

Evaluation of Apology Episodes in Japan and the U.S.

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Introduction

This paper reports the results of a two-part study on cultural perceptions of offending situations that may require apology. Previous research on Japanese and U.S. American apology styles found that the two styles significantly differed, and so did their perceptions of the situations used as stimuli (Sugimoto, 1995). Unless similarly perceived situations are used to solicit apologies from Japanese and U.S. Americans, the differences in apology styles cannot be attributed to, with confidence, either differences in perceptions of individual situations or genuine differences in communicative styles of the two nationalities.

In order to find situations requiring apology which are similarly perceived in the two cultures, the first part of the current investigation aims to solicit, from its Japanese and U.S. American participants, apology situations which typically take place in daily interactions with others. In the second part of the study, perceptions of these situations are measured in the hope of finding appropriate situations to be used in future research on apology.

Study 1

Method

Participants

A total of 96 Japanese and U.S. American college students participated in Study 1. The Japanese respondents were 51 students enrolled in English classes at two different private universities in Tokyo and its suburbs. The U.S.

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respondents were 45 students enrolled in communication courses at a public university in northern Michigan.

Instruments

An open-ended questionnaire was constructed to solicit apology episodes. The respondents were asked to recall and reconstruct recent incidents where someone they knew apologized or should have apologized (but failed to apologize) to them. Specifically, the respondents were instructed to recreate the conversation as fully as possible, using exact words if they could. Both Japanese and U.S. American participants completed the questionnaire during regularly scheduled classes.

Results

Each respondent reported one apology episode, resulting in 51 situations reported by Japanese and 45 situations reported by U.S. American participants. These episodes were then categorized into 26 different “situation types” (For the complete list of apology episodes reported, see Appendix 1).

Discussion

Apology episodes reported by Japanese and U.S. Americans significantly differed in several different ways. The exploratory, uncontrolled nature of the survey responses does not allow for any systematic analysis of cultural norms underlying these reported incidents. Thus, only descriptive accounts of major features found in both Japanese and U.S. American responses are offered below. In particular, the analysis focuses on two dimensions, nature of offense and relationship between the offender and the victim.

Nature of offense

Nature of offense refers to exactly what kind of offense was committed regardless of its severity or other circumstantial factors. For instance, breaking one’s promise and breaking the other’s glasses are different in nature and thus elicit different types of reactions even when their emotional impact to the victim is the same.

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Several previous empirical studies report that differences in the nature of offense affect the offender’s response styles to the situation (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Holmes, 1990).¹ In the naturalistic observation of New Zealander apology, Holmes (1990) reports the effect of differences in the nature of offense on the particular apology styles employed. When the situation involved inconveniencing someone (e.g., not being able to provide the service requested), the offense was most likely (48.6%) to be remedied with an apology which includes a simple “sorry” statement and an explanation. When the offender invaded someone’s personal space (e.g., taking someone’s seat) or the offender violated norms in conversation (e.g., interrupting someone), the offender was most likely to offer just a simple “sorry” (83.3% in space violation and 36.7% in talk violation). When the situation involved a time violation type of offense (e.g., being late for an appointment), the offense was most likely (50%) to be remedied with a message that included both a “sorry” statement and an account. When the offender caused some damage or loss to someone’s possessions (e.g., losing a book), an apology most often (40%) included a “sorry” statement and an offer of restitution. Finally, when a social etiquette rule was broken (e.g., burping), all the apologies reported took the form of simple statements such as “excuse me” or “pardon me.”

More important for cross-cultural research, situational differences seem to elicit different reactions from different cultures. Barnlund and Yoshioka (1990) report that situational differences affected the U.S. American and Japanese apology styles differently in two of the four types of offenses used in their study. In an interview part of their study, Barnlund and Yoshioka identified four types of

¹One study (Schlenker & Darby, 1981) reports no situational differences found in the kinds of apologies offered. However, the two situations used in the study were very similar in terms of the nature of offense, bumping someone in a crowded shopping mall and bumping someone on a crowded campus area between classes. Thus, this finding by itself is not strong evidence that situational differences make no difference in apology styles. Rather, it suggests that more situational variety is needed in future research.

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situations that equally require apology in U.S. American and Japanese cultures: (a) mismanagement of time, (b) failure to complete an assignment, (c) incompetent completion of an assignment, and (d) a breach of social norms. Barnlund and Yoshioka used these situations in the subsequent survey part of the study and found that features of apology messages produced by U.S. Americans and Japanese differed in two situations: mismanagement of time and incompetent completion of an assignment.

Previous studies extensively employed offenses involving physical damage as stimuli to solicit apology. The types of physical offenses used include: (a) clumsiness (Furuya & Yuda, 1988; Holmes, 1990; Mir, 1991; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Schlenker & Darby, 1981), (b) damage or loss of possession (Furuya & Yuda, 1988; Holmes, 1990; Mir, 1991), (c) physical aggression (Furuya & Yuda, 1988), and (d) traffic accidents (Furuya & Yuda, 1988; Mir, 1991).

