

THE RHETORIC OF PUBLIC APOLOGY AMID CALL-OUT CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a certain worldwide phenomenon surfaced in which public figures were shunned, ostracized, or as more popularly echoed, 'cancelled'. Referred to as cancel culture or call-out culture, it concerns individuals who did a form of misconduct, or alternatively, were alleged to have performed one. Carried within these cancel culture public apologies is a dynamic play of power through language between those who are being cancelled and thus apologize (the writers), and the people whom the apologies are aimed for (the readers). Drawing on Ng and Deng's (2017) descriptions of language and power relationship, the high social status or attractive personal qualities of the public figures may influence the power play in the public apologies at the micro level, as they are cancelled by the power of collective individuals who share the same beliefs in the allegations. In these public apologies, the figures who deliver the apology, usually the leaders representing a group of people, tend to keep a degree of social distance between them and the presumed target of the apology. The nature of public apologies representing a body of people is prone to having an impersonalized rhetoric. On the other hand, public apologies emerging from the cancel culture phenomenon come from well-known individuals who do not represent anyone else but themselves. Threats to their own career or reputation might motivate the apologies, and therefore there could be more pressure with the individuals being the main party carrying the burden. Aiming to reveal the rhetoric of public apologies amid cancel culture, this study utilizes the engagement system of appraisal theory in the analysis by considering the language through the frame of its interpersonal semantic feature.

Kata Kunci: *public apology, cancel culture, appraisal, engagement system, functional grammar*