

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ BÜYÜK ŞİRKETLER, KRİZ YÖNETİMİ SIRASINDA NASIL ÖZÜR DİLEME STRATEJİLERİ KULLANIYOR? BİR TÜR ANALİZİ ÇALIŞMASI

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Özet

Bu makale, şirketlerin iddia edilen hata veya suistimal iddiaları sonrasında yaptıkları kurumsal özürleri, kriz yönetiminin önemli bir parçası ve kendine özgü bir tür olarak ele almaktadır. Tür analizi yöntemiyle, Türkiye'deki büyük şirketlerin özür dileme süreçleri, bu özürlerin amaçları ve kullanılan iletişim stratejileri incelenmektedir. Çalışma, büyük şirketlerin kamuoyuna yönelik yayınladığı 14 özür metnine odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma, bu özürlerin sadece itibar ve güveni yeniden kazanmayı hedeflemediğini, aynı zamanda iletişimde bir pazarlık süreci ve stratejik bir konumlandırma aracı olarak kullanıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular, tür analizinin önemini vurgularken, kriz yönetimi uzmanlarına etkili özür stratejileri konusunda değerli içgörüler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kurumsal Özürler, kriz yönetimi, tür analizi, itibar onarımı, iletişim stratejileri

HOW APOLOGY STRATEGIES ARE EMPLOYED BY LARGE CORPORATIONS IN TURKEY DURING CRISIS MANAGEMENT: A GENRE ANALYSIS STUDY

Abstract

This article examines corporate apologies following alleged misconduct or offenses as a distinct genre, emphasizing their frequent appearance and critical function in crisis management. Employing genre analysis, it scrutinizes the objectives and communication strategies utilized in large corporate apologies within Turkey. The study centers on 14 public apologies issued by major companies to Turkish audiences amidst allegations of misconduct. It reveals that these apologies aim not only to restore reputation and regain trust but also to participate in communicative negotiation and strategic positioning. The study's implications emphasize the importance of genre study methodologies and offer insights for crisis management practitioners on effective apology practices.

Key words: Corporate apologies, crisis management, genre analysis, reputation repair, communication strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Compared to denial, downplaying the issue, making excuses, or not responding, an apology is generally seen as a better way for companies to fix their reputation and regain trust. However, apologizing makes the company seem more responsible for the crisis (Benoit, 1995; Fuoli et al., 2017; Koehn, 2013; Hearit, 1995; Wynes, 2022; Coombs and Holladay, 2008). Hearit (2006) created a model to guide how companies should apologize based on ethical standards. However, it's important to remember that apologizing is mainly a social action, shaped by the norms of any given society or culture (Holmes, 1990; Owen, 2019). Hearit's model, as explained by Frandsen and Johansen (2010), doesn't fully address the complex and varied practices of corporate apologies across different cultures.

This paper presents a comprehensive examination of apologies issued by large corporations (LCs) to people in Turkey. It becomes essential for a corporation to issue these apologies when it commits an error, such as a product failure, ecological disturbance, social or ethical mistake. This study covers both Turkish companies operating merely in the country and international firms that give service in other countries besides Turkey. The study aims to explore the intricacies of these corporate apologies, analyzing how they are constructed and presented to the public besides focusing on explaining how these apologies achieve balance between using standardized, often formal language and meet the specific communication intentions of the companies. This includes addressing and settling the issue, holding or reestablishing public trust, and keeping the corporation's reputation. The findings of this study seek to offer practical recommendations for professionals involved in crisis management. Understanding the dynamics of effective corporate apologies enable these professionals to more effectively manage crises, ensuring that apologies are perceived as genuine and fulfill their communication goals (Marsen, 2020; Coombs, 1995). This involves preserving or rebuilding the corporation's reputation, mitigating adverse public sentiment, and promoting accountability and transparency. This study will utilize genre analysis, a method pioneered by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), to scrutinize corporate apologies because it specializes in the analysis of text-based communication. Apologies in linguistics are often examined either as speech acts or as integral aspects of larger social interactions. Apologies from corporations, especially when responding to allegations of wrongdoing, represent a distinct form of communication due to their prevalence during crises and their specific goals and constraints (Arendt et al., 2017; Patel and Reinsch, 2003). Page (2014) suggests that despite cultural differences, the structure and content of corporate apologies are exhibited as a distinct communication event within organizations.