There are two problems identified with the use of situations involving physical damage. First, communication may play a less significant role in rectifying the situation when the damage is purely physical. For minor physical offenses, removal of the damage (e.g., no longer stepping on someone's foot) may be all that is needed to restore social balance in the situation. Second, physical damage is limited in the types of threat it imposes on social balance as well as in the kinds of contextual information it implies about the offense and the offender: Most offenses involving physical damage may create rather materialistic damage, while many of those involving non-physical damage can create psychological damage to the relationship. Likewise, many of the offenses involving physical damage (e.g., breaking a vase) can be taken as an accident and thus the offenses may be seen as unintentional. By contrast, some of non-physical offenses (e.g., being considerably late for a meeting for no apparent reasons) can be considered as more preventable and can even be interpreted as a sign of lack of respect to the victim.

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Apology episodes reported in the current study seem to support the argument advanced above. Situations involving non-physical damage far exceeded those triggered by physical damage both in kind and number. Out of 20 and 14 categories of episodes reported by Japanese and U.S. Americans respectively, only two types (“bodily harm” and “physical damage”) involved physical offenses. Furthermore, a far greater number of situations involving non-physical offenses than those with physical offenses were reported in both cultures: Of the 51 cases reported by Japanese, 42 cases (82.3%) involved non-physical offenses; of the 45 cases reported by U.S. Americans, 36 cases (80.0%) involved non-physical offenses.

Given the spontaneous nature of the current “recall and reconstruct” survey, it can be safely assumed that the respondents reported the first apology situations that came to their minds. If so, it can be said that non-physical damage is better remembered than physical damage, as, perhaps, the former matters more than does the latter.

Relationship between the offender and the victim

Not only the kind of offense committed, but also the relationship between the offender and the victim seems to influence people’s reactions to the offending situation. In previous empirical studies on apology, a wide variety of relationships existed between the offender and the victim: (a) strangers (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Furuya & Yuda, 1988; Mir, 1991; Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Schlenker & Darby, 1981), (b) friends (Furuya & Yuda, 1988), (c) romantic partners (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Furuya & Yuda, 1988), (d) colleagues (Furuya & Yuda, 1988), (e) superior-subordinate (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990), (f) teacher-student (Furuya & Yuda, 1988), and (g) parent-adult child (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990).

Of these, apology interchanges between strangers take place least frequently both in Japan and the U.S.: Barnlund and Yoshioka (1990) found that “the Japanese exchanged apologies most frequently with their closest friends and

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acquaintances, less often with superiors, rarely with family members or strangers. U.S. Americans also exchanged apologies most often with their closest friends, next with family members, equally with acquaintances and superiors, rarely with strangers.”(p. 196)

These variations in the relationship between the offender and the victim were found to influence apology styles of U.S. Americans and Japanese. One common feature in the U.S. American and Japanese reactions to the variations in the relationship between the offender and the victim is that members of both cultures preferred more indirect modes of apology (e.g., nonverbal) when they offended their parents (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990). Three other types of relationships (subordinate-superior, closest friends, and strangers) used in the same study (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990) yielded cultural differences in apology styles. In general, Japanese offenders employed a wider variety of apology strategies in adapting the type of their relationship with the victims while U.S. American offenders tended to rely on the same narrow repertoire of apologies regardless of the nature of their relationship to the victims (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990).

In another study (Mir, 1991), U.S. Americans were found to react to two different types of relational factors when apologizing: age and familiarity. In terms of the victim’s age, U.S. Americans used more intensified expressions of apology, more acknowledgment of responsibility, and more offers of repair to the old victims than young ones.² With regards to how familiar the victim is to the offender, more U.S. Americans offered explanations to unfamiliar victims than familiar ones and more U.S. Americans offered to repair the damage to familiar

²These results, however, should be interpreted with some caution. In this study (Mir, 1991), every participant was presented with all eight situations varying in the age of the victim. Thus, the manipulation of the age of the victim was quite obvious to the participants and that might have exaggerated the differentiation of messages based on the age. It is still possible that the trend exists, but the degree to which the trend affects the actual message might have been positively biased in this study.

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victims than unfamiliar ones.

The apology situations reported in the current investigation seem to support the above findings. The vast majority of cases reported involved “familiar” others such as friends, family and acquaintances. Reported apology interchanges between strangers were limited to specific situations such as bumping someone in public or dialing a wrong telephone number.

