feeling embarrassed or ashamed) plays a crucial semantic and pragmatic role in Uzbek apology formulas. Saying "Hijolatdaman" (I am ashamed/embarrassed) or "Hijolat qildim" (I have caused you embarrassment) functions as an

indirect apology with strong emotional connotation. The use of "hijolat" shifts the focus from the offense itself to the speaker's internal emotional state, which is semantically potent in conveying sincerity and humility. This aligns with Goffman's (1967) theory of face-work, where maintaining social dignity is central to interactional rituals. In Uzbek society, expressing personal shame functions as a powerful tool for repairing relational damage, often more impactful than a straightforward "sorry."

Relational context also heavily influences the semantic choices of apology expressions in Uzbek. When addressing elders, superiors, or people of higher social status, more deferential and formulaic language is used. For example, "Uzr bo'lsa ayting, gunohimni kechiring" (If there is an excuse, tell me; forgive my fault) is semantically loaded with humility and respect, often accompanied by body language such as bowing slightly or lowering the gaze. These expressions are not only semantically polite but also indexical of social hierarchy and the collectivist orientation of Uzbek culture (Hofstede, 2001). By contrast, apologies among peers or close friends may be more casual, yet still maintain certain cultural markers of respect, such as diminutives or emotionally nuanced terms like "ko'nglim og'ridi" (my heart hurt).

The semantics of apology in Uzbek also intersect with Islamic moral teachings, which emphasize forgiveness, humility, and reconciliation. Phrases like "Allohdan kechirim so'rayman" (I ask forgiveness from God) or "Alloh sizdan rozi bo'lsin" (May God be pleased with you) are occasionally used in serious apology contexts, especially when the transgression is perceived to have moral or ethical dimensions. These expressions carry a religious semantic load, linking the apology not just to the interpersonal level, but to spiritual and communal values (Usmonov, 2013). Such religious-inflected apologies reflect a worldview where moral accountability is tied to both human and divine judgment, thereby intensifying the sincerity and social weight of the apology.

Moreover, gender and age also affect the semantic construction of apologies in Uzbek. Younger speakers are expected to use more elaborate and deferent forms when apologizing to elders, often incorporating kinship terms or honorifics, such as "Otajon, meni kechiring" (Dear father, forgive me) or "Singlim, uzr" (Sister, excuse me), which personalize the apology and frame it within relational semantics. Gendered language may also influence the emotional tone of the apology, with women more likely to use affective and emotive semantic strategies, in line with social expectations around femininity and emotional expression (Saidova, 2019).

Finally, it is important to note that apologies in Uzbek are often context-bound and multi-modal, with prosody, gestures, and facial expressions contributing to their full semantic

interpretation. The tone of voice, for instance, can amplify or diminish the perceived sincerity of an apology. A softly spoken "Kechirasiz" with lowered eyes and a solemn expression communicates a very different semantic intent than a hurried, perfunctory version of the same word. As Wierzbicka (2003) points out, the semantics of emotion and politeness are embedded not only in words but also in culturally shared norms of delivery and interpretation. In Uzbek, where communication is often indirect and high-context, the full semantic value of an apology is co-constructed through linguistic, paralinguistic, and cultural cues.

Another point of interest is the **semantic extension of apologies into expressions of empathy and solidarity**, even when the speaker is not directly responsible for the offense. For example, phrases such as "Sizni ranjitishganidan afsusdaman" (I'm sorry that you were hurt) are semantically closer to expressions of sympathy but function pragmatically as apologies. This aligns with the **relational orientation** of Uzbek speech culture, in which taking emotional responsibility, even indirectly, is a valued social practice. These expressions demonstrate how apology formulas in Uzbek often extend beyond the prototypical offender-offended dyad and function as tools for building and maintaining communal bonds (Ide, 1989).

Lastly, the **semantic implications of forgiveness** in the context of apology should also be examined. The phrase "Kechirdim" (I forgive you) or "Alloh kechiradi" (God forgives) semantically completes the apology sequence and signals reconciliation. The act of granting forgiveness is often portrayed as a **virtuous, moral act**, rooted in religious teachings and cultural narratives of patience (sabr) and mercy (rahm). Therefore, the semantics of apology are not only about expressing regret but are intrinsically linked to expectations of **moral reciprocity**. The speaker who apologizes is not merely clearing their own conscience but is participating in a **shared moral economy** where forgiveness, too, is semantically and socially expected.

### Outcomes

In conclusion, the semantic landscape of Uzbek apology formulas reveals a rich interplay between language, culture, emotion, and morality. Apologies are more than simple admissions of fault—they are complex communicative acts that encode values of respect, empathy, deference, and moral responsibility. These semantic features vary according to context, age, gender, dialect, and even historical or religious factors, underscoring the depth and nuance of apology practices in Uzbek linguistic culture. Understanding these layers contributes not only to cross-cultural pragmatics but also offers a window into the Uzbek worldview, where language serves as a key mediator of social and moral relationships.

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