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Keywords

intercultural, politeness, evaluations, apology, im

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Evaluations of im/politeness of an intercultural apology

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Abstract:

This study examines variation in evaluations of im/politeness of a recording of a naturally occurring intercultural apology, focusing in particular on potential cultural differences in these evaluations across speakers of (Australian) English and (Mandarin) Chinese. We first closely analyse the apology itself as a form of social action, and suggest in the course of this analysis that evaluations of im/politeness are closely tied to converging and diverging interpretations of actions and meanings that are interactionally achieved in situated discourse. The results of a survey of evaluations of the apology and follow-up interviews with Australian and Taiwanese informants are then discussed. A comparison of ratings of im/politeness of the intercultural apology between Taiwanese and Australians suggests that there are indeed significant differences in evaluations of im/politeness between members of these two cultural backgrounds. We trace this through our analysis of metadiscursive commentary to differences in the ways in which "sincerity" is conceptualised in (Australian) English and Taiwanese Mandarin. In doing so we propose a firmer empirical basis for the analyst to make inferences about whether the interactional achievement of diverging interpretations of meanings and actions in intercultural discourse is culturally motivated or simply idiosyncratic to the situation or individual participants. We conclude, however, that while evaluations of im/politeness are indeed influenced by the cultural background of respondents, developing a more fine-grained understanding of cultural influences on evaluations of im/politeness is necessary.

1. Introduction

Apologies are generally classified as a form of politeness or remedial facework in the large body of research on this social action that has emerged to date. However, most this work has concentrated on establishing how apologies are produced, in particular, the various linguistic forms and strategies that constitute an apology. In such studies, it is generally taken for granted that “apologies are politeness strategies” (Holmes 1990: 155), as they have been, for most part, examined through the lens of Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (Deutschmann 2003; Holmes 1990, 1995; Márquez-Reiter 2008), or less commonly, Goffman’s (1971) model of facework (Owen 1983; Koutsantoni 2007). There has thus been less focus on how apologies are perceived by recipients, and the possibility that the same apology may be evaluated as polite, impolite, over-polite or shades between by different interactants. And while there has been some work on apologies that has encompassed the perspectives of both the speaker and addressee in analysing them as a form of interactionally achieved social action (Davies, Merrison and Goddard 2007; Owen 1983; Robinson 2004), the assumption that apologies are in themselves a form of politeness or remedial facework has still been retained.

Recent work on politeness, however, has witnessed a shift towards a discursive, evaluative approach, where the treatment of politeness as a stance indexed by the speaker (Brown and Levinson 1987; Leech 1983) has been challenged as not taking into account the way in which politeness arises as a moral evaluation by speakers *and* addressees of (linguistic) behaviour in interaction (Eelen 2001; Locher and Watts 2005; Mills 2003; Watts 2003). The question arises, then, as to what underlies evaluations of apologies as polite, impolite, overpolite and shades between by interactants.

In this paper, we first propose that one way in which the analyst can make inferences about evaluations of im/politeness co-constituted by participants is to focus on the ways in which participants (dis)affiliate with each other through the interactional achievement of meanings and actions. We take a naturally occurring apology arising in an intercultural interaction as our starting point. In our analysis we approach apologies as a form of social action (Davies, Merrison and Goddard 2007; Owen 1983; Robinson 2004). We suggest that evaluations of im/politeness are closely tied to converging and diverging interpretations of actions and meanings that are interactionally achieved in situated discourse (Arundale 2006, 2010; Haugh 2007, 2010b), as well as the empirical and moral norms relative to which such evaluations arise.¹ Empirical norms, in this analysis, are defined as encompassing (linguistic) behaviour interactants think is *likely* to be occasioned in particular, localised contexts based on the sum of their individual experiences, while moral norms are defined as involving (linguistic) behaviour interactants think *should* be occasioned, with the latter constituting part of the moral structures of sociocultural networks (Culpeper 2008: 29; Haugh 2003: 399-400; cf. Eelen 2001: 127-158). In invoking norms in our interactional analysis, then, we are presuming that such evaluations of im/politeness are not only being made by the participants, but *could* be made by others who share similar socioculturally-situated frames of reference. It then becomes an empirical

¹ In the Conjoint Co-Constituting Model of Communication (Arundale 2006, 2010), the term *interpretings* is used in place of *interpretations* in order to illustrate the contingency of understandings of actions and meanings as they emerge through interaction. In this paper we use the more common term for the sake of simplicity, although with the proviso that such interpretations are always to be read as contingent rather than determinate participant understandings.

question as to what extent similar evaluations would be distributed across sociocultural groups.