Given this trend found in the reported cases, it seems reasonable to assume that apology-requiring situations involving “familiar” others leave a stronger, if not more lasting, impression than do those involving strangers.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to assess cultural perceptions of apology episodes reported by both Japanese and U.S. Americans. In overview, the study used a 2 (culture) x 2 (gender) x 20 (situation) design: Male and female college students in Japan and the U.S. completed one of the five forms of a questionnaire (the five forms differing in specific situations presented) prepared in English or Japanese, in which they were asked to rate and respond to four different interpersonal situations that may require apology. The reflective role-play task involved written responses.

Method

Participants

238 (117 Japanese and 121 U.S. American) respondents participated in Study 2. The Japanese sample was drawn from English classes at two private universities in metropolitan Tokyo area. The U.S. sample was drawn from speech communication courses at two public universities, one in Texas and the other in Virginia.

Instruments

A questionnaire containing both open-ended and scaled questions was developed in which the respondents were presented with four apology-requiring

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situations and were asked to indicate how they perceive each situation along with several dimensions such as magnitude of damage, reparability of damage, or intentionality of the offender.

Selection of episodes

Twenty situations were chosen from episodes reported by both U.S. American and Japanese participants in Study 1, according to the following criteria: (a) the situations needed to be realistic to the general sample population from both cultures (as well as both genders); (b) the situations needed to be easily describable in a short paragraph and not too dependent on context; (c) the situations that involved a chance encounter between strangers needed to be eliminated; (d) the types of damage presented in the episodes needed to be balanced between mere physical damage (e.g., damage to the other’s belongings such as an umbrella) and other offenses (e.g., being late to a meeting); and (e) an equal number of situations should be selected from those reported in both cultures as well as those reported in only one culture. Thus, eight episodes that were reported in both cultures, as well as six each of episodes reported in one culture, were included in the questionnaire.

Construction of the questionnaire

It would have been unreasonable to have each participant respond to all twenty apology episodes, and thus the vignettes were divided into five forms, A, B, C, D, and E. Each form contained four episodes: one reported by U.S. Americans, another reported by Japanese, and four more reported by both. The order of presentation of the situations was counterbalanced in four different ways in order to reduce the effect of the presentation order as much as possible.

Some of these twenty episodes were modified to further ensure the cultural and gender equivalence. In terms of gender equivalence, some gender-specific elements in the reported episodes (e.g., borrowing beauty supplies) were changed into a more gender-neutral ones (e.g., borrowing compact discs). Original situations differed in terms of cultural equivalence; for instance, many

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situations reported by U.S. American participants included roommate situations. Since Japanese college students rarely share living quarters with others, those situations needed to be changed to interactions that took place elsewhere, such as school or club functions. Similarly, many Japanese participants reported situations involving a commute to campus by train, while U.S. American college students in the sample population do not do so. Therefore, those situations were altered accordingly. During the process of modification, however, neither the Japanese nor the English version of the questionnaire controlled the final form: Modifications were made in both versions until equivalence was achieved.

The final modification regarded the use of names of the hypothetical offender and victim in each situation: both English and Japanese versions of the questionnaire had separate forms for each gender. The use of names (e.g., John vs. Joan) was the only difference between the two gender forms within each version.

The following lists all the situations used in the English version of the questionnaire (“Japan,” “U.S.,” or “both” in parentheses indicates the origin of each vignette. For instance, “Japan” refers to an episode originally reported by Japanese respondents in Study 1).

Episode 1. “Being late” (both)

John and Mark made a plan to meet. John understood the time to be around two o’clock, but Mark thought they had agreed on a more precise time. John shows up one hour late.

Episode 2. “Damaged CD” (both)

Jim borrows a CD from Todd and three weeks later returns it damaged.

Episode 3. “Spilling ice” (both)

Joe and Dan are at a party. When Dan was getting a drink at the bar, Joe

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pushes in to get a drink, too, and accidentally knocks over an ice bucket onto Dan.

Episode 4. “Accusation” (both)

Greg and Eric both have executive positions in a campus organization. One day Greg finds an inconsistency in the account, and openly accuses Eric of mismanagement. As it turns out, it wasn’t Eric’s fault.

Episode 5. “Delayed return” (both)

Mike and Brad are studying together for an upcoming exam in a coffee shop. Mike takes off to make a copy of Brad’s notes and says he will be back in an hour. Mike comes back three hours later.

Episode 6. “Presentation” (both)

Chuck, Jon, and two other students are assigned to give a group presentation in class. On the day of the presentation, Chuck comes totally unprepared and ruins the entire presentation.

Episode 7. “School insulted” (both)

Doug and Tom went to high school together, but now attend different universities. One day Doug calls Tom and says that he is struggling with his studies. Tom trivializes it by saying “Really? I thought your college was easy.” Doug is offended.

Episode 8. “Group project” (both)

Bill and Don are assigned to a group project with others. Bill does not hold his weight and Don covers for him by doing extra work. They meet in class when the project is due.

