

# SORRY . . . I'M CANADIAN

## AN ANALYSIS OF WHEN CANADIANS USE THE WORD SORRY

### 1. *Introduction*

Why is it that we feel the need to apologize when we are not at fault? It could simply be the way in Canada, as Canadians appear to be world leaders in official apologies. Perhaps Canadians are overly concerned with maintaining their self-image as a tranquil, multicultural, peacemaking nation.

Through our research, we strived to discover when Canadians use the word *sorry*, in which contexts, as well as whether these contexts differ for other nationalities. From our experience we believed Canadians would be likely to say *sorry* more than other nationalities. By definition, the word *sorry* is appropriate when someone is feeling regretful about something they have said or done, but Canadians have different uses for the phrase *I'm sorry*, with variations indicated primarily by inflection. Canadians use *sorry* not only when expressing regret but also when trying to grab someone's attention or avert a potential problem.

### 2. *Purpose and Hypothesis*

The purpose of this paper is to explore how and when Canadians say the word *sorry* and how this differs between age groups and from other nationalities.

We speculated that saying *sorry* in order to avert potential problems would be a *Canadianism*, in other words, a use of *sorry* very common among Canadians, far less common for other nationalities. We believe this use of *sorry* is especially Canadian since the Canadian government has used this tactic repeatedly: making official apologies to various groups not to right historical wrongs but to try and ease political tensions and improve future relationships between communities in Canada.

### 3. *Research and Procedure*

We found research on apologizing that compared different languages syntactically but none that compared dialects within one language. We did not find much data on the Canadian *sorry*; therefore, we decided to conduct our own survey. Our survey gave

participants a series of scenarios in which a verbal response of *sorry* *might* occur. Participants were asked to write down their verbal response to each scenario, and the data were analyzed. The survey is reproduced in .

After surveying 33 individuals at random, we divided our participants into three different age categories: ages 9-17, ages 18-25, and ages 26 and above. We also divided the participants into categories based on nationality: Canadian and non-Canadian. We had intended to compare results between males and females, but we dian.









conclusion about this

*Appendix A  
Linguistics Survey*

*The following is a list of scenarios, which occur, in everyday life. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers; this exercise is an observation of the English language. Please don't feel pressured to write what you think is a 'proper' answer, honestly write out what your typical verbal response would be for each scenario.*

1. You are browsing at your local grocery store and a stranger bumps into you.
2. You need to ask a nearby stranger for the time.
3. You are walking down the sidewalk and a person in front of you drops their mitten.
4. You are lost in an unknown city and you need to ask a stranger on the street for directions.
5. a) You are looking for a place to work in a busy library and you notice someone standing up. You approach them to be sure they are leaving so that you can take their seat.  
b)



The overall rates of use of each type of sorry in each age group are charted and graphed below.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Apologizing</b>	<b>Attention</b>	<b>Alleviate Problem</b>
9-17			