We thus next propose that another way of validating the analyst's inferences about the evaluations of im/politeness co-constituted by participants is to carefully examine perceptions of im/politeness and metadiscursive commentary about this same apology elicited across a number of different informants.² Such metadiscursive commentary arises as a discourse co-constructed between the interviewer and informants, and is thus analysed as such. We focus in our analysis of these discursive events on the extent to which similar evaluations can be observed to be shared across sociocultural networks (in this case largely middle-class, educated Anglo-Australians and Taiwanese), thereby providing grounds for exploring intercultural differences in evaluations of im/politeness. In order to ground the inherent variability and argumentativity of evaluations of im/politeness (Eelen 2001; Haugh 2010a), we conceptualise (national) culture as being both constituted in and constitutive of the intercultural interaction itself as well as the subsequent metadiscursive commentary.

Culture itself is a notoriously difficult concept to define, so here we can only offer a broad conceptualisation of it as encompassing ways of perceiving, shared knowledge, norms, values and practices, which are learned and shared through (un)conscious observation, interaction and imitation amongst members of the social group in question (cf. Fortman and Giles 2006: 92-94; Spencer-Oatey 2000: 4). In saying culture is constituted through interaction we mean to suggest that particular norms, for example, may be invoked by participants as a discursive resource, including at the level of so-called national cultures (Angouri 2010; De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak 1999). In other words, *culture* in the lay sense can be invoked by participants as a way of drawing boundaries between self(-group) and other(-group), and in this sense ties in with notions of group membership and identity. In the case of evaluations of im/politeness of apologies, this entails categorizing the apology as appropriate or inappropriate (or shades between) by making reference to a cultural identity, a process which is, of course, open to discursive dispute. In saying culture is constitutive of interaction, however, we also suggest that such norms are not simply locally created, but constitute a form of social memory distributed across social networks which cannot be straightforwardly reduced to psychological constructs (Krippendorff 2009). As Kecskes (2010, in press) has argued, participants bring prior knowledge into intercultural interactions that influences the communicative process. In the case of apologies, such prior knowledge includes understandings of both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic norms of apologising that are presumed by participants.³ We suggest that exploring such evaluative norms through the lens of intercultural interaction provides a useful window into their inherent discursivity (Haugh 2010c).

We begin by first briefly reviewing research on apologies in situated discourse, focusing in particular on previous studies of apologies in English and (Mandarin) Chinese. We then undertake a social action analysis of the intercultural apology that occurred in a telephone conversation between an Australian and Taiwanese which forms the core of this study, examining how the two interactants index affiliative and

² An earlier version of this study can be found in Chang (2008). This paper is a revised and expanded version of that paper.

³ Pragmalinguistic norms encompass the linguistic forms and strategies used in interactionally achieving meanings and actions, and their interpersonal implications, while sociopragmatic norms encompass the social values and ways of perceiving that underlie the interpretation and performance of communicative acts as (in)appropriate (cf. Thomas 1983).

disaffiliative stances in the course of the interaction. Intercultural variation in evaluations of this apology on a scale ranging from very impolite to very polite amongst a sample of Australian and Taiwanese informants is then explored: firstly, through detailed comparisons of their ratings, and secondly through an analysis of the accounts of their ratings that were given in subsequent follow-up interviews. Finally, the implications of these findings for further research on intercultural im/politeness are considered.

2. Apologies in English and Chinese

An apology is broadly defined here as an action in interaction where the speaker is “acknowledging some perceived social transgression and the hearer [is] receiving and dealing with this act” (Grainger and Harris 2007: 1). In this definition apologies are treated as interactionally achieved; that is, an action counts as an apology if framed as an apology by the speaker and treated as an apology by the recipient. As Grainger and Harris (2007: 3) point out, studies of apologies thus far have largely focused on how they are produced by speakers, with the role of the recipient being largely neglected. Following the work of Olshtain, Blum-Kulka and others (Olshtain and Cohen 1983; Olshtain 1989; Blum-Kulka, House and Kas per 1989; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984), for example, a large number of cross-cultural and interlanguage studies of apologies, for the most part using data collected through discourse completion tests (DCT), have been conducted, although there has been increasing focus on analysing apologies in situated spoken discourse in recent years (Aijmer 1996; Deutschmann 2003; Holmes 1990, 1995; Koutsantoni 2007; Márquez-Reiter 2008; Owen 1983; Robinson 2004).⁴ Such work has focused on different forms of apology illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), such as *sorry* in English or *duìbùqǐ* in Mandarin Chinese, and various apologies strategies, for example, giving accounts, promising forbearance and so on.

