This study is a semantic and pragmatic analysis of the uses of three apology expressions in English: I’m/I am sorry, pardon me, and forgive me. Although English apologies have attracted considerable attention in the linguistic literature (e.g. Borkin and Reinhart 1978; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Fatigante et al. 2016; Page 2014), no study has compared the meanings and uses of these three expressions. For example, Borkin and Reinhart compare only excuse me and I’m sorry. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain investigate strategies of apology in general, without a focus on similarities and differences across the three expressions studied here. In addition, Borkin and Reinhart appear to use constructed rather than naturally occurring examples as data, and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain elicited constructed apologies with a Discourse Completion Test. English as a Second/Foreign Language Learners notably have a difficult time distinguishing among the uses of these apology expressions, thus making desirable a more detailed description of their use.

Based on 100 examples of each expression from the online Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Davies 2008-), and 100 examples of each expression in the online Corpus of American Soap Opera (CASO) (Davies 2011-) (total 600 tokens), I examine the ways
these expressions are used for certain offenses such as interrupting and making requests such as clarification, recasting, and repetition. The functions of *I’m/I am sorry* are also distinguished in terms of whether its use in specific contexts represents a real apology or an expression of sympathy. In addition, the frequency of each expression within the 600 tokens sat from COCA and CASO, and the co-occurrence of each with common intensifiers such as *so, very,* and *please* are examined. Common collocations as well as adjuncts, or utterances that accompany each expression, are also considered. These data serve as the basis for constructing a Behavioral Profile (Gries 2010) of the expressions to distinguish them and show how they overlap under some conditions.

The study should be a useful resource for both teachers and students of English as a Second/Foreign Language.