Most people contend that the main objective of corporate apologies in crisis is to foster and rebuild the company's reputation (Coombs et al., 2010). This viewpoint reflects the understanding that when faced with crises like product recalls, service disruptions, or ethical scandals, corporations strategically utilize apologies to preserve or regain public trust and confidence (Lewicki and Brinsfield, 2017). According to Goffman (1971), an apology serves as a social mechanism that enables individuals or entities committing misconduct to acknowledge their mistakes, express regret, and request forgiveness from those influenced. Goffman (1971) contends that an efficient apology should have several key elements: acknowledging the mistake, displaying sincere regret, and seeking forgiveness which are crucial for both personal and corporate apologies. The earnestness of these apologies is often evaluated by how obviously the company accepts its mistake, shows sincere regret, and endeavors to correct the situation and avert possible occurrences in the future (Fuoli et al., 2017; Page, 2014; Sandlin and Gracyalny, 2018). This research seeks to assess how

successfully large corporations (LCs) achieve these essential elements in their apologies during crises.

Turkey is an excellent country to investigate this subject because Turkish people are becoming more conscious of public problems and their right to be apologized if they suffer from a wrongdoing (Ruhi, 2006). For example, in 2017, Yasar Holding, a large company operating in diverse business areas ranging from food, tourism, agricultural production to energy sectors in Turkey, was demanded by some people who thought their political sensitivities were disregarded by the chairman of the company. In 2011, Onur Air which is one of the prominent corporations in air passenger transportation in Turkey had to apologize for the start-up of an aid campaign thought by a group of masses humiliating the families of martyrs and earthquake victims in Van province. In 2021, because the oven offered for sale did not match the specifications on the poster, BIM, a chain of discount markets based in Turkey apologized for the wrongdoing. In 2023, Çiçeksepeti, an online platform company that provides online flower, gift and gourmet gift delivery services had to apologize to its users due to a mistake by one of the sellers registered on the platform for trying to make a terrorist organization look likable. In 2015, due to flight cancellations and delays that victimized thousands of people in Turkey, Turkish Airlines (THY) apologized to its passengers for the inconvenience they caused. In 2021, users of Ziraat Bank, Akbank and Garanti Bank which are the leading banks in Turkey experienced difficulties accessing online mobile banking for some time and the banks apologized to its users by publishing tweets due to the disturbance they caused to them. In 2019, Turk Telekom, a giant company providing telecommunication services to Turkey, victimized its users with serious communication disruptions after the earthquake taking place in Istanbul and then the company issued a message of apology due to this shortcoming. Vodafone, another communication giant operating in Turkey accidentally sent an emergency message to some of its users in the early hours of the morning, alarming and frightening them in 2021 and following this mistake, the company issued a letter of apology to its customers. In 2024, Patiswiss, a chocolate and dessert production company based in Turkey, apologized to its customers after it had been discovered that some of their products were sold even though they were moldy. Doğadan Cay, a Turkish brand manufacturing herbal tea, issued an apology letter for a sexist commercial in 2015. Ülker, a giant food manufacturing company in Turkey and operating in many different countries, had to apologize for an advertisement that called for a political coup in 2017. Hasbro Turkey, a game and toy company based in the United States, was forced to issue a letter of apology for sexually explicit advertising to its customers in Turkey in 2016.

1.1. Genre as an Analytical Tool

Genre-based analysis is a highly recognized approach for examining professional communication (Bhatia, 2008). According to John Swales (1990), a genre is a category of communicative events that share common communicative goals. Besides these goals, examples of a genre also display similarities in structure, style, content, and the intended audience (Hyland, 2002). The evident suggestion is that, while various elements can be examined in genre analysis, the core of a genre resides in its communicative purpose, which directs us to its ideological roles (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). Each text within a given genre shares a common communicative objective, which is achieved through various rhetorical functions and more specific actions, referred to as moves and strategies (Swales, 1990). A move is a part of a text that fulfills a specific purpose, such as confirming confirmation of message delivery. A strategy is the method used to accomplish this move, like highlighting a particular point. Moves may include steps (Bhatia, 1993), which are basically various

strategies employed to accomplish a move. Just as each step's role contributes to fulfilling the broader goal of a move, each move contributes to achieving the overarching communicative objective of a genre.

Analyzing moves, steps, and strategies can be a powerful tool not only to uncover implicit or individual purposes (Bhatia, 1995) in contexts like examining the part of promotion in proposals for grants and analyses of published works (Bhatia, 2004) and scrutinizing the orientations and biases inherent in news reporting (Fairclough, 1992), but also for describing how these elements are realized to achieve socially recognized communicative goals. Therefore, employing a genre analysis approach can provide a valuable framework for investigating the interplay between conventional form, underlying purposes and stylistic choices, indicating its relevance for examining the communicative purposes of corporate apologies (Askehave and Swales, 2001; Swales, 2004).