This emphasis on the production of apologies and their treatment as examples “*par excellence* of politeness at work” (Grainger and Harris 2007: 1) in the field can be traced back, on the one hand, to Goffman’s (1971) seminal treatment of apologies as remedial work, and Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) subsequent development of this in the context of their face-saving model of politeness; and, on the other hand, to Searle’s (1969, 1979) classic treatment of apologies as a speech act. Both Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory and Searle’s Speech Act Theory are rooted in the perspective of the speaker. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), for example, focus primarily on the speaker in treating apologies as a way of the speaker showing concern for the addressee’s negative face, which gives rise to politeness if the appropriate amount of “concern” is paid relative to the offence (R), and the social distance (D) and power differential (P) that holds on that occasion between the speaker and addressee.⁵ In such approaches, however, there is no mention of how the apology is received by the addressee in the above conceptualisation, and thus there is little room left for an examination of cases where the treatment of the act in question as an apology is in dispute amongst interactants (Glinert 2010).

⁴ See Meier (1998) and more recently Grainger and Harris (2007) for an overview of research to date on apologies.

⁵ Subsequent work has also focused on how apologies may be supportive of the speaker’s self-image or positive face (Deutschmann 2003: 43), but retains the assumption that the speaker indexing a polite stance can be straightforwardly equated with politeness.

Due to the dominance of such speaker-centred approaches there have been only a limited number of studies focusing on apologies in situated spoken discourse in English (Aijmer 1996; Deustchmann 2003; Holmes 1990; Owen 1983; Robinson 2004), and even less work on situated apologies in (Mandarin) Chinese (Pan and Kádár in press: 99-100; Tsai 2007). In the remainder of this section, we briefly review some of the main findings from studies of apologies in situated spoken discourse, as it is these which are most relevant to our subsequent analysis. We focus on apologies as primary actions rather than apology-prefaced actions (Robinson 2004) in this review.

Apologies (in English) have been found to be either retrospective and thus remedial or “face-supportive” in orientation, or anticipatory and thus disarming or softening in orientation (Aijmer 1996: 98-99). In both cases, the most common IFID in English across formal and informal settings has been found to be *sorry*-based units (Aijmer 1996; Deustchmann 2003; Holmes 1990; Owen 1983). For instance, in examples of apology in spoken data from the British National Corpus, 59.2% of identified IFIDs contained the *sorry* token (Deustchmann 2003: 51), while in spoken data from the London-Lund Corpus, the most common IFID was found to be (*I'm*) *sorry*, with 180/215 tokens (83.7%) found according to Aijmer (1996: 84).

Work on apologies in interactional discourse in English has found that apologies do not occur in isolation but are often preceded by what Owen (1983) terms “priming moves”, which occasion the apology action (p.51). For instance, the co-construction of “statements of troubles” or “complainables” by interactants often leads into an apology sequence (Owen 1983: 54). Apology IFIDs are also found to commonly co-occur with accounts (Owen 1983: 96). The two most predominant account turn-constructions found by Owen (1983) were an apology conjoined by *but* with account (that is, [apology (*sorry*)] *but* [account]), and a statement of the offence conjoined by *and* with an account (that is, [specification of offence] *and* [account]) (p.96). Deustchmann (2003) argues that the use of the conjunctives *and* versus *but* has different implications:

Whereas *and* tends to be used as a device establishing a link (of responsibility) between the speaker with the offence...*but* usually introduces explanations or justifications dissociating the speaker from the offence. (Deustchmann 2003: 57)

In other words, in constructing accounts, the speaker may attempt to distance him or herself from the offence using *but*-conjoining.

In regards to responses to apologies from recipients in English, Robinson (2004) argues that these can be characterised as either preferred or dispreferred (cf. Owen 1983: 98-103). Robinson (2004) claims that preferred responses “somehow mitigate or undermine an apology’s claim to have caused offence”, while dispreferred responses “somehow endorse an apology’s claim to have caused offence” (p.319). Preferred responses to apologies are generally accomplished through expressions of absolution and disagreeing with the need to have apologised (pp.305-306). Absolution is projected by expressions such as *that’s alright* or *that’s okay*, through which the recipient “simultaneously acknowledges the commission of a possible offence yet claims that no offence was actually taken” (Robinson 2004: 319). He also notes that this absolution can be upgraded through *oh*-prefaced responses, for example, *oh that’s alright* (p.307). Disagreeing with the need to have apologised involves expressions such as *no*, through which the recipient “undermines an apology’s premise that offence was given” (p.319). Examples of dispreferred responses, on the other hand, include mere acknowledgements, such as shrugging or saying *right*, or responses that

show concord with the apology such as *yeah*, that is, “responses that agree with the need to have apologised” (p.319).