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Episode 9. “Quarrel” (U.S)

Jeff and Bob are friends from school and generally get along with each other. One day, they get in a fight and in the heat of the argument, Jeff says “I wish you were dead!” Bob’s feelings are hurt.

Episode 10. “Bar” (U.S)

Nick and Ben made plans to go out to a bar one week in advance. On the day, Nick says he cannot go because he is broke. When their mutual friend, Ron invites Nick to go drinking with him, Nick accepts the invitation right away. Nick runs into Ben on his way to the bar.

Episode 11. “Phone call” (U.S)

Allison and Michelle are friends from school. One day, Allison calls Michelle very early morning to check the class assignment, only to wake her up.

Episode 12. “Snapping” (U.S)

Ann has been quite stressed out and upset about the way her paper is going. One day, she gets in a very bad mood after accidentally erasing part of her paper on the computer. When Kris calls to tell Ann about the class Ann missed while working on the paper, she snaps at Kris for no apparent reason.

Episode 13. “Mood swings” (U.S)

Meg has been pretty busy with her studies and has not spent much time with her friend from school, Lynn, lately. Every time Meg does get to spend some time with Lynn, she is always in a bad mood and often ends up upsetting Lynn. Lynn is bothered by Meg’s mood swings.

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Episode 14. “Itinerary” (U.S)

Jessica and Heather made a plan to travel together and agreed on the itinerary after a lot of thoughts. But during the trip, Jessica loses interest in some of the places and wants to go somewhere else. This does not agree with Heather.

Episode 15. “Crush Revealed” (Japan)

Lucy and Judy are friends from school. One day, Lucy tells Judy that she’s interested in their mutual friend, Joe. Within a couple of days, Lucy finds out that Judy told everybody in their group of friends, including Joe, about it. Now Lucy is very upset.

Episode 16. “Yelling” (Japan)

When Cindy, Susan, and some of their friends are planning a trip together, Cindy gets upset because she cannot always get her way. Susan tries to calm Cindy down, only to get yelled at by her. Next day, Cindy and Susan go to the same English class.

Episode 17. “Pen kept” (Japan)

Kathy cannot find her favorite pen and assumes that she has lost it somewhere. One day, while studying with Linda, Kathy notices that Linda is using the pen. Linda used it last time they studied together and kept it because she liked the way it wrote. Kathy obviously does not appreciate this.

Episode 18. “Message” (Japan)

Nancy and Beth are friends from high school. One day, Nancy calls Beth and leaves a message saying that she wants to get together sometime soon. Beth has been busy and never returns her call. More than a week later, Beth runs into Nancy while running some errands.

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Episode 19. “Lunch” (Japan)

Lori and Kate, friends from school, planned to have lunch together in the cafeteria after their morning classes. Lori’s morning class was canceled so she went back to take a nap and never showed up. Lori runs into Kate the next day.

Episode 20. “Indecisiveness” (Japan)

Terry and Julie go shopping together. Terry finds the book she was looking for, but cannot make up her mind whether or not to buy the expensive book. So Julie suggests that they go around the mall and come back to the bookstore later. When they come back, Terry still cannot decide and keeps Julie waiting for quite some time while trying to make up her mind.

For each situation, the participants completed the same set of five questions. The first question asked the participants to rate on the scales indicating the realism of the situation. The next four questions concerned the nature of each episode. The participants indicated: (a) how great the damage was, (b) how intentional the offense was, and (c) how avoidable the offense was, and (d) how unreparable the damage was.

Procedure

Both the U.S. and Japanese participants completed the questionnaire during regularly scheduled classes. The questionnaire booklets were marked for each gender so that the participants would be assigned to situations involving characters of their gender. Within each gender, the five different forms (A, B, C, D, and E) were alternately stacked resulting in a random assignment of the participants to the five forms.

The participants were provided with no specific information about the nature of the study. The title page of the questionnaire stated that the aim of this

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study on “interpersonal communication” was to examine “how people react to daily interpersonal situations.” A brief introduction stressed the anonymity and confidentiality of answers.

Both English and Japanese versions of the questionnaire took an average of fifteen to twenty minutes for completion.

Coding and Analysis

Numerical data from the seven 9-point Likert-type scales in each situation were scored by assigning 9 to the left-most (most intense) end of the scale (e.g., very easily, very upset) and 1 to the right-most (least intense) end of the scale (e.g., not at all, not upset).

Results

Realism

All the apology episodes tested in the current investigation were rated as more realistic than not, with one exception: the Japanese rating of “quarrel,” averaged below the midpoint, indicating that the situation was perceived as less than “realistic.” Moreover, the nationality of the originator of each situation did not seem to affect the realism rating by either Japanese or U.S. Americans.

