Production and perception of apologies:
Interlanguage pragmatics of
British learners of Mandarin Chinese

Catherine Hua Xiang
University of Bristol

Speech act realization of apologies

- Define apology (Holmes 1990, p. 159):
  
  An apology is a speech act addressed to B’s face-needs and intended to remedy an offense for which A takes responsibility, and thus to restore equilibrium between A and B (where A is the apologizer and B is the person offended).

- The Existing Model (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981)
  - An Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID)
  - An explanation
  - Taking on responsibility
  - Offer of repair
  - A promise of forbearance
Politeness and face

- ‘Face’ is defined as ‘the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself’ (1987, p. 61).
- Cross-cultural difference of ‘face’ (Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998)

Culture as values: Individualism and Collectivism

**Individualism**
- Consider individual
- Distinguish forms of discourse less
- Pay attention to context less
- Express explicitly and directly
- People infer less

**Collectivism**
- Consider group
- Distinguish forms of discourse more
- Pay attention to context more
- Express implicitly and indirectly
- People infer more
  (Fukushima, 2000, p. 134)
Subjects

- Total number of subjects: 80
- Native British English speakers: 20 (NBs)
- Native Mandarin Chinese speakers: 20 (NCs)
- British advanced CSL learners: 20 (BCSLs)
- Chinese advanced ESL learners: 20 (CESLs)
- Age: 19-22
- Educational background: University students
- Gender: F (50%), M (50%)

Elicitation instruments

- Videoed Role Plays
- Production data analysis
- Evaluation questionnaires
- Individual interviews & focus groups
Role-play situations

1. You forgot to return a book on time to a professor.
2. You are seriously late for a job interview with the department manager.
3. Your mobile phone rings in a session with his/her personal tutor.
4. You got confused about the tutorial time and didn't show up.
5. You misrecognize a stranger as a friend on the street.
6. You provide the wrong deadline for handing the essay to a new school mate.
7. You promised a good friend to bring a DVD when visiting, but forgot.
8. You borrowed a mobile from a good friend to make a call but dropped it on the floor and it was broken.
9. You incidentally give less money to the shop assistant for your shopping.
10. You split hot soup on the waitress.
11. You promised to take your little cousin to a movie, but you couldn't go because of work.
12. You (the senior resident) had a party all night long in your flat and disturbed your flatmate preparing for her exam.

Different strategy preference

http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/CIKProceedings
Role Play Data: NB

Transcription of the NB video

A: Hello, how are all your courses going at the moment?
P: It’s, eh, it’s fine, thank you. I had a bit trouble with homework the other day.
(Mobile phone rings.)
P: Oh, sorry. Excuse me. It’s my phone. Eh. (Switches the phone off.)
A: Yeah, not really meant to have it on.
P: Sorry. Yes. No, I forgot to turn it off.
A: Ok. Don’t let it happen again.
P: Ok. Yeah. Sorry about that.
(A: Assistant; P: Participant)
Role Play Data: NC

Transcription of the NC video

P: 学习还可以。（My work has been ok.）
A: 刚上交给你布置的那么多作业有没有完全完成？（Have you done those assignments I told you to do last time?）
P: 有完成了。（I have done it.）
（Mobile phone rings.）
A: 老师,不好意思,我妈妈打电话给我。（Oh, teacher, sorry. It's my mum who phoned me.）
P: 没关系,我把手机关了吧。（Oh, no problem. I am turning my phone off.）
A: 好,你开手机影响我们上课。（Yeah, you see, the fact that your phone rang disturbed our tutorial.）
P: 对 对 对。（Right, right, right.）
A: 也影响我们思路了。（Also interrupts our thoughts.）
P: 对,打断老师了。（Yes, I interrupted you, teacher.）
A: 对我不好,对你也不好。（It's no good to me and no good to you.）
P: 大家都不好。（It's no good to everyone.）
A: 好,。（Yes, that's right.）
P: 下次不会再有这种事情了。（I won't let this kind of thing happen again in the future.）
A: 下次好好听。（Remember to turn your phone off next time.）
P: 没问题 没问题。（Yes, not problem, no problem.）
A: 好,那我们下面这道题再看一下。（Good. Let's take a look at the next question.）
Role Play Data: BCSL