As we noted, there has been very little work thus far on apologies occurring in situated spoken discourse in (Mandarin) Chinese. Pan and Kádár (in press: 99-100) argue this is a reflection of the so-called “no apologising culture” (*bu daoqian wenhua*) developing in (Mainland) China. While apologies were traditionally quite frequent in Chinese (Chun and Yun 2010; Kádár 2007), Pan and Kádár (in press) claim that in modern China apologies are more often achieved “by means other than linguistic expressions, such as taking redressive action or doing something for the person offended to mend the relationship” (p.99). This claim that the rate of apology IFIDs is decreasing in Chinese (which is what we understand to be meant by “no apologising culture”) is reflected in Tsai’s (2007: 83) apology role play data, where she found offers of repair (34.6%) more frequently than IFIDs (22.6%). Other apology strategies identified in her apology role play data included acknowledging responsibility (17.5%), and less commonly, providing explanations, expressing concern, evasive strategies or opting out (Tsai 2007: 83). She also noted expressions of embarrassment (*buhaoysi*) and emotive expressions were used to index the speaker’s sincerity in making the apology and to reduce embarrassment for the offended party (pp.67-68). Crucially, she also identified repetition of IFIDs as well as offers of repair and other strategies as features of apologies occurring in situated spoken discourse in Chinese (Tsai 2007: 78, 87-99), although in being based on elicited rather than naturally-occurring data, these conclusions need to be treated with due caution.

In the following section, we look more carefully at a naturally occurring apology that arose in an intercultural interaction, drawing from these studies of apologies in situated discourse in English and (Mandarin) Chinese in our analysis.

3. An interactional analysis of an intercultural apology

The intercultural apology that is the focus in this study occurred in a telephone conversation between a male Australian (Wayne) and a female Taiwanese (Joyce).⁶ Joyce’s mother had started becoming friends with Wayne having found a common interest in Taiwanese cooking when shopping at a local supermarket. Joyce’s mother had invited Wayne and his wife to dinner at a Taiwanese restaurant, but suddenly had to go back to Taiwan because Joyce’s grandmother became ill. Rather than cancelling the appointment, Joyce and the rest of the family were asked to still have dinner with Wayne and his wife by Joyce’s mother. Joyce called Wayne to ask whether he would meet them for dinner a week later, and during that call Wayne promised he would be there. On that evening, however, Wayne and his wife did not turn up to the restaurant. Joyce made a call to Wayne from the restaurant, but he did not answer his mobile. The next day Wayne sent a short SMS text to Joyce, saying “Sorry I forgot I was busy with something.” Since Joyce did not leave a message on Wayne’s mobile phone about the purpose of her call, in subsequently apologising for an offence (“Sorry I forgot”) and offering an account (“I was busy with something”), Wayne’s SMS text constitutes evidence he was indeed aware that he had promised to meet them for dinner. The following evening, two days after the event, Joyce called Wayne, having not received a follow-up call from him at that point. The entire conversation was

⁶ Joyce is the sister of the first author of this paper, hence the ready access to the recording itself and the background details of this incident we were able to gain. Permission to use this recording for this study was gained from both participants by the first author after the call was recorded by Joyce.

recorded and then transcribed for close analysis. In examining this situation, then, there are three possible offences to which the participants could be orienting to during the call (Aijmer 1996: 64; Deuschmann 2003: 109-110). First, Wayne and his wife did not turn up to dinner. Second, he did not let Joyce and her family know they would not be turning up. Third, he did not respond to Joyce's call from the restaurant (that is, he did not call back). The third offence was occasioned by Joyce making the following call to Wayne two days after the event. The entire conversation, which is reproduced in Appendix 1, is divided into five parts in the analysis that follows.

It is worth noting that Joyce had not met Wayne in person, and had only spoken to him once before making this call, when she had called on behalf of her mother (who does not speak English fluently) to arrange the specific time and place for the dinner. There is thus little in the way of any interactional history between Joyce (and indeed the rest of Joyce's family) and Wayne that precedes this conversation. In other words, the relational work that occurs in the conversation is largely the whole sum of their relationship. This gives us a way into analysing the (dis)affiliative stances that are indexed here without the complication of there being much in the way of prior (relational) context.

In our analysis, however, we resist the assumption that Joyce should be taking "native speaker" norms to be her target. The analysis of intercultural interaction should treat the participant understandings of both so-called native and non-native speakers on an equal footing, not fall into the trap of prioritising native speaker norms as a yardstick for evaluating the relative degree of (in)appropriateness of "non-native" speaker behaviour. Thus, while it is worth noting that Joyce had spent nearly four years in Australia three studying at university, and so she had some degree of familiarity with Australian interactional practices, we do not assume that Joyce was necessarily intending to follow such norms in this particular interaction. It is in this spirit, then, that we focus on explicating the interpretations and evaluations displayed by both Wayne and Joyce in our analysis without prioritising either one of them. This is not to say that participants or informants themselves do not make such judgments, and as part of an analysis such membership categorisations may indeed come to the fore. But we as analysts should avoid inadvertently reproducing native/non-native speaker stereotyping through premature categorisation of the interpretations and evaluations of participants as "native" versus "non-native". Instead, we regard these interpretations and evaluations as a contingent interactional achievement between two participants who are likely to have different frames of reference, with a particular focus on how these participants display their orientation towards each other in order to explicate (rather than simply make assumptions about) these different frames of reference.