Genres, as often highlighted, serve as intermediaries between the distinctive characteristics of specific contexts and the recurring features across contexts, all of which are embedded within and shaped by the broader historical and socio-political context (Bhatia, 2004; Belcher, 2023; Richardson et al., 2012; Miller, 1984). Given that contextual factors often necessitate deploying various structures within the same genre to achieve communicative goals, it becomes compelling to perceive genres as evolving, diverse, and adaptable rather than restrictive (Swales, 1990, 2004). The flexibility of genres to accommodate contextual variations suggests the possibility for genres to be manipulated to redefine situations by deploying variables, shaping style and information, and creating stylistic and informational equivalence, among other possibilities (Wallin, 2008). Considering the multifaceted nature of generic forms (Bhatia, 2008a), it is logical to reinterpret the communicative goals of a genre within specific contexts as adapting the genre for a temporarily established set of social goals (Askehave and Swales, 2001).

Genre studies become incredibly useful for understanding corporate apologies when they consider not just the format of apology, but also the social and cultural forces that influence it (Yin, 2016; Miller and Shepherd, 2009). This is because the corporate apology can be considered an emerging genre that is relatively limited in its scale and scope, tied to the specific networks of business, yet it also encompasses somewhat broader, global interactions spanning across organizations, institutions, and society (Goss, 2003; Coe and Yeung, 2015). Studying textual organization, linguistic strategies, and discursive tactics utilized to achieve the communicative goals of corporate apologies is expected to reveal the true intentions of corporate entities (Fuoli and Paradis, 2014). This analysis would also be valuable for discussing whether these strategies are commonly accepted by Turkish society. In this regard, genre analysis, as a method of textual analysis, offers a robust theoretical foundation for examining the dynamic nature of corporate apologies and the interaction between micro-level practices and norms within larger societal contexts (Fuoli and Paradis, 2014).

2. MATERIAL AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research analyzes 14 genuine apologies delivered by large corporations through various means like letters, statements, and announcements directly presented by large corporations (LCs) to Turkish consumers during the years of 2011-2024. These apologies were delivered online publicly after the LCs were accused of wrongdoing or violating the rights of Turkish customers. The data gathered from various media sources like newspapers,

social media accounts and internet could be classified into various types based on the themes of the crises. The apologies cover different topics, including violating political sensitivities, fake products, infringement of social values, customer victimization, disruption in service, communication breakdown, disrespect for sensitive public values, sex discrimination, safety concerns and sexual content. To achieve the research objectives, the study explores the following questions:

1. What are the intended outcomes of these apologies by large corporations?
2. How are these reasons expressed through language?

First, the data will be examined to identify the different rhetorical techniques used in this type of communication and to discuss how language is used to carry them out. In this paper, the limits of the text are defined according to the criteria suggested by Paltridge (1994), rather than specific linguistic markers. According to Paltridge (1994), Recognizing the structure of a text entails grasping its cognitive limits concerning convention, appropriateness, and content, rather than merely its linguistic boundaries.

Once these techniques are identified, the study will explore the underlying intentions of the large companies (LCs) by analyzing how they use language and discourse to achieve their goals. Specifically, the study focuses on how LCs accept responsibility and express regret, which are key aspects of evaluation. Unless specified otherwise, all translations of the examples examined in this study are made by the researcher. The original Turkish names of the large corporations (LCs) are provided in parentheses.

3. FINDINGS

Only a small number of the apologies in the dataset have a heading or title in bold and larger font than the rest of the text many of which start with various phrases like to the attention of the public, our valued customers, notification message and end with clauses and phrases like we respectfully announce to the public, with our best regards, or just the name of the company or board chairman. In addressing the audience, the phrases our valued customers, to the attention of our most valued customers, our very dear customers are used to show respect, enhance the standing of Turkish customers and imply how valuable the customers are for the LCs to mitigate the wrongdoing or inconvenience they caused to the consumers and users. Moreover, by aligning with the Turkish way of addressing, the adopted linguistic approach is seen to promptly pacify Turkish customers. The typical framework of rhetorical moves can be outlined as follows:

First move: Launching the crisis sequence

Second move: Softening the effect

Third move: Presenting an explanation

Fourth move: Make an apology

Fifth move: Guaranteeing corrections and/or reminding

Sixth move: Closing

The six moves outlined define and organize the key components or characteristics of large corporate apologies in Turkey. Moves 1 and 6 create a structural framework for the other moves, which are responsible for conveying the message's content. The apology appears in central moves 2, 3, 4, and 5, serving as a foundation for the LCs' message and achieving the communicative goals that define the genre. In some cases, the order of Moves 2, 3, and 4 can vary and an apology statement or announcement did not appear right at the start of the

message. The first move in this genre usually positioned following a headline or an opening greeting is launching the crisis sequence. This move primarily introduces and initiates the communicative process by providing reference information that connects the message to an purported misconduct or violation. It reviews the crisis event and updates its current status. The example given below showcases this communicative purpose.