Damage

In general, most of the episodes were rated as more damaging by Japanese than by U.S. Americans: only “quarrel” and “message” were rated higher by U.S. Americans than by Japanese. In addition, nine situations were rated below the midpoint by U.S. Americans, while only two situations were rated lower than the midpoint by Japanese.

Intentionality

Both Japanese and U.S. American respondents considered ten episodes higher (i.e., as “intentional”) and the other ten lower (i.e., “unintentional”) than the midpoint of the scale. Three situations received different ratings by Japanese

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and U.S. Americans: “lunch” was perceived as an intentional offense by Japanese but not by U. S. Americans; the reverse trend was found with two other situations, “quarrel” and “accusation.”

Avoidability

Every episode tested was perceived as more or less avoidable by both Japanese and U.S. Americans. However, three situations rated lowest on this scale by Japanese (“bar,” “quarrel,” and “spilling ice”) received much higher ratings by U.S. Americans.

Reparability

Of the 20 episodes, Japanese rated six situations and U.S. Americans rated 8 situations above the midpoint (i.e., as unreparable). The situation named “lunch” was rated higher by Japanese and lower by U.S. Americans than the midpoint. Further, while U.S. Americans considered the situation, “spilling ice,” as more “reparable” than did Japanese; the reverse trend was found with “quarrel.”

Discussion

The purpose of the present study is to find apology-requiring situations that can be perceived similarly by Japanese and U.S. Americans. To that end, the following examines the suitability of each episode along three dimensions: (a) realism, (b) severity of offense, and (c) perceived avoidability, intentionality and reparability.

Realism

First and foremost, perceived realism of each episode should be the most important factor to consider when selecting stimuli to be used in future apology research. As Sugimoto (1995) argued, many stimuli used in existing apology research were arbitrarily created by researchers and therefore lack realism to sample populations.

As such, three of the 20 episodes tested in this study do not seem suitable for future research: “quarrel,” “school insulted,” and “delayed return” received

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the lowest ratings for realism. “Quarrel” in particular, was rated lowest (4.19 by Japanese; 5.55 by U.S. Americans) in both cultures; followed by “school insulted” in the Japanese rating (5.79; 6.30 by U.S. Americans) and by “delayed return” in the U. S. American rating (5.91; 6.79 by Japanese).

Severity of offense

Severity of offense committed is a critical factor to consider when selecting episodes as stimuli to elicit apology because it affects both the victim’s and the offender’s reactions to the situation. First of all, severity of offense directly affects the victim’s attitude toward the offender. Ohbuchi et al. (1989) found that Japanese participants in their study formed a more favorable impression of the apologizer (i.e., an offender who offered an apology) when the offense was mild than when it was severe. Second, severity of offense also affects the offender’s response to the situation (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Holmes, 1990). U.S. Americans are more likely to use intensified expressions of apology (e.g., “I’m terribly sorry,” as compared to “Sorry about that”) when responding to situations involving a more severe offense (Mir, 1991; Schlenker & Darby, 1981).

Beyond the intensity of apology expressions, various types of other apology strategies have been incorporated in the message depending upon the severity of offense in the situation. Overall, the more severe the offense is, the more types of strategies are included in apology messages (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Holmes, 1990; Mir, 1991; Schlenker & Darby, 1981). Moreover, while both U.S. Americans and Japanese adjust their apologies to the severity of offense, they seem to differ in their preferred forms for different levels of severity (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990). Mir (1991) found that U.S. Americans tended to include more strategies such as acknowledgment of responsibility in their apologies when the offense was severe than when it was not severe. In another study, the most commonly used strategy in Japanese apologies shifted from “apology” (e.g., admitting guilt or requesting forgiveness) to remediation as the emotional impact of unavoidable offense increased (Furuya & Yuda, 1988).

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When the offense was an avoidable one, the degree of violation (i.e., severity of offense) influenced the offender’s choice of accounts strategies: excuse or justification. When the offense was severe, justification was offered, whereas when the offense was not so severe, excuse by denying the intention (e.g., “What I did was bad, but I didn’t mean it”) was most likely to be offered by Japanese offenders (Furuya & Yuda, 1988). Thus, severity of offense is undoubtedly a critical factor when studying apology interchanges.

Given its significance, future research should refrain from using situations of which perceived magnitude of damage sharply contrast in the two cultures. Six of those situations were found among the 20 episodes tested in the current investigation: “spilling ice,” “indecisiveness,” “snapping,” “yelling,” “itinerary,” and “accusation.”

Of these, “spilling ice” yielded the greatest cultural difference: the average rating by Japanese was 7.18, while that by U.S. Americans was 3.53. In other words, Japanese considered the offense as highly damaging while U.S. Americans thought it was rather minor.