The conversation, which was just over two minutes long can be divided into five main parts (see Appendix 1): (1) opening and greetings (lines 1-5), (2) apology from Joyce to Wayne (lines 6-12), (3) apology from Wayne to Joyce (lines 13-32), (4) "catching up" (lines 33-61), and (5) closing (lines 62-75). While the apology from Wayne to Joyce about missing their appointment is the main focus of our analysis, we argue that evaluations of this apology as im/polite cannot be divorced from the broader interaction in which it occurred. We suggest in this analysis that it is not only the interactional achievement of the apology action itself that contributes to such evaluations (in part 3), but also the emergence of (diverging) interpretations of meanings that are interactionally achieved coordinate with the apology action, including the apology from Joyce that arguably occasions the apology from Wayne

(in part 2), and Wayne's attempts to "catch up" with Joyce and thereby show friendliness (in part 4).

In part 1 of the overall sequence, it is Joyce who calls Wayne (thereby occasioning a third possible offence on Wayne's part as previously noted), opening the conversation with a standard greetings and "how-are-you" sequence (Schegloff 1968, 2007: 22), although Joyce does not reciprocate the latter. Instead, she launches an apology sequence in part 2 with a pre-apology (line 6), asking whether it is too late to call, as seen in the excerpt below.⁷

(1)

6 J: is it too late to ↑call
7 W: No: it's fi:ne.
8 J: Yeah a:h sorry hhh yeah ah sorry to call you
9 so late. Yeah I get your ah message, sorry cos
10 I didn't have time to reply to you.
11 (0.4)
12 W: ye:ah no, it's I'm- it's fine.

Wayne responds with a denial ("no") and absolution ("it's fine") in line 7, thereby treating her pre-apology as an apology through a standard preferred response (Robinson 2004: 301-302), to which Joyce subsequently responds by issuing an apology IFID oriented towards her late call (lines 8-9). She then goes on to say that she received Wayne's prior SMS message, and projects another apology with a *sorry* IFID in regards to not replying to his SMS (lines 9-10). Wayne once again responds with a denial and absolution (line 12), thereby interactionally achieving it as an apology from Joyce to Wayne, on the one hand, yet simultaneously claiming that no offence was taken (Robinson 2004: 319). However, he uses the *yeah-no* discourse marker, which is becoming increasingly common in (Australian) English (Burrige and Florey 2002), to hedge his dissent with the need to apologise.

Wayne then launches an apology sequence himself (part 3), with a standard apology IFID conjoined with *but* to an account (lines 13-14). The occurrence of this apology sequence after Joyce's initial apology sequence (lines 6-12) suggests that Joyce's apology here occasions an apology from Wayne, or constitutes what Owen (1983) terms an apology "priming move". It is the second apology projected by Joyce (lines 9-10) which makes "not replying" a possible complainable (Schegloff 2005), thereby creating interactional space for Wayne to orient towards his own offence of not returning Joyce's call from the restaurant. And this is indeed exactly what Wayne orients to in the head act of his apology, where he refers to "not getting back to you" (the third offence) in lines 13-14.

(2)

13 W: It's just, a:h, I really apologise for not to you
14 getting back the other day but we couldn't make it?
15 J: oh, that's okay.

Wayne does not, however, orient his apology IFID to the second offence, namely, not letting Joyce and her family know that he and his wife would not be turning up for dinner. In saying that "we couldn't make it?" (line 14), Wayne acknowledges the primary offence, that is, not turning up to dinner when he had agreed to come, but he

⁷ A list of transcription symbols can be found at the end of this paper, with pseudonyms being used for both interactants.

does not directly apologise for this here, or indeed anywhere, in the conversation that follows.⁸

The head act of Wayne's apology is comprised of *apologise* as the IFID and a *but*-conjoined account as we noted above. The use of *apologise* is a marked IFID since it occurs only very infrequently in corpora of spoken discourse in English (Aijmer 1996: 84; Deustchmann 2003: 51; Lakoff 2001: 201) and is also preceded by an intensifier, which arguably increases the illocutionary force of the apology head act. However, in conjoining his account ("we couldn't make it") with *but* (Deustchmann 2003: 57; Owen 1983: 96), Wayne at the same time distances himself from taking responsibility for the first offence of not turning up. Joyce, in turn, issues a standard preferred response through an absolution ("that's okay"), which is *oh*-prefaced, thereby increasing the level of absolution (Robinson 2004: 307). Up until this point in the interaction, then, both Wayne and Joyce have been aligning their responses and thus have indexed affiliative stances with each other. In the utterances that follow, however, a more complex picture emerges.

In lines 15-18, Joyce offers a more detailed account for Wayne's second offence, namely, not letting them know he and his wife would not be coming. This account, however, gives rise to diverging interpretations on the part of Wayne and Joyce as we can observe in the excerpt below.

