

The Case of Apology: Comparison between Korean and Japanese as NNS

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For a number of years, there have been topics in investigating such the speech act as apology, refusal, and compliment. This paper examines how Korean and Japanese express the apology. The study focuses on the difference between Korean and Japanese in apologizing situation. It is based on the corpus through framework of the Apology Instrument used by Cohen and Olshtain (1981). There are some research questions related with this paper; 1) among four apologizing semantic formulas by Cohen and Olshtain (1981), which types of expressions are used? ; 2) in apologizing, who use more intensifier (i.e. really/so/ terribly) ?; 3) in even the apologizing situation as NNSs, is it affected by the social status and power?; 4) Is Japanese more polite than Korean in the situation in which an apology is expected?

The subject are 10 of Korean university students (5 male and 5 female), and 10 of Japanese university students (5 male and 5 female). They are intermediate English learners. These subjects are asked to response a questionnaire with eight situations in which an apology is expected.

The findings is expected how they express the apology over social power and cultural differences. Furthermore, this study contributes to how to teach the apology among speech act in EFL situation.

1. Introduction

The study of defining the speech act has been researched since 1960's, but the approach toward production and perception of the speech act has been focused for last 15 years. For this field, a large number of studies of apologizing have been carried out (e.g. Edmondson 1981; Fraser 1981; Holmes 1990; Blum-Kulla et al.1989; Olshtain and Cohen 1983; Owen 1983; Trosborg 1987). They would focus on the forms or discourse between non-native speakers and native speakers. Cohen and Olshtain (1981) suggested the developing a measure of sociocultural competence; the case of apology. The subjects in this first study were 44 college students-12 native English speakers (to provide data on native English-speaking patterns of apologizing) and 32 native Hebrew speakers (12 to give baseline data for Hebrew native language apologies and the other 20 to give nonnative responses in

English). Cohen and Olshtain (1981) researched the value for sociocultural competence and found that native speakers' choices of apology forms were highly patterned.

The study of Olshtain (1983) showed how the subjects perceived the universality of the need to apologize in given situation. In her study, Olshtain had two goals. The first was to discover the extent and type of transfer in the speech act of apologies of both English and Russian-speaking learners of Hebrew. The second one was to try to learn whether learners' perceptions of "language universality or specificity affects actual performance." In the respect to data, Olshtain found that the highest degree of apology overall was in English, lower in Russian, and the lowest in Hebrew.

In other researches, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) investigated American (native speakers) and Japanese performance (non-native speakers) on two face threatening acts (FTA's) in English-disagreement and giving embarrassing information. Several researchers had a stereotype about differences between American and Japanese. In this study, the findings showed that Americans are not always more direct than Japanese and that Japanese do not always avoid critical remarks, especially when speaking to someone of lower status.

Garcia (1989) studied apologizing in English as politeness strategies used by native and non-native speakers. For this study, Garcia presented the results of empirical research comparing the politeness strategies used by American and Venezuelans in an English language role-play situation. This study showed that differences in conversational style had the potential for creating misunderstanding. Moreover, this investigation added to the research contrasting native and non-native speakers by presenting an analysis of conversation interchanges in English 1) as an L1 engages other L1; and 2) as an L1 engages L2s.

Early several researchers attempted to demonstrate differences between Native Speakers (NSs) and Non-Native speakers (NNSs), but there are few researches about the comparison of conversational types between NNSs from different cultural background, especially Japanese and Korean. The purpose of this paper is to compare the apology expressions among speech acts between Japanese and Korean. The hypothesis to be tested is that the conversational style in apologizing situation has differences between Japanese and Korean as NNSs. So, the research questions that prompted this study was, " Which types of the apologizing expression do NNSs often used?," " Who do use more intensifier (i.e. terribly, so, and really) in apologizing situations?," "Do Japanese say "I'm sorry" much more frequently than Korean?," "Is Japanese more direct than Korean?," and "Do they say "I'm sorry" much more frequently when talking to a higher status person than when talking to lower status person? " In the part of the result, these questions are mentioned.

2. Method

2.1. Instrument

In order to test difference between Japanese and Korean in apologizing situations, the same framework used by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) was used for subjects. In this instrument, there were eight situations. Four situations were designed to assess intensity of regret in expression an apology (e.g. “I’m very sorry”-high intensity, “I am sorry”-low intensity). The other four situations were intended to estimate the adequate apology (e.g. “I wish to apologize”-more formal, “I’m sorry”-more informal). However, this testing was focused on the frequency and types of major apologizing expressions. The full text of the situations appears in the Appendix.