(1) Interruptions caused by technical problems in our bank's mainframe computers continue. All channels through which we serve our customers are affected by this problem. Our relevant units and technology business partners continue to work for a solution. We apologize for the disruptions in our services during this period and thank you for your understanding. (Akbank)

The second move, softening the effect, is focused on mitigating any potential negative consequences resulting from the alleged misconduct or violation. This involves using language elements designed to lessen the perceived harm or to frame the wrongdoing in a way that suggests it is not as severe or significant as it might initially appear. This could include employing phrases that downplay the impact, offering explanations that contextualize the behavior, or highlighting aspects that portray the company's actions in a less severe light. The goal is to manage perceptions and reduce the severity of the wrongdoing in the eyes of the audience.

(2) Ziraat Mobile is experiencing some partial access problems due to intense demand. You can perform your transactions smoothly through our other channels. We apologize for the access problem and thank you for your understanding. (Ziraat Bankası).

In Example 2, the bank's choice of the quantifier "some" and the adjective "partial" indicates a deliberate attempt to downplay the severity of the service disruption. Furthermore, the bank aims to reassure Turkish customers by concluding the apology message with gratitude for their anticipated understanding. Additionally, the bank portrays itself as a highly sought-after institution by using the phrase intense demand, subtly suggesting that it is burdened by the overwhelming demands of its clientele, thereby positioning itself as somewhat of a victim in the situation.

The third step in the corporate apology process involves the strategic use of language to explain the wrongdoing. This stage usually includes offering explanations or accounts for the incident, often shifting some accountability to outside forces or third parties. At the same time, ambiguous language quantifiers like "some," "a few," or "partial"—are utilized to lessen the impact of the misconduct. Vague wording and minimized details help diminish the perceived gravity of the situation. Additionally, the message is meticulously crafted to safeguard the company's reputation by underscoring its moral standards, previous positive impacts, or ongoing steps to rectify the situation. This strategy seeks to restore stakeholder confidence, preserve credibility, and limit reputational harm.

The apologizer strives to manage perceptions, reduce reputational damage, and uphold trust while admitting fault by mixing explanations, ambiguous language, and positive framing. Moreover, the company frequently attempts to portray itself as a victim of circumstances in this stage, subtly deflecting full responsibility and seeking forgiveness. This victimization strategy aims to evoke empathy and understanding from stakeholders, helping to ease negative perceptions and maintain goodwill. The strategic use of language in this phase is key to shaping the narrative surrounding the incident and influencing how the company's actions are perceived afterward. The following examples illustrate how Turkish corporations apply these strategies in their apologies:

(3) Since the Simfer branded midi oven we offer for sale in our stores does not match the product specifications on the poster, it has been decided to recall the products sold. We expect our customers who purchased the product to return it to the nearest BIM store and we apologize for the mistake made. (Bim)

BIM, a prominent retail chain, recognizes a mismatch between the advertised features of the Simfer-branded midi oven and the actual product available in its stores. Instead of admitting a mistake in labeling or marketing, the company frames the problem as an opportunity to demonstrate its dedication to accountability. BIM shifts the focus from a potential mistake to a simple technical mismatch by phrasing it as 'not matching the poster'. The wording diminishes the seriousness of the situation, making it appear to be a trivial difference rather than a critical product defect.

Additionally, BIM is positioning the recall as a demonstration of their commitment to customer satisfaction, rather than a reaction to external pressures. The phrase "it has been decided to recall the products sold" finely avoids assigning direct blame, while emphasizing that the company is taking rapid action to solve the issue. BIM also implements a customer-focused approach by politely asking customers to return the product to the nearest store and offering an earnest apology. This tactic works to preserve customer trust, framing the recall as a responsible, customer-oriented action, rather than a sign of their own negligence.