(3)

15 J: oh, that's okay. yeah, yeah, yeah. I- I just
16 thought oh probably you are busy with something
17 so you ah probably were easy to- to (0.2)
18 for(hhh)get it.
19 W: yeah we were pretty busy actually
20 J: oh, okay, yeah, yeah that's fine. I just want to
21 call you, that- that- that's oka:y.

Wayne, on the one hand, responds by agreeing with Joyce's proposed account (line 19). However, this assent is followed by the discourse marker *actually*, which following Smith and Jucker's (2000: 223) analysis, arguably increases the intensity of Wayne's commitment to his claim. The way in which *actually* can be seen to "play a role in the negotiation of epistemic status" (p.223) is apparent in Wayne asserting his ownership of this epistemic space, namely, knowing about his own schedule, through the placement of this discourse marker. In this sense, then, his response disaligns with Joyce's attempts to decrease Wayne's possible embarrassment about the offence. That Joyce treats his response in line 19 as disaligning is evident in her subsequent response in line 20, where she initially only acknowledges Wayne's claim to epistemic ownership ("oh okay"), before repeating an absolution for his offence ("that's fine" in line 20 and "that's okay" in line 21).

Joyce also launches the possible closing of the apology sequence at this point by asserting something which is already known to both of them (that is, Joyce called Wayne) (lines 20-21).

(4)

20 J: oh, okay, yeah, yeah that's fine. I just want to
21 call you, that- that- that's oka:y.

⁸ It is worth reiterating that Wayne did apologise for not turning up to dinner in the SMS text he sent to Joyce earlier through an IFID (*sorry*), acknowledgement of the offence ("I forgot") and an account ("I was busy with something"). He did not, however, revisit this apology in the phone conversation.

22 (0.2)
 23 W: ye:ah I'll give you a- (0.2) I'll give you a
 24 ring at a later day and u:m I'll give you a time
 25 or a date when we're gonna come back down again.
 26 J: yeah, sure, yeah, maybe just u:m can make another
 27 time when you come down to Brisbane.
 28 (0.2)
 29 W: yeah it'll be ni:ce=actually it'll be nice to
 30 catch up.
 31 J: y(hh)es hhh y(hh)es oka:y ye(hh)ah so no
 32 wo(hh)rries, that's oka:(h)y.

Wayne does not, however, align with this possible closing of the apology sequence, but rather makes an offer of repair (lines 23-25), which Joyce accepts (lines 26-27), although no actual date for another meeting is specified by either participants. Wayne then topicalises “catching up” in evaluating this possible future meeting positively (lines 29-30). Joyce, however, while agreeing with this positive assessment, once again launches the closing of the apology sequence, and possibly the entire conversation with “yeah so” (line 31) (Schegloff 2009), followed by issuing yet another absolution for Wayne’s offence (“no worries”, “that’s okay”) in lines 31-32.

The interaction then moves into the fourth major sequence, initiated by Wayne, where they “catch up”, although this action is arguably “making as if to catch up” since Wayne and Joyce have only ever spoken once before, and then only very briefly. Joyce, however, repeatedly disaligns with Wayne’s attempts to show interest in her and her family, particularly, in lines 37, 44, 50, 53, 56 and 59 where Joyce does not reciprocate “showing interest” in Wayne despite there being interactional space in order to do so, but simply responds with “yeah”. She also projects possible closing of the entire conversation twice in the “catching up” sequence (Schegloff 1968), notably at lines 37-39 and lines 62-64. It is the second possible conversational closing that is picked up by Wayne (line 66), who then confirms closing of the call with a positive assessment of the entire call (“it was really nice to talk with you”) (line 68), with which Joyce assents (line 69), before closing greetings are exchanged (lines 69-75).

While the overall tenor of this conversation might appear at first glance to be affiliative, then, we argue that there are three key diverging interpretations of meanings and actions that arise during this interaction, which are indicative of disaffiliative stances being indexed by the participants, particularly Joyce. The first occurs when Joyce offers an account for Wayne’s offence, which is followed by disaligning responses first from Wayne and then from Joyce. The second is indicated through Joyce repeating absolution of Wayne’s offence at a number of different points in the conversation despite Wayne only ever offering an apology once in the interaction. The third occurs over the course of the “catching up” sequence, where Joyce repeatedly attempts to close it down.

We would like to suggest that there are two inferences we as analysts could make about these disaligning actions. First, they are indicative of the culturally grounded nature of the diverging interpretations of the meanings and actions which are interactionally achieved in this call. Second, these diverging interpretations themselves are indicative of diverging evaluations of the degree of im/politeness of Wayne’s apology to Joyce. While Joyce is attempting to “save face” for Wayne through offering a more developed account (lines 15-18), for instance, Wayne response in line 19 indicates that he has interpreted this account as face-threatening. His response, in turn, appears to be face-threatening to Joyce in light of her awkward response at this point (line 20). Wayne also does not respond to Joyce’s implication

that his apology was not sufficient arising from her repeated offers of absolution, while Joyce does not align with Wayne's attempts to show friendliness. These disalignments can arguably be traced back to differences in apology practices in (Mandarin) Chinese, where reducing embarrassment for the offender and showing the apology is sincere through repetition constitutes a "polite" apology, and (Australian) English where showing friendliness is interpreted as an important accompaniment in a "polite" apology sequence.