Subjects

2.2. Subject

The subjects were 20 college students-10 native Japanese speakers in their middle twenties, and 10 native Korean speakers in their middle twenties. Their major is English, and they are intermediate-level learners. They have studied English for fourteen years on the regular education system-secondary school and college. They had been exposed American and British English through words of English teachers and the curriculum materials. The subjects were divided into two groups. Japanese of NNSs served as informants for Japanese English learners’ apologies, Korean of NNSs served as informants for Korean English learners’ apologies.

2.3. Procedure

The same Instrument used by Cohen and Olshtain (1981) used here. The instrument had the indirection before responding each of situations. The method of the research is the questionnaire. Investigator met each of 10 Korean students and explained the purpose of this survey. Informants responded the questionnaire in English. In the survey of 10 Japanese students, the investigator sent the attached file with the questionnaire each of 10 Japanese students through the e-mail. These questionnaires were collected as data for investigating the apology between Japanese and Korean.

Data Analysis

The major goal of data analysis was to research comparison of apologizing expression between NNSs of English. Fraser’s list formulas (1981) established a taxonomy of apologies based on nine categories. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) classified four basic categories and the first of category was divided into four subcategories. This set of apologies is the following:

1. An expression of apology

- a. An expression of regret (e.g. “I’m sorry”)
 - b. An offer of apology (e.g. “ I apologize”)
 - c. A request for forgiveness (e.g. “Excuse me” or “Forgive me”)
 - d. An expression of an excuse (not an overt apology but an excuse which serves as an apology)
2. An acknowledgment of responsibility
 3. An offer of repair
 4. A promise of forbearance (i.e., that it won’t happen again)

The 20 questionnaire were collected, and then they were examined and classified in terms of the apologizing semantic formula used by Olshtain and Cohen (1983).

3. Result

The objective was to explain what semantic formulas of apologies nonnative speakers expressed in English and focused on the comparison of apologies between Japanese and Korean. First, I will define differences of apologies between Japanese and Korean in each of eight situations. Second, I will see the frequency of use of apologies in subformulas. Third, I will look at frequency of use of the intensifier in apologizing situation. Finally, I will consider deviation concerning social factors, for instance, relationship between boss and employee, parent and children, and friends.

Table 1
Frequency of use of semantic formula by situation *

		GROUP	
		JAPANESE ENGLISH LEARNERS (N=10)	KOREAN ENGLISH LEARNERS (N=10)
SITUATION	SEMANTIC FORMULAR		
Insulting someone at a meeting (1)	Expression of apology (APOL)	50 0	70 0
	Acknowledgement of responsibility (RESP)	50	30
	Offer of repair (REPR)	0	0
	Promise of Forbearance (FORB)		
Forgetting a meeting with your boss (2)	APOL	100	100
	RESP	0	0
	REPR	0	0
	FORB	0	0

Forgetting a get-together with a friend (3)	APOL	80	80
	RESP	20	0
	REPR	0	0
	FORB	0	20
Forgetting to take your son shopping (4)	APOL	80	100
	RESP	0	0
	REPR	0	0
	FORB	20	0
Backing into someone else's car (5)	APOL	60	80
	RESP	30	0
	REPR	10	20
	FORB	0	0
Bumping into lady, hurting her, & knocking over package (6)	APOL	80	70
	RESP	0	30
	REPR	20	0
	FORB	0	0
Bumping into lady, shaking her up a bit (7)	APOL	80	100
	RESP	10	0
	REPR	10	0
	FORB	0	0
Bumping into lady unavoidably because she was in the way (8)	APOL	90	100
	RESP	0	0
	REPR	10	0
	FORB	0	0