Transcription of the BCSL video

A: 你最近学习忙吗? (Have you been busy studying recently?)
P: 比较忙。 (Yeah, quite busy.)
(Mobile phone rings.)
啊, 真不好意思, 这是我妈妈, 我应该接。 (Oh, really sorry. It’s my
mum. I should get it.)
(Stands up and walks away.)
A: 好吧 (Ok.)
P: 喂, 好, 我正在上课。再见。 (Hello, yes, I am in class. Ok. Bye.)
A: 是这样的。今后上课可不可以把手机关了或调成震动? 因为这样
会影响我们上课。 (Look. Could you please turn your phone off or
set it to vibration in the future. This disturbs our class.)
P: 这是因为我的奶奶正在住院。所以呢, 我应该知道最新的消息。
(This is because my grandma is in hospital. So, I need to know the
latest news.)
A: 哦, 是这样啊! 好, 我知道了。好, 我们再继续 (Oh, I see. I
understand. Let’s continue.)

http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/CJKProceedings
Evaluation of Necessity to Apologize

Evaluation of ‘Face-losing’

http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/CJKProceedings
‘Face-losing’ and Apology

British: I don’t know. Your standard, your dignity or your pride, whatever. I don’t think it should be affected if you apologize *when you are wrong*. Because there’s nothing wrong with apologizing if you’ve done something wrong. But I think it would be affected if you didn’t apologize if you’ve done something wrong. You know, you are not polite.

British: The action is face losing, the apology is face gaining. It’s not face losing to apologize, it’s how you start to rebuild, isn’t it? But in the situation you have lost face because you’ve done something bad and you feel ashamed.

British: If I was apologizing, I would *never consider* I might lose face if I apologize.

‘Face-losing’ and Apology

Chinese: *Mianzi jiushi ni zai beren yanzhong de xiangxiang, zhouni ren de tai du, betren dui ni de pingjia. Zhongguo ren youshi tai jiang mianzi, renjia de tai du ye hui jiaqing ni ziji de xiangxiang. Bir yijian xiaoshi, bing hushi name dui duan de xiaoshi, ruguo bu ren xiao yixia, ni ji jui juede zai zhongren mianqian xinli hui shuif, juede hen yao, jiu hui jude diu mianzi.* (Face is your own image in others’ eyes, others’ attitude as well as evaluation of you. Chinese sometimes just pay too much attention to ‘face’, what other people think might affect your own decision. For example, a tiny thing that is nothing to be ashamed of, if others laugh at you, you would feel uncomfortable deep inside in front of others, feeling depressed. That is to say you feel you have lost your face.)

Chinese: *Daoqian keding hui jude ziji diu mianz, xinli shuang bu neng jiehou, daoqian shi chengren ziji zuoqie cuoshi, hui gei ren liuxia hui de yinxian, ziran hui yu xiang mianzi, suoli aiyu mianzi, yihan bu hui daoqian.* (Apologizing is definitely face-losing and it is hard to accept because apologizing equals acknowledgement of one’s mistakes. Those mistakes might leave others a bad impression of you. So, for the sake of ‘face’, you’d better not apologize.)
Which is more important: ‘Face’ or ‘Fact’?

- British students didn’t think it is face-threatening to challenge the tutor.

B: To decide whether to apologize or not in this situation, face is not a concern. I think the driver in that situation is to do with whose fault it is and what the consequence of that action is to the person. So, I thought his response was reasonably appropriate, although he wasn’t apologizing necessarily. He said if and it’s conditional. Fair enough. I think it’s unjust if it’s automatically the student’s fault. There should be some negotiation.

B: I think it’s ok to question if they weren’t 100% sure. I think if you just go straight into an apology, it almost shows no thought for what you’ve done. I don’t know about face threatening but if you annoy your tutor, then you might find it a bit more difficult getting good grades in the future!

Which is more important: ‘Face’ or ‘Fact’?

- Chinese students felt strong necessity to save the face for their tutor especially when they believed they were right.

C: 我觉得脸面的重要性是学生和老师之间的。我觉得这是一个非常大的问题，因为如果老师不道歉，学生可能会对老师失去信心，进而影响到他们未来的学习。我认为，如果老师能够道歉，学生就会对他们有更多的信心，从而更加尊重老师。
Evaluation of Body Language

- **Native British**
  - Eye contact: direct eye contact is desirable
  - Facial expression: one needs to look embarrassed or sorrowful; a smile or laugh is not good
  - Body orientation: not too relaxed, sitting back is not good; leaning forward is good

- **Native Chinese**
  - Eye contact: one should look down
  - Facial expression: smile or laughter is good since it helps break the ice, helps relax the situation
  - Body orientation: not too relaxed; if the hearer is standing, the speaker shouldn’t be sitting

Conclusion

There are some differences found in:
1. Culturally specific apologies
2. Strategy preference
3. Perception towards ‘face’ and apology
4. Evaluation of body language

Cultural values, beliefs and concepts underpin the choices of apology strategies.
References:


References:

References: