

The hardest word

LINKS TO:

Stage 3, Module 15

Learning Object 4: *Write a farewell speech*

Exercise 1

1.1 Write down two examples of personal or informal apologies you have heard, or offered. Describe what was said, and any relevant non-verbal communication.

Personal apologies in Australia can range from the highly informal and casual to the very sincere and heartfelt.

One example of a very casual apology is what happened to me this morning on the way to school. I accidentally bumped into another student while I was getting off the bus. Neither of us was hurt or anything, but I did say 'I'm sorry', and she said, 'That's cool'. I smiled at her while I was apologising, and she smiled back at me when she responded, which let me know that she really was OK with it.

My sister offered me a more formal apology recently. I had lent her a shirt of mine to wear to a party. The shirt got torn. I was very upset, because I really liked that shirt, and at first I was a bit angry because I thought she had been careless with it. My sister asked to talk to me. We sat down in my room and she looked straight into my eyes while she told me what had happened and how sorry she was. She said she was really grateful I had lent her the shirt, and she was really sorry to have let me down by not taking better care of it. I accepted her apology and we shared a hug.

I still didn't feel great about my shirt being ruined, but I was grateful for my sister's apology.

1.2 Describe the context and content of a formal, public Australian apology, including non-verbal communication, with particular attention to any features of the apology that you think are specifically Australian.

The most famous public apology that I know of in Australia is when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised to the Indigenous people of Australia in 2008. The speech was delivered in parliament, and was broadcast live on radio and television throughout Australia. My family and I listened to it on the radio. The speech was fairly short and simple. Mr Rudd's voice was steady and deep. He sounded very sincere. The speech used everyday language, but also seemed very serious and formal.

Later, I saw images of the speech on the Internet. Mr Rudd was dressed very formally in a dark suit, white shirt, and reddish tie. The speech was delivered in parliament, which was another non-verbal indication of the seriousness and formality of the apology.

1.3 What values, attitudes or beliefs influence the content of the Australian apologies you have described, including any non-verbal communication?

The apology I offered after getting off the bus this morning is an example of the kind of apology many Australians offer each day. It is a matter of courtesy, rather than a deeply felt, serious apology.

The second apology I described is an example of a heartfelt personal apology. This kind of apology reflects the value Australians place on treating others with kindness and respect. This particular apology also reflects Australian beliefs about respecting other's belongings, and the value we place on sharing. Asking to speak with me was a way for my sister to

(continued on following page)

(continued from previous page)

indicate she had something serious she wanted to talk about, and is a common way for an Australian to initiate such an apology. My sister sat close to me, and looked me in the eye while she was apologising, then we shared a hug at the end. These non-verbal elements of our conversation are typical of a personal apology in Australia, and reflect the value we place on apologising properly in order to maintain love and respect between friends and family.

The delivery of the formal public apology in parliament reflected the importance and gravity of the occasion, which came at the end of a long period of public discussion and debate. I think the apology reflects a growing belief in Australia that Indigenous people have suffered as a result of the way Australia was colonised, and that it is time to both recognise that history, and focus on a more positive future. I also think the speech is a reflection of the increasing value all Australians place on the contribution Indigenous peoples have made, and continue to make, to Australian culture.

Exercise 2

2.1 Describe what you know about the words a personal apology in Indonesia might include, as well as what facial expression or body language an Indonesian person might use while apologising.

In Indonesia, it is very important to use the correct form of address when speaking to someone; this is especially true when apologising. When offering a personal apology, Indonesians will start by saying the name of the person they are apologising to, or they will use a form of address such as *Mas*, *Mbak*, *Pak*, or *Bu*. They would also use an expression of apology such as *Maaf*, *Maafkan* or *Sori*. The degree of formality of the apology is also important in determining what body language to use. If a student is apologising to the school principal, for example, they should speak clearly and not look the principal in the eye.

In the context of the *Idul Fitri* celebration, people ask for and give forgiveness to each other. In some parts of Indonesia this is accompanied by the act of *sungkem*, which is kneeling in front of the person from whom you are asking for forgiveness and placing your

face on their knees. You also have to say *Maaf lahir dan bathin*, which means 'forgive my wrongdoings to you whether they are expressed or just in thoughts'.

2.2 Have you ever heard a formal public apology delivered by an Indonesian person?

Describe the context and content of the apology, including any non-verbal communication, with particular attention to any features of the apology that you think are specifically Indonesian.

I have never heard of a formal public apology delivered by an Indonesian, but I have read about one on the Internet. The apology was written by the chairman of the committee and event organiser for an event called *Fantastic4 Fest'12*, which was a job market, book fair, IT show and a food bazaar. The chairman gave four reasons for the cancellation: the limited time given to participants to register, a mistake in the address given for correspondence, the unsuitability of the venue, and other technical and non-technical issues. One feature of the apology that I think is specifically Indonesian is the use of hyperbole, for example by using the word *mohon* (to request) instead of *minta* (to ask), as well as the phrase *maaf yang sebesar-besarnya* (the biggest apology). I also noticed that some expressions in this written apology were not expressed in standard Indonesian, but were in colloquial Indonesian, for example the use of the word *kedepannya* (in the future), and *ucapkan terima kasih* (expressed thanks).