“Indecisiveness” and “snapping” yielded less, but still considerable differences in cultural perceptions. With both situations, the ratings by Japanese and U.S. Americans differed by the margin of three points or more (“indecisiveness” = 5.61 by Japanese, 2.34 by U.S. Americans; “snapping” = 6.04 by Japanese, 3.93 by U.S. Americans).

Cultural perceptions of three other situations, “yelling,” “itinerary,” and “accusation,” also differed greatly. In all three situations, Japanese ratings (6.85 for “yelling,” 6.73 for “itinerary,” and 8.64 for “accusation”) exceeded U.S. American ratings (4.85 for “yelling,” 4.93 for “itinerary,” and 7.00 for “accusation”).

Finally, the situation called “project” was rated differently by U.S. Americans and Japanese in three dimensions: severity of damage, avoidability and reparability. For damage and avoidability, Japanese gave higher ratings (7.96

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for damage; 7.92 for avoidability) than did U.S. Americans (6.44 for damage; 6.80 for avoidability). For reparability, however, U.S. Americans rated higher (5.86) than did Japanese (4.69). Altogether, these situations do not lend themselves to useful comparison of apology styles.

Perceived avoidability, intentionality, and unreparability

Not only the perceived magnitude of damage but also several related factors such as avoidability influence people’s reactions to apology-requiring situations. Thus, apology episodes rated highly differently by Japanese and U.S. Americans in terms of these factors could possibly compound otherwise simple and straightforward findings in future research. Four of such situations were found in the episodes tested in the current study: “bar,” “pen kept,” “mood swings,” and “lunch.”

The first three situations received different cultural ratings for their “avoidability.” “Bar” and “pen kept” were perceived as more avoidable by U.S. Americans (7.52 for “bar”; 8.10 for “pen kept”) than by Japanese (5.96 for “bar”; 6.95 for “pen kept”). In contrast, “mood swings” was perceived as more avoidable by Japanese (6.14) than by U.S. Americans (5.10).

Cultural perceptions of “lunch” differed, not in terms of “avoidability,” but “intentionality” and “unreparability.” In both dimensions, Japanese rated the episode higher (6.25 for intentionality; 5.92 for unreparability) than did U.S. Americans (3.22 for intentionality; 2.96 for unreparability). Thus, these four episodes do not seem suitable for future comparative research on apology styles.

Suitable situations for future comparative research of apology styles

With 14 situations being eliminated for reasons discussed above, six apology episodes remain: “phone call,” “message,” “being late,” “crush revealed,” “presentation,” and “damaged CD.”

Three of these situations, “phone call,” “message,” “being late,” involve minor, non-physical offenses. All involve violation of social norms or expectations. Three other situations involve rather significant physical or non-physical damage.

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“damaged CD” is the situation where physical damage to a borrowed CD was rated as moderately severe. Two other situations, “crush revealed” and “presentation” involve non-physical and severe damage. These six situations seem to strike a nice balance in terms of several critical dimensions of apology-requiring situations such as severity of offense, or the physical vs. non-physical nature of damage.

Conclusion

Existing work on Japanese and U.S. apology styles found that apology styles of the two cultures differ, but so do their perceptions of the situations, making it difficult to decide whether the cultural differences in apology styles should be attributed to culturally different norms of apology, or merely to culturally different perceptions (or both). Thus, the present study aimed to find situations to be used as stimuli in future apology research. The situations need to be: (a) similarly perceived by both Japanese and U.S. Americans; (b) realistic to members of both cultures; (c) involve offenses that were not extreme but typical of day-to-day interactions with others; (d) be embedded in an on-going relationship that individuals wished to preserve.

In this two-part study, actual instances that required apology were solicited from both Japanese and U.S. Then, twenty of those apology episodes reported were presented to another group of Japanese and U.S. Americans.

One hundred and eighty one Japanese and 121 U.S. American college students participated in Study 2. Each participant responded to four of the twenty episodes that may require apology in a written form in English or Japanese. All the situations were actual instances requiring apology reported by 45 U.S. Americans and 51 Japanese in Study 1, and were adjusted for gender and cultural equivalence. For each situation, first, participants indicated how realistic the situation was, then completed scales regarding severity of damage, intentionality

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of the offender, avoidability of the offense, and unreparability of damage.

Responses to the questionnaire were then analyzed to select similarly perceived episodes that can be used as stimuli to solicit apology. The insights gained in the current study are indispensable for further research on apology styles of U.S. Americans and Japanese, a relatively new subject area for systematic empirical research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The list of apology episodes reported in Study 1

Japan

Type	Frequency	Illustration
Being late	8	being late for an appointment
Standing up	5	no show for an appointment
Physical damage	5	a loaned book damaged
No contact	4	being remiss in writing
Bodily harm	4	bumping into the other
False accusation	3	being falsely blamed for failure
Borrowing	3	a loaned CD not returned for long
Love triangle	3	a friend and a significant other cheating
Schedule change	3	a sudden cancellation of a meeting
Acting immature	2	alienating someone in a conversation
Revealing secrets	2	revealing one's secrets to other
Professional failure	1	failure to meet the deadline for a report
Jealousy	1	being jealous of one's friendship with another
Insult	1	putting down the other's alma mater
Thanks	1	acknowledging one's debt to the other
Disagreement	1	expressing one's disagreement
Indecisiveness	1	failure to make up one's mind
Sneaking out	1	leaving a friend behind in a class
No birthday present	1	forgetting someone's birthday
Kindness		
Unappreciated	1	an act of kindness gone unacknowledged

U.S.