(4) We are deeply saddened by the comments made on social media about our campaign video we prepared to announce our new product. We would like to sincerely state that we did not set out with the mentioned purpose. Therefore, we would like to let you know that we understand the sensitivity of our valued consumers and that we have removed our campaign video. (Doğadan Çay)

The company structured their apology to both recognize the negative feedback to their video and to highlight their good intentions and their quick response. Instead of directly acknowledging the mistake, they express regret over social media comments, subtly shifting focus and depicting the issue as a misunderstanding rather than an error. The phrase "we sincerely state that we did not intend the perceived offense" redirects attention to how the audience perceives the situation rather than implying any fault on the company's side. At the same time, they acknowledge consumer sensitivity, positioning themselves as empathetic and considerate of public concerns. Their decision to remove the video emphasizes their sensitivity and responsibility to acting in the best interests of their consumers, helping to generate positive feelings and moves the focus from the problem to the solution.

(5) As the Türk Telekom Family, the earthquake that occurred during the mobile technology renewal works for uninterrupted and more secure communication caused disruptions in our network. We deeply regret not being able to provide uninterrupted communication to our mobile subscribers for a while. We sincerely apologize for this negative experience and thank our customers for their patience and understanding. (Türk Telekom)

Türk Telekom is using its statement to position the network problems because of a natural disaster, thereby avoiding any admission of any shortcomings on their end. By linking the issue to an earthquake that occurred during mobile technology updates, the company diverts focus from possible weaknesses in infrastructure or planning. The statement "we deeply regret" expresses empathy and recognizes the inconvenience caused but avoids explicitly accepting direct responsibility. By emphasizing the external cause, Türk Telekom portrays itself as a victim of unexpected events rather than a party responsible for the issue. The apology for failing to deliver "uninterrupted communication" subtly recognizes the disruption while reaffirming their typical dedication to reliability. Lastly, thanking customers

for their patience and understanding builds goodwill, encouraging a response of empathy rather than frustration.

(6) A statement clarifying the purpose of the commercial and its subsequent parts was released to the public to prevent any confusion. Nonetheless, despite this explanation, this negative campaign, which attempted to inject diverse interpretations or meanings into the commercial, escalated to the extent of including 'insults and threats' against our brand/company. As a company that has been producing for this country since 1944 and satisfying its consumers with its products, Ülker is aware that it is an important value of our nation and our country. Ülker is also aware of the value that our nation attaches to Ülker. In addition, a comprehensive investigation has been initiated by our company, all the relevant persons have been suspended, and criminal complaints will be filed against anyone who is negligent and/or intentional, as well as administrative measures. We would like to take this opportunity to apologize to all our citizens who have been hurt by this unfair perception. On the other hand, we would like to thank our nation for standing by us and wishing us well in this process.) (Yıldız Holding)

Ülker's statement tactfully frames the controversy over its commercial as arising from how others misinterpreted it rather than any error on their side. By explaining that they issued a clarification "to prevent confusion," the company implies that the negative responses arose from misunderstandings rather than flaws in the advertisement. The term "negative campaign" reinforces this notion, suggesting that the backlash was not organic but a deliberate effort to weaken the brand. By highlighting insults and threats, Ülker positions itself as a victim, changing attention from the commercial's content to the seemingly aggressive behavior of those criticizing it. The mention of serving the nation since 1944 reminds patriotism and enduring trust, subtly indicating that the company's long-standing reputation should compensate for the controversy. The apology is thoroughly worded, stating regret for the damage caused by "unfair perception" instead of undertaking responsibility for the company's actions, further deflecting the blame. Lastly, the announcement of an internal investigation and personnel suspensions is a deliberate move to demonstrate accountability and professionalism, designed to reassure the public while evading direct admission of fault. Bhatia (2004) argues that when potential causes of wrongdoing are presented in a different light, regardless of their truthfulness, they are often accepted without challenge. He suggests that even though explanations and apologies are different, they happen in a similar social setting, which lets companies create specific ways of communicating to reach their goals. By mixing these discourses, companies strategically manipulate apology customs to escape accountability. This interdiscursive connection exploits the perceived trustworthiness of the explanatory genre to divert responsibility in corporate apologies. Language such as "unavoidable reasons" is intentionally used to display events as fated, thus shifting blame and mitigating the alleged responsibility. The following apologies illustrate how linguistic choices shape the narratives of responsibility in corporate communication.

(7). Atatürk Airport is effectively closed due to heavy weather conditions. Many of our passengers were victimized for reasons beyond our control. We apologize to all our passengers.
(Türk Hava Yolları)

The statement tactfully uses the term "beyond our control" to evade responsibility from the airport authorities, portraying the disruptions as an inevitable consequence of extreme weather conditions rather than a failure in management or readiness. The message implies that the closure was an unavoidable necessity rather than a decision that could have been prevented by describing Atatürk Airport as "effectively closed". The phrase "many of our passengers were inconvenienced" admits the impact on passengers in a neutral tone, escaping any direct admission of blame. The apology at the end expresses regret, but since the responsibility has already been ascribed to uncontrollable weather, it serves more as an

expression of sympathy rather than an acceptance of responsibility. This strategy allows the airport to protect its image and reduce negative public feedback regarding its response.