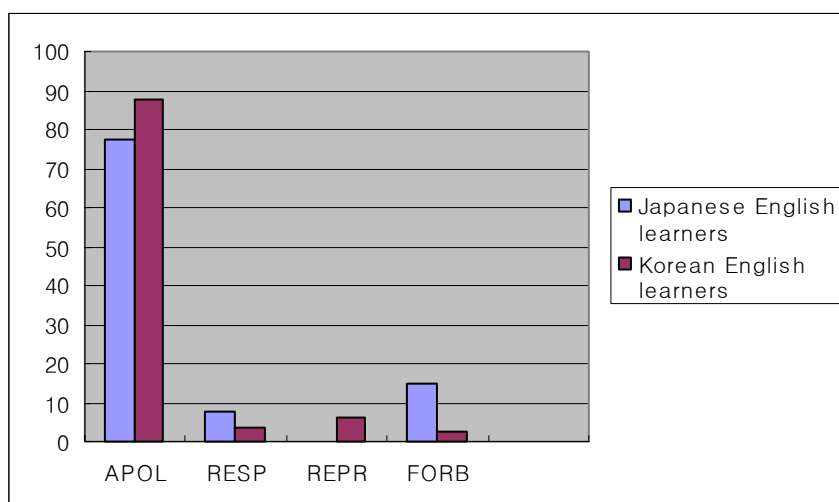
* The data are expressed in percentages

First, I found some situations where Japanese and Korean expressed different styles. The Japanese used more diverse apologies than Korean in each of apologizing situations (see Table 1). In other words, Korean were more likely to express an apology than were Japanese in “insulting someone at a meeting” (Japanese 50% vs. Korean 70%), “forgetting a get-together with a friend” (Japanese 80% vs. Korean 100%), “backing into someone else’s car” (Japanese 60% vs. Korean 80%), and “bumping into lady, shaking her up a bit” (Japanese 80% vs.

Korean 100%).

Furthermore, Japanese were less likely to express of apology than were Korean (see Graph 1). For example, in all of situations, Japanese English learners used 77.5 % of the express of an apology, while Korean English learners used 87.5% of the express of an apology. However, I found that Korean English learners used more four expressions than Japanese even if the percentage of three expressions were small (see Graph1).

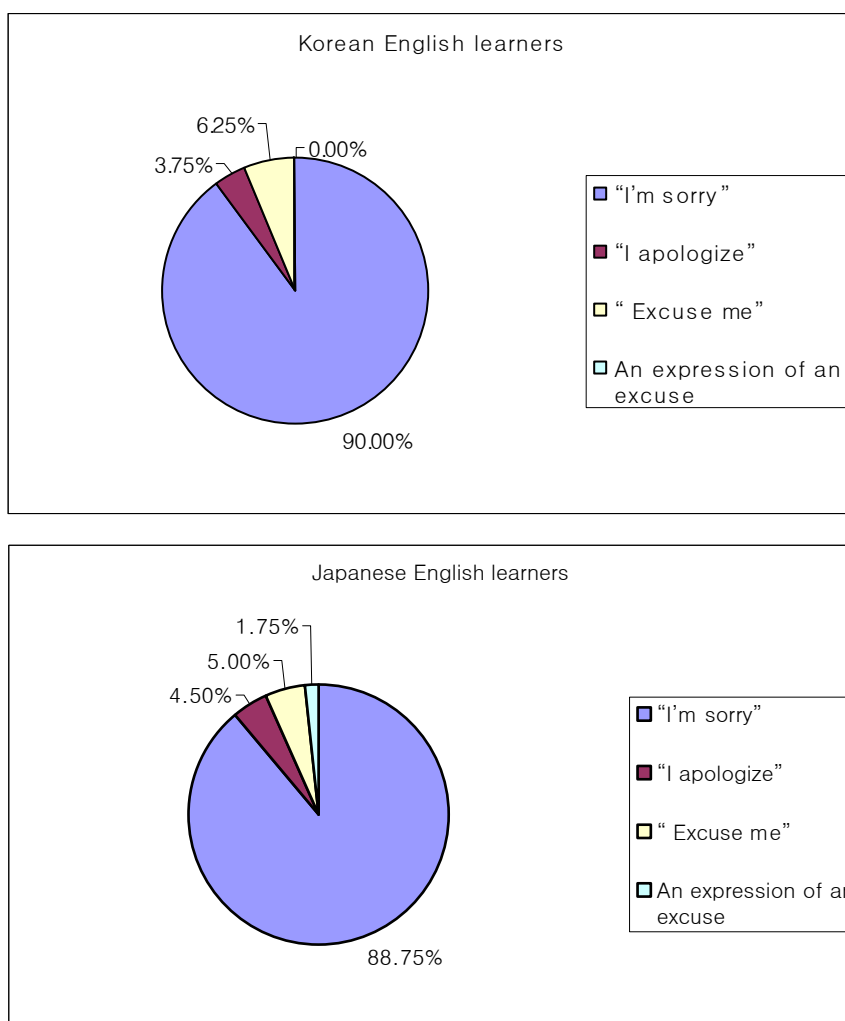
Graph1
Frequency of use of apologizing expressions*



*The data are expressed in percentages

Second, this paper found that both of Japanese and Korean usually used the limited expression in apologizing situations (see Graph 2). For example, Japanese were likely to “I’m sorry,” “I apologize,” and “Excuse me,” and each of expressions was the percentage of 88.75%, 4.5%, and 5%, respectively. In contrast, Korean expressed 90% of “I’m sorry,” 3.75% of “I apologize,” and 6.25 % of “Excuse me.” The finding showed that Japanese and Korean as NNSs often presented the limited, similar types of apologies such as especially “I’m sorry.”