However, while we can arguably demonstrate by carefully examining Wayne and Joyce's uptake of each other's utterance that the apology as a whole gave rise to both affiliative and disaffiliative stances, we believe it is more difficult to be certain that: (1) these diverging interpretations are culturally grounded, and (2) there are indeed diverging evaluations of im/politeness arising on the part of Wayne and Joyce. In treating these diverging interpretations as culturally grounded, on the one hand, we are making the claim that these are not simply idiosyncratic differences in Wayne's and Joyce's communicative styles. The question arises, however, as to how we might justify this claim. In characterising im/politeness as an evaluation, on the other hand, we are clearly locating it in the cognising of individual participants (that is, in the minds of Wayne and Joyce). Yet, it has been argued that these evaluations are also sociocultural in nature, since they draw from both empirical and moral norms. The question, then, is how do we know whether politeness or impoliteness (or something between) has arisen here?

While follow-up interviews with participants can sometimes provide insight into such interpersonal concerns (Haugh 2010c: 155-157), and indeed Joyce indicated to us that she regarded Wayne's apology to be impolite lending support to our analysis in part, they are not always feasible in practice. In this case, asking Wayne about his apology could have occasioned, in our view, further face-threatening discourse since such questions would implicitly raise the possibility that Wayne's apology was inappropriate. As we as analysts aim to deal with real-life interactions, we also sometimes face ethical or moral constraints on what we can ask of people who participate in our recordings. Questions of im/politeness are particularly sensitive as they go to the core of interpersonal relationships, and indeed are difficult at times for participants to straightforwardly answer, as Pan (2008) argues in relation to survey interviews. Follow-up interviews with participants also do not necessarily constitute reliable evidence of sociocultural influences as the views of one informant can, of course, be open to the charge of being idiosyncratic.

In the following section, we offer one possible solution to these two dilemmas, namely, how we might ground our analysis of sociocultural influences on evaluations im/politeness, which are inherently sociocognitive, within an interactional perspective. We first investigate empirical norms underlying the evaluation of Wayne's apology as *im/polite* by examining ratings by Australian and Taiwanese of the apology. We then analyse the moral norms underlying those evaluations of im/politeness through follow-up interviews with Australian and Taiwanese informants.

4. Evaluations of im/politeness

In this section, we examine evaluations of this intercultural apology as polite, impolite, and shades between amongst speakers of Australian English and (Mandarin) Chinese. We begin by describing the data collection process, and then analyse the overall scores given by 50 Australians and Taiwanese on an im/politeness rating scale

(ranging from very impolite through to very polite), before discussing the accounts given by 28 selected respondents in follow-up interviews.

4.1. Data

The respondents to the questionnaire included 25 Australians and 25 Taiwanese. All of the participants were born in their respective countries and were native speakers of either (Australian) English or (Mandarin) Chinese. All of the Chinese-speaking Taiwanese were also competent speakers of English. The age of the Australian respondents ranged from 18 to 51 years, and that of the Taiwanese participants from 20 to 45 years, with 12 males and 13 females in each sample. After completing the survey, 28 respondents, including 14 Australian and 14 Taiwanese informants balanced across gender, were then selected based on availability for follow-up interviews. All of the respondents can be described as coming from educated, middle-class backgrounds. The respondents who evaluated and discussed the intercultural apology were thus from the same sociocultural backgrounds as the two original interactants, Wayne and Joyce.

The apology evaluated in this study occurred in a telephone conversation between Wayne (an Australian) and Joyce (a Taiwanese), as discussed in the previous section. All of the participants first listened to the entire conversation, as well as being given a simplified transcription of this conversation, after the events leading up to the telephone call were explained. They were then asked to rate the level of im/politeness of the apology in that call on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “very impolite”, “impolite”, “neither polite nor impolite”, “polite”, through to “very polite” (see Appendix 2), firstly because the interaction itself was in English, and secondly because we were attempting to tap intercultural not cross-cultural ratings. In the case of the Taiwanese respondents, we initially anticipated that they would employ Australian-influenced norms in their evaluation, hence the English lexemes. However, it emerged that the Taiwanese actually employed different evaluative criteria, at least to some extent, as we will see in the following analysis.