Two additional key observations in Move 3 demand further consideration. Firstly, although this move illustrates clear form-function relationships, it is less standardized when compared to other moves within the genre. For instance, as demonstrated in example 6, LCs highlight their favorable reputation among Turkish consumers while acknowledging the misconduct. This dual purpose becomes even more apparent when analyzing Move 5. Second, within this obligatory and frequently detailed stage of explaining misconduct, LCs occasionally leverage it to request forgiveness, denounce the wrongdoing, and portray themselves as victims, thereby adding further complexity to the narrative.

(8) Our campaign, whose aim was to draw attention on social media to help the families of our martyrs and earthquake victims, has been terminated due to some of our followers who did not understand this. We apologize to our followers for the misunderstandings. (Onur Air).

Onur Air's statement subtly shifts responsibility onto its audience by blaming the campaign's cancellation on "misunderstandings by some followers" instead of admitting any internal shortcomings. By presenting the situation in this way, the company positions itself as a victim of misunderstanding rather than confronting possible flaws in the campaign's execution or communication. Emphasizing the campaign's noble objective—assisting the families of martyrs and earthquake victims—portrays Onur Air as well-intentioned, suggesting that the criticism was unnecessary. The apology centers on the "misunderstandings" rather than addressing any genuine errors, reinforcing the idea that the company was not responsible for the issue. This approach helps protect Onur Air's reputation by implying that the controversy arose from external miscommunication rather than any fundamental shortcomings in the campaign.

(9) Due to the high demand for our digital services, we are experiencing access problems on our digital channels. We apologize for the inconvenience experienced by our customers. (Garanti Bankası).

Garanti Bank's statement skillfully blames the access issues on "high demand," presenting the problem because of the bank's popularity and success rather than a fault in its infrastructure. By redirecting attention to external factors, particularly increased user activity—the statement avoids accountability while maintaining a favorable brand image. The wording, "we are experiencing access problems," uses neutral language, evading any admission of internal deficiencies or insufficient preparation. The final apology recognizes customer inconvenience, but it fails to take direct responsibility, implying that the situation was beyond the bank's control. This approach not only reassures customers but also subtly reframes a technical issue as a sign of robust consumer trust and engagement.

In the fourth stage of the corporate apology process, large corporations (LCs) formally offer apologies to their Turkish customers. This step follows the previous phase, in which LCs provide an explanation or justification for the misconduct or incident. This sequence indicates that apologies are typically given only after offering context or clarification about the events, ensuring customers have a clear grasp of the situation before the apology is issued.

A key insight from the data is that all the apologies analyzed were conveyed in a clear and explicit manner. This straightforward approach highlights the transparency and clarity with which large corporations (LCs) communicated their regrets and acknowledgments to

their customers. By avoiding ambiguity, these companies aim to convey sincerity and accountability in their responses.

(10) We would like to apologize to anyone who felt disturbed. (Hasbro Türkiye)

The use of clear and direct language in corporate apologies demonstrates a strong commitment to transparency and respect for customers. Companies aim to rebuild trust and demonstrate accountability for their misconduct by explicitly expressing regret without ambiguity. This direct approach reassures customers that their concerns are being recognized and addressed earnestly. Furthermore, by avoiding vague or evasive language, companies emphasize their dedication to honest and open communication, which helps strengthen their relationship with consumers and fosters long-term brand credibility.

11. We would like to apologize for the access problem and thank you for your understanding. (Vodafone)

Vodafone's apology is straightforward and brief, openly addressing the access issue while appreciating customers' patience and understanding. By acknowledging the problem and expressing gratitude for their cooperation, the statement remains courteous and respectful, reinforcing its positive connection with the clients.

Although it appears near the end of the message, the fifth step—ensuring corrective actions and/or reaffirming the company's commitment—plays a crucial role in resolving the crisis and restoring the corporation's damaged reputation. In some cases, the apologies analyzed included detailed lists of corrective actions, often formatted as key points to improve clarity and readability. By underscoring the importance of Turkish customers and providing clear actions to prevent future incidents, this action endeavors to rebuild customer confidence and earn forgiveness. The example below shows how this is done.

