

A Cross-Linguistic Study of Apology Styles between Iranian and Japanese Auto-Company Managers: Compensation in Focus

Mohammad Reza Jafari ^{1*}, Omid Tabatabaei ¹

1. English Department, Najafabad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Najafabad, Iran.

* Corresponding Author's Email: mohammad_jafari272@yahoo.com

Abstract – The purpose of this study was to examine Iranian and Japanese auto-company managers' perceptions of apologies with focus on compensation. The researcher conducted a survey questionnaire to identify the differences between them in terms of offering apology to the clients. The top managers were invited to participate in the study and interview via an appointment at different auto companies in Iran. Through being in touch with chief executive officers at Toyota and Mazda companies in Japan via email, they were invited to participate in the study as well. The sample of the research was formed by 30 Japanese managers and 30 Iranian's. The obtained results indicated that the managers evaluated the apology based on their cultural perspectives regarding the verbal and non-verbal elements of the apology. The findings showed that the Japanese managers were different from Iranians. In other words, Iranians rarely offered a simple apology, whereas Japanese offered apology with compensation especially when the severity of the offence was high. Hence, learning the cultural differences play an important role in a successful international business. The results of this study seem very effective and useful for L2 teachers. They can teach these cultural differences and aspects of speech acts of apology in English. It can also be helpful to enrich the related literature and learning aspects of sociolinguistics.

Keywords: apology styles, compensation, cross-cultural pragmatics, verbal and non-verbal elements of apology

I. INTRODUCTION

The word apology has emerged from the legal term *apologia*. To offer an apology means, representing a formal speech and explanation in order to reply to the charges. The main perception of the modern phrase to apologize is to make a formal statement against the charges. In 16th century, people started to employ apology to express regret and sorrow for a perpetration (Tavuchis, 1991).

Pragmatics is a study which emphasizes the perception of human linguistic interaction among interlocutors (Wierzbicka, 1991). Pragmatics describes how human beings can do different language functions through speeches. Levinson (1983) defines pragmatics as the systematic study that explains how human beings realize the intended meaning uttered by one.

Sometimes apology is simply saying I'm sorry, but it does not work all the time. It means that the apologizer is expected to offer more for the actions resulted in harm and damage experienced by another party; hence, the apologizer must accept a responsibility toward the wrong action and keep a promise to compensate for it. Otherwise, the apology is

hollow without taking responsibility and it leads to the loss of the relationship (Darby & Schlenker, 2012). Apology also exerts positive effects on relationships. When it is held with more responsibility, it can improve the relations. The more responsible the person is for the offence the more trust the offender earns (Gold & Weiner, 2000).

This study has focused on styles of apology between Iranian and Japanese auto company managers regarding compensation. The act of compensation helps the perpetrator to represent a real apology.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Barnlund and Yoshioka (1990) conducted a questionnaire study including 12 critical incidents drawn from interviews with 40 Japanese and American university students. The authors asked the interviewees to describe a recent incident in which someone had apologized to them and one in which they had apologized to someone else. Then they developed their questionnaire based on the interview data. The questionnaires were administered to 120 Japanese in Japan and 120 Americans in the United States. The results revealed that the Japanese seemed to prefer apologizing directly without explaining their actions. Although the Americans also seemed to prefer apologizing directly, they seemed to favor explanations as a form of apology in order to justify their acts. The promise of compensation was one of the frequent strategies used by Japanese. This preference was explained by the Japanese's collective concerns with restoring balance and social harmony for attending to others' needs, which seemed to supersede a desire to protect autonomy, self-esteem, and self-determination. The authors suggest that for the collectivistic Japanese, the group seems to take priority over the individual.

The reason of conducting this research upon this serious problem is that apology is not usually offered by Iranians, and if it is done, it's very weak without taking compensation, particularly on the part of managers and authorities who are in charge of the organizations and companies. Instead of apologizing, they justify the problem or shift the mistake onto another shoulder.

In line with the above mentioned problems and for the purpose of this study, the following question has been posed: Do Iranian auto-company managers keep their promise after apologizing in order to compensate for the perpetration or Japanese?

Based on this question, the following null hypothesis is mentioned: Neither Iranian auto-company managers nor Japanese managers keep their promise after apologizing in order to compensate for the perpetration.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants for this survey were 60 auto managers including financial managers, sales managers, and production managers with considerable experiences around 10 years and

more. They all had B.Sc. or M.Sc. in mechanical engineering or management at working several companies in two cities in Iran. 30 Iranian managers were invited to participate in this study and 30 Japanese managers with the same degrees were asked to join this research through questionnaires sent via email.