Graph 2
Frequency of use of subformulas



Third, this result suggested the frequency of the use of intensifiers between Japanese and Korean. In two situations of “forgetting a meeting with your boss” and “bumping into lady, hurting her, & knocking over packages,” Japanese used much more intensifiers (i.e. really, so, terribly) than did Korean (Japanese 20% vs. Korean 12.5%). Also, the common expression of intensifier is “so.” That meant that Japanese were more polite than Korean.

Finally, it is believed that Japanese are extremely status conscious (Condon 1984, Deutsch 1983, Nakane 1972, 1974). Most interestingly, in the situation of “forgetting a meeting with your boss,” both of Japanese and Korean are the same percentage (see Table 1). The boss is higher than employee, so they used the expression of an apology with an intensifier (e.g. “I’m so sorry” and “I’m terribly sorry”). That meant to us that Korean as well as Japanese said “I’m so sorry” much more frequently when talking to a higher status person than when talking to a lower status person. Therefore, the social status would be regarded as a

factor affecting to the speech act of NNSs. Furthermore, it showed that both of subjects can be sensitive to high status.

4. Conclusions

According to Cohen and Olshtain (1981), it appeared that Non-Native speakers had the sociocultural competence through the case study of an apology. Garcia (1989) found the comparison between NNSs and NSs by researching the apology. Through these earlier studies, I assumed that the differences would be seen in the apologies by NNSs.

In this study, I found the differences between Japanese and Korean in the case of an apology. The findings were the following:

1. Korean were more likely to express an apology than were Japanese
2. Both of Japanese and Korean usually used the limited expression in apologizing situations, especially "I'm sorry."
3. Japanese used much more intensifiers (i.e. really, so, terribly) than did Korean.
4. Korean as well as Japanese said "I'm so sorry" much more frequently when talking to a higher status person than when talking to a lower status person.

The results of this paper demonstrated speech types of the apologies as NNSs from the different cultural background. These findings suggested that EFL teachers should often make English learners expose in the real situation. Even though the textbook had a variety of apologies in the part of speaking, students couldn't realize those expressions in the real situation. Through this paper, it will be anticipated that EFL teachers have to set up the effective instructions and develop adequate materials for the development of students' communicative competence.

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APPENDIX

Age: _____ Sex: F / M _____ Nationality: _____
 Instruction: You will be asked to read and to response in eight situations for calling an apology. You try to answer like in the real situation.

Apology Instrument

Situation 1

You're at a meeting and you say something that one of the participants interprets as a personal insult to him

He: "I feel that your last remark was directed at me and I take offense."

You: _____

Situation 2

You completely forget a crucial meeting at the office with your boss. An hour later you call him to apologize. The problem is that this is the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. Your boss gets in the line and asks:

Boss: "What happened to you?"

You: _____

Situation 3

You forget a get-together with a friend. You call him to apologize. This is already the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. Your friend asks over the phone:

Friend: "What happened? "

You: _____

Situation 4

You call from work to find out how things are at home and your kid reminds you that you forgot to take him shopping, as you had promised. And this is the second time that this has happened. Your kid says over the phone:

Kid: "Oh, you forgot again and you promised!"

You: _____

Situation 5

Backing out of a parking place, you run into the side of another car. It was clearly your fault. You dent in the side door slightly. The driver gets out and comes over to you angrily.

Driver: "Can't you look where you're going? See what you've done?"

You: _____

Situation 6

You accidentally bump into a well-dressed elderly lady at an elegant department store, causing her to spill her packages all over the floor. You hurt her leg, too. It's clearly your fault and you want to apologize profusely.

She: "Ow! My goodness! "

You: _____

Situation 7

You bump into a well-dressed elderly lady at a department store, shaking her up a bit. It's your fault, and you want to apologize.

She: "Hey, look out! "

You: _____

Situation 8

You bump into an elderly lady at a department store. You hardly could have avoided doing so because she was blocking the way. Still, you feel that some kind of apology is in order.

She: "Oh, my!"

You: _____