12. We apologize for this regrettable situation, and we would like to inform the public that we will be much more careful to prevent similar situations and to prevent the opening of similar products by our sellers.) (Çiçeksepeti)

This statement doesn't just recognize the issue; it also demonstrates the company's commitment to fixing it by defining precise preventative measures. By declaring that they will "be much more careful" and detailing steps to prevent similar incidents, the company not only shows awareness of the problem but also reassures customers that concrete corrective measures are being implemented. By taking action beyond a simple apology, this strategy establishes a sense of responsibility through the implementation of real improvements. This transparency fosters trust and signals a sincere commitment to preventing errors and ensuring high-quality service.

In instances where no specific corrective actions are proposed, some large corporations (LCs) employ an alternative move referred to as "reminding." This strategy allows LCs to emphasize their previously established positive image or past good deeds to the Turkish public. Among the apologies examined, only Yildiz Holding, Yasar Holding, and Patiswiss included references to their company's positive image following the description of remedial actions, as seen in sample 6. This tactic aims to reinforce the perception of the company's integrity and commitment to positive contributions despite the occurrence of a transgression or issue.

13. Yaşar Group has been producing, providing employment and contributing to our country's economy with its companies and brands for 71 years in the light of its corporate values, without compromising its ethical stance, standing at an equal distance to every institution, organization and individual. (Yasar Holding)

In this statement, Yasar Holding employs the "reminding" strategy to emphasize its positive reputation and longstanding contributions to society. The company reminds its audience of its enduring economic presence by emphasizing its 71 years of production, employment, and contribution to the country. The mention of "corporate values" and maintaining an "ethical stance" further strengthens the company's integrity, suggesting that its actions consistently align with high moral principles, even during current difficulties. This strategy reinforces trust and reaffirms the company's dedication to its core principles.

The phrase "standing at an equal distance to every institution, organization, and individual" further underlines the company's assurance of objectivity and impartiality, showing itself as a responsible and balanced entity in its relations with the public and other stakeholders. This approach goes beyond merely reflecting on past achievements; it is a deliberate tactic to remind the audience of Yasar Holding's enduring contributions and favorable reputation. By doing so, the company seeks to counteract any negative perceptions or criticisms arising from the current situation, reinforcing its image as a reliable and ethical organization.

This reminder functions as a carefully planned crisis management strategy. In the absence of explicit corrective actions, the company highlights its positive track record to uphold trust and loyalty among its customers, bolstering the public's perception of its integrity and long-standing dedication to ethical practices and social contributions. By stressing its history, the company seeks to remind consumers that its past actions exhibit reliability and consistency despite the present challenge. This method helps to mitigate potential damage to its reputation by redirecting attention to its proven reliability and enduring principles.

14. As the Patiswiss brand, we work hard to make sure that our products remain fresh and healthy throughout their shelf life. We see every feedback as an opportunity to improve our products. (Patiswiss)

Patiswiss's statement employs a "reminder" strategy to emphasize its continuous focus on quality and customer satisfaction. By stating their dedication to product freshness and health throughout shelf life, they underpin their dedication to quality. This strategy not only stresses their high standards but also raises openness by explicitly revealing their efforts to provide product quality.

Furthermore, "We see every feedback as an opportunity to improve our products" shows Patiswiss's sensitivity to consumer feedback portraying them as a customer-centric company. By focusing on these positive attributes, Patiswiss aims to maintain its reputation for trustworthiness. In the context of an apology, these reminders help lessen the impact of the current issue by reinforcing their history of quality and customer dedication, reassuring customers of their integrity and commitment to improvement.

In the final move of closing, different companies do not adhere to a standardized pattern. Some firms choose to conclude by expressing gratitude towards their customers, with three companies specifically thanking them for their understanding, and two using the phrase "with our best regards." Four companies opted for a formal closure, stating "we respectfully

announce to the public." Interestingly, only six companies ended their apologies by explicitly stating their company name, while others concluded their apologies without any specific marking at the end. This variability in closure styles reflects the diverse approaches companies take in formally concluding their apologies to the public.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that large corporate apologies in Turkey, like other genres, are relatively formulaic with a recognizable organizational structure designed to serve multiple communicative purposes. These purposes include direct communication about the current crisis, the impact of alleged wrongdoings, their causes, expressions of apology, remedial actions, and highlighting the corporation's achievements or good deeds. Additionally, these apologies subtly convey a minimal impact of the issue, projecting a sense of responsibility while implying no real fault. Direct purposes are achieved through structured communication moves such as updates on the situation, evaluations of the impact, identification of causes, formal apologies, remedies, and positive image reinforcement. Indirect purposes, such as minimizing the perceived impact, distancing from responsibility while appearing accountable, are achieved through the strategic use of linguistic and discursive resources, particularly by employing explanatory and promotional genres.

The data suggests that, along with the diversity of communicative purposes, the genre being analyzed shows underlying contradictions. These communicative purposes are so strongly connected that they are difficult to distinguish. Specifically, in the context of corporate apologies, this genre aims to appear as honest, genuine, and intended (Hearit, 2006) within the framework of Move 4. However, there is a hidden objective where large corporations (LCs) attempt to avoid responsibility through explanations and to restore their reputation through self-promotion. Although the phrase "We/I apologize" may sound apologetic, the surrounding context reveals that it is neither an admission of wrongdoing nor an expression of remorse. These language strategies seem to be attempts to release LCs from responsibility and guilt or to manipulate the Turkish customers. Recent studies indicate that reform signals in corporate apologies have a stronger impact on consumer trust than mere admissions of guilt, suggesting that emphasizing corrective actions may be more effective in restoring reputation (Hornsey et al., 2024).

This study looks at how crisis communication and apologies are used as strategies to handle crises, especially in the context of large corporate apologies in Turkey. Even though this type of apology is relatively new in Turkey, it shows both consistency and creativity in its structure. This study contributes to the limited body of research on corporate apologies in non-Western settings by revealing how Turkish cultural norms reshape typical apology structures. Such insights have rarely been discussed in the existing literature. It is consistent because some elements, like saying sorry and explaining what went wrong, are like those used in Western practices. This consistency supports the idea that there is a specific way corporate apologies are typically made.

Large corporations (LCs) show creativity by adapting their apology methods to align with the values and social norms of Turkish culture. For example, they employ respectful language when referring to Turkish people, illustrating how the local context influences corporate apologies (Kadar, 2007). However, the LCs' practice of providing explanations sometimes goes against or reshapes the sociocultural expectations of Turkish people. The method used to assign responsibility tends to emphasize blaming others rather than

considering the consequences. This intentional difference in approach helps to reveal the real motives of the large corporations (LCs) not to take responsibility themselves but to assign blame to someone else or invent an excuse. The tendency to shift blame to uncontrollable reasons or third parties as the sole cause of the problem may seem strange to many Turkish people. Although this study has concentrated on the language and discourse strategies used for these purposes, the limited number of apologies analyzed (only 14) means the findings should be considered suggestive rather than broadly applicable.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explores the genre of large corporate apologies, a relatively under-researched area compared to other professional genres. It examines how various communicative purposes are accomplished through the systematic structuring and linguistic patterns of this genre. This research suggests two important implications.

First, a holistic approach is necessary to examine examples of large corporate apologies. The current research focuses on the specific relationships between form and function. To support the principle of holism in professional discourse analysis, it is crucial to go beyond common modes of communication and consider typical participants and their reservoir of knowledge on navigating typical situations within their social community (Yeung, 2007; Askehave and Swales, 2001) by implementing a framework that incorporates multiple viewpoints and dimensions (Bhatia, 2008b). For a more profound comprehension of the cultural genre of corporate apologies, future research should advance holism by integrating linguistic analysis with a cultural perspective that accounts for national cultural differences (Swales, 1998). Recent frameworks such as multimodal genre analysis (Xia, 2020) or culturally-informed genre studies (Lim, 2020) offer promising avenues to examine corporate apologies within specific national and cultural contexts. Additionally, a contextual approach utilizing ethnographic techniques, such as reflective in-depth interviews, should be employed. This includes engaging with LCs (those responsible for apologies) and Turkish individuals (the recipients) to gain insights into their perspectives and experiences.

The second practical implication focuses on how crisis communication practitioners engaged in crisis management can apply the findings of this study. The research offers valuable insights into large corporate apologies, including the various communicative goals achieved through distinctive rhetorical features. It also explores strategies for fostering long-term relationships with intended recipients, employing diverse linguistic and discursive techniques across different stages of the apology process. For crisis management practitioners aiming to rebuild the reputation and trustworthiness of large corporations (LCs), it is advisable to customize the style and content of apologies to align with the sociocultural expectations of their intended audiences. This approach not only recognizes local variations (Oliveira, 2013) but also emphasizes the importance of specialized genre knowledge as a critical aspect of professional expertise.

This study offers a novel contribution by analyzing Turkish large corporate apologies through a genre-based lens, highlighting the interplay between global apology structures and localized cultural practices. By focusing on both linguistic strategies and implicit motives, it extends existing research beyond Western-centric models and provides a culturally grounded understanding of corporate discourse in Turkey.

6. REFERENCES

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