B. Instruments

A survey questionnaire has been developed to investigate how Iranian and Japanese manager styles of apology differ. The instrument used for data collection was Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The survey questionnaire measures managers' perceptions of the verbal and non-verbal components of apology. In order to insure the accuracy of the translation, the researcher had given both the English and the Persian questionnaire to professors of English language at Najafabad and Isfahan Universities for review and had taken their comments into consideration. The Cronbach alpha Coefficient reliability of the questionnaire was found to be .87. Needless to say, the aforementioned questionnaire enjoys an acceptable reliability.

C. Procedure

Iranian managers and authorities were worked for Iran Khodro Company. Japanese managers were working for Toyota and Mazda companies and their email addresses were accessed through Toyota and Mazda companies in Japan. Each participant received an email with a cover letter embedded into the body that introduced the study and provided a survey link. The Japanese participants completed a survey questionnaire via email. The Iranian participants were asked to complete the DCT, taking approximately 30 minutes. Each situation was explained in Persian to the participants by the researcher before they completed the questionnaire.

D. Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected in the current study, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21 was applied. The data analysis included the descriptive statistics for the questionnaire. Then chi-square analysis was employed to find out if there was any difference between the two groups of managers. In other to analyze the data, the quantitative analysis was used to gather data from DCT.

IV. RESULTS

A. Results of the DCT

The research question of this survey asked "Do Iranian auto-company managers keep their promise after apologizing in order to compensate for the perpetration or Japanese?" In order to come up with an answer to this question, the Iranian and Japanese managers' responses to every DCT were compared. The DCT was based on this scenario: When the

customers register for an auto in order to receive it in a specific period of time (for example one month), but you are not able to hand over the auto on time, yet you pay the financial damages. Which of the followings would you do because of your unpunctuality? (a) I only offer my apology, (b) I do not apologize and try to justify my perpetration, (c) I offer my apology and represent free services for one time, (d) I shift my fault onto another shoulder, and (e) other. The obtained frequencies for different answers by Iranian and Japanese managers are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of Apology Strategies Related to Accepting or Declining Perpetration

	I only offer my apology	I do not apologize and try to justify my perpetration	I offer my apology and represent free services for one time	I shift my fault onto another shoulder	Other
Japanese	8	0	22	0	0
Iranian	7	3	4	8	7

As could be noticed in Table 1, in all the choices of apology strategies, there were differences between the Japanese and Iranian managers. The largest difference was in the mid choice (i.e. I offer my apology and represent free services for one time) which was selected by 22 Japanese managers, while only 4 Iranian managers preferred to choose this alternative. The smallest difference, on the other hand, was in the leftmost choice (i.e. I only offer my apology) which was selected by 8 Japanese and 7 Iranian managers. Pearson Chi-square test was employed to figure out whether Iranian managers differed significantly from Japanese managers with regard to apologizing and accepting perpetration. Table 2 illustrates the results of the Chi-square analysis.

Table 2: Chi-Square Results for Comparing Iranian and Japanese Managers for Apology Strategies Accepting or Declining Perpetration

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	30.52	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	38.72	4	.000
N of Valid Cases	59		

The p value under the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) column in front of Pearson Chi-square was less than the specified level of significance (i.e. $.000 < .05$), the conclusion being that the difference between the frequencies of different apology strategies used by Japanese and Iranian

managers with respect to accepting or declining perpetration was statistically significant. These results are also graphically illustrated in Figure 1, below.

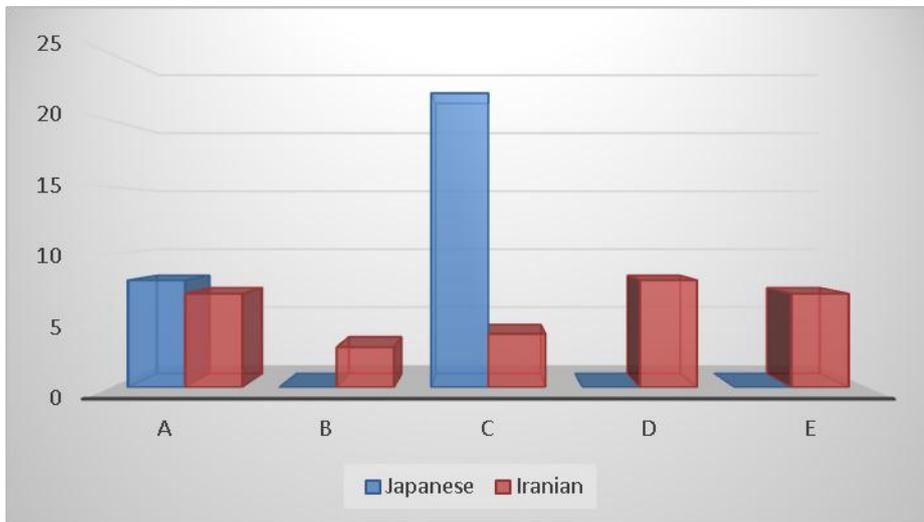


Figure 1: Comparing Iranian and Japanese Managers for Apology Strategies Related to Accepting or Declining Perpetration