Type	Frequency	Illustration
False accusation	7	being falsely accused for cheating
Hurtful words	6	saying "I wish you were dead" in a fight
Bodily harm	5	spilling ice cream over someone
Norms violated	4	broken promises
Physical damage	4	a CD returned damaged
Extra work		
Unappreciated	3	doing more than fair share not appreciated
Physical		
Inconveniences	3	calling and waking up someone late at night
Insults	3	name-calling
Professional failure	2	failure to do part in a group project
Schedule change	2	changing a plan in the last minute
Being late	2	being late for a date
Jealousy	1	questioning the other out of jealousy
Grouch	1	being grouchy for no reason
Have to work	1	failure to spend time with family

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Appendix 2: Average scores for apology episodes

JAPANESE	Realism	Damage	Intentionality	Avoidability	Unreparability
being late	6.65	6.50	4.00	7.61	3.37
damaged CD	6.73	6.59	3.27	6.68	3.95
spilling ice	6.68	7.18	3.77	5.73	4.27
accusation	6.95	8.64	4.45	7.18	5.59
delayed return	6.79	7.21	5.84	7.37	5.26
presentation	7.13	7.61	6.13	7.87	6.13
school insulted	5.79	7.25	5.12	7.08	4.79
group project	7.50	7.96	6.38	7.92	4.69
quarrel	4.19	6.69	4.69	5.77	4.08
bar	6.74	7.35	5.83	5.96	5.30
phone call	8.76	3.40	3.60	6.44	2.36
snapping	6.09	6.04	3.32	7.14	2.59
mood swings	6.73	6.27	3.36	6.14	3.32
itinerary	7.50	6.73	5.14	6.23	3.73
crush revealed	7.45	7.55	6.86	7.00	6.48
yelling	6.80	6.85	5.30	6.05	3.90
pen kept	6.43	5.81	6.14	6.95	4.52
message	7.74	3.56	3.00	6.22	2.39
lunch	7.25	5.83	6.25	7.75	5.92
indecisiveness	8.11	5.61	3.27	6.23	3.54

U.S. American	Realism	Damage	Intentionality	Avoidability	Unreparability
being late	6.50	5.11	3.68	7.54	3.21
damaged CD	7.44	6.00	3.05	6.44	4.39
spilling ice	7.68	3.53	2.74	7.42	2.74
accusation	6.32	7.00	5.89	7.32	5.79
delayed return	5.91	6.91	6.65	7.30	5.78
presentation	7.63	7.09	6.38	8.24	6.71
school insulted	6.30	6.35	5.65	8.04	5.30
group project	8.32	6.44	7.00	6.80	5.86
quarrel	5.55	7.52	6.17	7.17	5.96
bar	6.86	7.09	6.52	7.52	6.69
phone call	7.15	2.77	3.23	6.85	2.04
snapping	7.81	3.93	3.44	6.70	2.52
mood swings	7.35	6.23	3.74	5.10	4.00
itinerary	7.54	4.93	4.25	5.29	4.11
crush revealed	8.12	6.65	7.38	7.81	6.00
yelling	7.30	4.85	5.15	5.85	3.85
pen kept	6.90	4.48	6.52	8.10	3.17
message	8.00	4.38	3.62	6.21	3.79
lunch	7.52	4.61	3.22	6.91	2.96
indecisiveness	7.84	2.34	2.84	5.62	2.19

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Appendix 3: Relative rankings of episodes in the two cultures.