2.3 What values, attitudes or beliefs influence the content of the Indonesian apologies you have described, including the non-verbal communication?

Indonesians do not offer the kind of apologies that many Australians offer on a daily basis, like when you bump someone on the street or when you are late for an appointment. Indonesians do, however, offer an apology as an indication of respect before an exchange.

The manner of an apology in Indonesian depends on the degree of formality required. When apologising to an older person or someone you respect, Indonesians show sincerity by not looking at the person they

(continued on following page)

(continued from previous page)

are apologising to. This non-verbal element reflects the value Indonesians place on respect for an older person. Also, Indonesians express their apologies in a way that, for them, shows the importance of maintaining respect and good relationships between friends and colleagues, and the importance of not making each other lose face.

Finally, Indonesian politicians rarely give verbal apologies, but when they do they try to look humble as they are risking their reputation and that of their government by apologising for their mistakes. Indonesian companies generally apologise in writing and usually use elaborate language written for them by their lawyers.

Exercise 3

3.1 What similarities and differences are there between the ways personal apologies are given in Indonesia and in Australia?

I think there are not many differences between the way personal apologies are given in Indonesia and in Australia. The main difference is whether to look the person you are apologising in the eye, or to keep your eyes averted. Australians maintain eye contact as a sign of their sincerity, while Indonesians avert their eyes as a sign of respect and humility.

In Indonesia, there is also tradition of asking and giving forgiveness during the *Idul Fitri* celebrations, which is not practised by Australians.

3.2 What similarities and differences are there between the ways formal or public apologies are delivered in Indonesia and in Australia?

In Indonesia, formal or public apologies are normally given in writing or printed in newspaper. It is very rare for politicians or other public figures to make a verbal apology in public. Perhaps this is because of the strong emphasis in Indonesian culture of maintaining face. In Australia, public apologies are rare, but they are also significant events taken very seriously by the people issuing them, by the media, and by the general public. Generally, an apology given by a politician will

be much anticipated, watched by a lot of citizens, and widely discussed in the press.

3.3 What cultural misunderstandings might occur because of the differences in expectations about when, why and how to apologise in these two different cultures?

Australians may perceive Indonesians as being rude when they bump you in the street or are late for an appointment and don't apologise. Conversely, Indonesians may think an Australian is being rude if they apologise while looking the person they are apologising to in the eye.

Exercise 4

4.1 Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you deserved an apology from someone, but they didn't apologise to you? Describe the background to the situation.

Once, I confided in my best friend about something very private and personal. I was quite upset at the time, and needed to talk to someone I could trust. A few days later, I found out that she had put up a post online about what I told her. She didn't mention my name, but anyone who knows me would have realised it was about me.

4.2 What did you do to resolve the situation? Describe your actions or your thinking (if you decided not to take action).

I waited for a few days, hoping my friend would realise that she had done the wrong thing and would offer me an apology. The longer things went on, the more upset I was that she didn't apologise. Finally, I rang her and said I was really hurt and upset by what she had done.

At first my friend was surprised, and thought I was being over-sensitive, but then I explained that even though she hadn't used my name, it was pretty clear she was talking about me, and now everyone at school knew about my secret.

She offered to take the post down, but I said it was too late. She apologised, and said she hadn't realised that people would guess it was about me.

We're still friends, but I don't really trust her with private information any more. Although I know she didn't mean any harm, and I think she was quite sincere in her apology when it eventually came, I don't think I will ever forget how awful it was to see my deepest secrets posted online for all the world to see.

4.3 Imagine that the person you wanted the apology from was Indonesian. Would this make any difference to your expectations about whether they should apologise, or how or when they should apologise? Explain your answer.

If this person is an Indonesian, I think I would expect the same from them. I would still expect them to apologise and I would still be very upset if they didn't. However, I probably would not ring to tell them how I felt. I would ask to talk to them in person so they can see that I am more upset than angry at what they've done. This is because I understand that in some countries, there is no concept of privacy. Not all information that is obtained by someone is considered private, especially if that information is given freely by the person concerned. Perhaps they would think that if I didn't want the information to be known, I should not have shared it in the first place.

4.4 Imagine that the situation was reversed and an Australian was the 'offender' and an Indonesian was in your position. Would this make any difference to the situation? Explain your answer.

I think the Indonesian person would still be upset, mainly because they might lose face because of the information being available to everyone. The difference would probably be in the way they handle the situation. They may or may not approach the Australian person to tell them how they feel. I know Indonesians do not like confrontation and, to maintain harmony, they would rather avoid contact with the person who has caused the disharmony. However, if these two people are good friends, I think the Indonesian person would find a way to let the Australian person know they are upset.