In Figure 1, A refers to ‘I only offer my apology’, B to ‘I do not apologize and try to justify my perpetration’, C to ‘I offer my apology and represent free services for one time’, D to ‘I shift my fault onto another shoulder’ and finally E to ‘Other’. The only noticeable difference where Japanese managers had higher frequencies than Iranian managers was when they stated they would provide free services in order to compensate for their perpetration (Case C). In Case A (that is offering mere apologies), Japanese managers also outnumbered Iranians, but the difference was not substantial. Nevertheless, in the other three cases (i.e. not apologizing and trying to justify the perpetration, shifting one’s fault onto another’s shoulder, and others), Iranians selected more choices than did the Japanese managers.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section provides a specific discussion for the research hypothesis. The results of data analysis are discussed below.

Neither Iranian auto-company managers nor Japanese managers keep their promise after apologizing in order to compensate for the perpetration. As mentioned in previous section, in all the choices of apology strategies, there were differences between the Japanese and Iranian managers. The largest difference was in the mid choice (i.e. I offer my apology and represent free services for one time) which was selected by 22 Japanese managers, while only 4 Iranian managers preferred to choose this alternative. The smallest difference, on the other hand, was in the leftmost choice (i.e. I only offer my apology) which was selected by 8 Japanese and 7 Iranian managers. The conclusion being that the difference between the frequencies of different apology strategies used by Japanese and Iranian managers with

respect to accepting or declining perpetration was statistically significant. The only noticeable difference where Japanese managers had higher frequencies than Iranian managers was when they stated they would provide free services in order to compensate for their perpetration (Case C). In Case A (that is offering more apologies), Japanese managers also outnumbered Iranians, but the difference was not substantial. Nevertheless, in the other three cases (i.e. not apologizing and trying to justify the perpetration, Shifting one's fault onto another's shoulder, and others), Iranians selected more choices than did the Japanese managers, so this hypothesis that there is no difference among them is rejected. The result indicated that Japanese managers showed were more responsible to the customers against unpunctuality than Iranian's.

As mentioned above apology plays a significant role in Japan. The reason that Japanese managers offer apology with more commitment is that whenever a mistake or wrongdoing is made, the perpetrator takes the full responsibility and tries his best to compensate the unpunctuality because customer's satisfaction is really important to him. In Japan it is believed that the satisfaction stores the trust of customers; consequently, the customers set to advertise for their products. Market and reputation are two considerable factors in their business. It means that they never want to lose this fame and stay behind the market around the world; moreover, taking the utmost pleasure in offering products that their customers love is genuinely crucial. In such situations, they always stop, strive to understand the problem, and make changes to improve further. They never run away from their problems or pretend they do not notice them. By making continuous improvements, they plan to continue offering even better products for society. In contrast, Iranian managers do not consider these important factors; such as, market, reputation and customer's voices. They do not accept the fault or run away from it because they believe that if they compensate the unpunctuality by giving free services to one client, then the other customers are informed and come to receive free services, so it costs a fortune for them.

Analysis of the responses which were provided by the participants indicated that Japanese managers apologize more than Iranians'. They compensate for the perpetration that they have committed, while Iranians rarely offer a simple apology or shift the fault onto another shoulder. When the severity of the offence is high, Japanese are more responsible for the wrong action and attempt to compensate it, whereas Iranian's justify it and do not compensate for it. Auto-company managers working for global organizations need to acquire sophisticated communication skills. They are supposed to interact with individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Competent global leaders should be aware of that how to communicate with culturally diverse customers while reducing the potential for misunderstanding. In that sense, corporate leaders need to acquire knowledge of culture-specific values that will enable them to ensure better understanding among interlocutors. Moreover, it will bring positive outcomes to the company.

REFERENCES

- Barnlund, D. C., & Yoshioka, M. (1990). Apologies: Japanese and American styles. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14, 193-206.
- Darby, B. W., & Schlenker, B. R., (2012). Peace and Conflict. *Journal of Peace Psychology*, 18(2), 109–130.
- Gold, G. J., & Weiner, B. (2000). Remorse, confession, group identity, and expectancies about repeating a transgression. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 22, 291–300.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tavuchis, N. (1991). *Mea culpa: sociology of apology and reconciliation*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1991). Cross-cultural semantics: *The semantics of human interaction (Trends in linguistics, Studies and monographs, 53)*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.