Realism

Japanese		U.S. American	
1. phone call	8.76	1. group project	8.32
2. indecisiveness	8.11	2. secret revealed	8.12
3. message	7.74	3. message	8.00
4. group project	7.50	4. indecisiveness	7.84
4. itinerary	7.50	5. snapping	7.81
6. crush revealed	7.45	6. spilling ice	7.68
7. lunch	7.25	7. presentation	7.63
8. presentation	7.13	8. itinerary	7.54
9. accusation	6.95	9. lunch	7.52
10. yelling	6.80	10. damaged CD	7.44
11. delayed return	6.79	11. mood swings	7.35
12. bar	6.74	12. yelling	7.30
13. mood swings	6.73	13. phone call	7.15
13. damaged CD	6.73	14. pen kept	6.90
15. spilling ice	6.68	15. bar	6.86
16. being late	6.65	16. being late	6.50
17. pen kept	6.43	17. accusation	6.32
18. snapping	6.09	18. school insulted	6.30
19. school insulted	5.79	19. delayed return	5.91
20. quarrel	4.19	20. quarrel	5.55

Damage

Japanese		U.S. American	
1. accusation	8.64	1. quarrel	7.52
2. group project	7.96	2. presentation	7.09
3. presentation	7.61	2. bar	7.09
4. crush revealed	7.55	4. accusation	7.00
5. bar	7.35	5. delayed return	6.91
6. school insulted	7.25	6. crush revealed	6.65
7. delayed return	7.21	7. group project	6.44
8. spilling ice	7.18	8. school insulted	6.35
9. yelling	6.85	9. mood swings	6.23
10. itinerary	6.73	10. damaged CD	6.00
11. quarrel	6.69	11. being late	5.11
12. damaged CD	6.59	12. itinerary	4.93
13. being late	6.50	13. yelling	4.85
14. mood swings	6.27	14. lunch	4.61
15. snapping	6.04	15. pen kept	4.48
16. lunch	5.83	16. message	4.38
17. pen kept	5.81	17. snapping	3.93
18. indecisiveness	5.61	18. spilling ice	3.53
19. message	3.56	19. phone call	2.77
20. phone call	3.40	20. indecisiveness	2.34

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Intentionality

Japanese		U.S. American	
1. crush revealed	6.86	1. crush revealed	7.38
2. group project	6.38	2. group project	7.00
3. lunch	6.25	3. delayed return	6.65
4. pen kept	6.14	4. pen kept	6.52
5. presentation	6.13	4. bar	6.52
6. delayed return	5.84	6. presentation	6.38
7. bar	5.83	7. quarrel	6.17
8. yelling	5.30	8. accusation	5.89
9. itinerary	5.14	9. school insulted	5.65
10. school insulted	5.12	10. yelling	5.15
11. quarrel	4.69	11. itinerary	4.25
12. accusation	4.45	12. mood swings	3.74
13. being late	4.00	13. being late	3.68
14. spilling ice	3.77	14. message	3.62
15. phone call	3.60	15. snapping	3.44
16. mood swings	3.36	16. phone call	3.23
17. snapping	3.32	17. lunch	3.22
18. damaged CD	3.27	18. damaged CD	3.05
18. indecisiveness	3.27	19. indecisiveness	2.84
20. message	3.00	20. spilling ice	2.74

Avoidability

Japanese		U.S. American	
1. group project	7.92	1. Presentation	8.24
2. presentation	7.87	2. pen kept	8.10
3. lunch	7.75	3. school insulted	8.04
4. being late	7.61	4. crush revealed	7.81
5. delayed return	7.37	5. being late	7.54
6. accusation	7.18	6. bar	7.52
7. snapping	7.14	7. spilling ice	7.42
8. school insulted	7.08	8. accusation	7.32
9. crush revealed	7.00	9. delayed return	7.30
10. pen kept	6.95	10. quarrel	7.17
11. damaged CD	6.68	11. Lunch	6.91
12. phone call	6.44	12. phone call	6.85
13. indecisiveness	6.23	13. group project	6.80
13. itinerary	6.23	14. snapping	6.70
15. message	6.22	15. damaged CD	6.44
16. mood swings	6.14	16. message	6.21
17. yelling	6.05	17. yelling	5.85
18. bar	5.96	18. indecisiveness	5.62
19. quarrel	5.77	19. itinerary	5.29
20. spilling ice	5.73	20. mood swings	5.10

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Unreparability

Japanese		U.S. American	
1. crush revealed	6.48	1. presentation	6.71
2. presentation	6.13	2. bar	6.69
3. lunch	5.92	3. crush revealed	6.00
4. accusation	5.59	4. quarrel	5.96
5. bar	5.30	5. group project	5.86
6. delayed return	5.26	6. accusation	5.79
7. school insulted	4.79	7. delayed return	5.78
8. group project	4.69	8. school insulted	5.30
9. pen kept	4.52	9. damaged CD	4.39
10. spilling ice	4.27	10. itinerary	4.11
11. quarrel	4.08	11. mood swings	4.00
12. damaged CD	3.95	12. yelling	3.85
13. yelling	3.90	13. message	3.79
14. itinerary	3.73	14. being late	3.21
15. indecisiveness	3.54	15. Pen kept	3.17
16. being late	3.37	16. lunch	2.96
17. mood swings	3.32	17. spilling ice	2.74
18. snapping	2.59	18. snapping	2.52
19. message	2.39	19. indecisiveness	2.19
20. phone call	2.36	20. phone call	2.04