This approach differs from earlier studies of perceptions of “sentence politeness”, which focused on ratings (Gupta, Walker and Romano 2007; Koyama 2001; Viejobeuno, Preston and Preston 2008) or rankings (Carrell and Konnecker 1981; Fraser 1978; Walters 1979) of the im/politeness of single sentences through written questionnaires. Previous approaches to analysing perceptions of politeness have only encompassed evaluations of im/politeness conventionally associated with particular utterance forms, divorced from their prosodic context (although see Walkinshaw [2009] for a recent attempt to contextualise such ratings in spoken versions of the relevant utterance). As we will see later, however, there are good reasons for allowing evaluations of apology to be situated within a broader discourse context rather than focusing on single utterances.

The follow-up interviews focused on better understanding the reasons why the respondents evaluated the apology in the way that they did. Interviewees were asked to give accounts for their ratings, and to discuss what they thought Wayne could or should have said (see Appendix 3). The interviews with Australians were conducted in English, while the interviews with Taiwanese were conducted in (Mandarin) Chinese. Most of the interviews were conducted by the first author, although a small number were conducted by Joyce herself. They were recorded and then later transcribed for analysis. In analysing these follow-up interviews, we treat the stances of the respondents as being co-constructed with the interviewer (Potter and Hepburn

2005), and thus we remain alert to the possibility that the Taiwanese respondents were simply siding with Joyce, or that the Australian respondents were siding with Wayne. The accounts the respondents themselves gave for their ratings of im/politeness indicate that these evaluations did indeed involve some degree of identity work, which we attempt to trace in our subsequent analysis.

4.2. Ratings of im/politeness: investigating empirical norms

The rating scale in the questionnaire generated a range of responses, although clear differences emerged between the Australian and Taiwanese respondents in their overall ratings of the degree of im/politeness of the apology, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Overall ratings of degree of im/politeness by Australian and Taiwanese respondents*

	AUSTRALIAN	TAIWANESE
very impolite	2	5
impolite	6	15
neither polite nor impolite	9	5
polite	8	0
very polite	0	0
TOTAL	25	25

The Australian respondents varied in their ratings from “very impolite” through to “polite”, with 32% (8/25) rating the apology as “(very) impolite”, 32% rating it as “polite”, and 36% (9/25) rating it as “neither polite nor impolite”. In other words, they were spread quite evenly across the im/politeness rating scale, although no respondents rated the apology as “very polite”. However, if one collapses the ratings into “impolite” versus “not impolite” amongst the Australian respondents, then a more clear pattern emerges, namely, 68% (17/25) rating the apology as “not impolite”, with only 32% (8/25) rating it as “impolite”. The Taiwanese respondents, on the other hand, exhibited much less variance in their overall ratings, ranging from “very impolite” through to “neither polite nor impolite”, with no respondents rating the apology as “polite” or “very polite”. 80% (20/25) of the Taiwanese respondents thus rated the apology as “(very) impolite”, while only 20% (5/25) rated it as “neither polite nor impolite”.

The difference between the overall ratings of Australians and Taiwanese was found to be statistically significant. Due to the small numbers of respondents in some categories, a chi square test was applied to the frequency of Australian and Taiwanese respondents who rated the apology as falling into either the category of “impolite” or “not impolite” ($X^2 = 36.00$, $p = 0.01$, $df = 1$). These very robust results at the 0.01 level of significance indicate that there was indeed a very clear difference between Australian and Taiwanese respondents in how they evaluated the degree of im/politeness of this intercultural apology.⁹

⁹ Notably, no clear differences emerged between male and female ratings of the degree of im/politeness of the apology. Both male and female respondents varied in their ratings from “very impolite” through to “polite”. 52% (13/25) of males and 60% (15/25) females rated the apology as “(very) impolite”, while 48% (12/25) of males and 40% of females rated it as not impolite. In contrast to differences in ratings across cultural background, however, this slight difference across genders was not statistically

Two key findings thus emerged from this survey. First, there was a clear difference in ratings of the degree of im/politeness of this apology between Australian and Taiwanese respondents. Second, despite this overall intercultural difference in evaluations of im/politeness, there was nevertheless some degree of intracultural variation as well, particularly amongst the Australian respondents. These differences in evaluations of im/politeness raise the question of what generates such variability. Although both the Australians and Taiwanese rated the apology using the English lexemes *polite* and *impolite*, when considered in conjunction with the analysis of the follow-up interviews, it becomes clear that the respondents were making these evaluations with reference to different moral norms. This is perhaps unsurprising since while the concepts of *politeness* in (Australian) English and *lǐmào* in Mandarin Chinese are analogous, they do not encompass exactly the same conceptual range (Gu 1990; Haugh 2006; Hua, Wei and Yuan 2000; Pan and Kádár 2011). In the following section, we focus our analysis on the accounts given by Australian and Taiwanese respondents when asked to explain their ratings, in order to further explore this intercultural variability in evaluations of im/politeness.

4.3. Accounting for ratings of im/politeness: investigating moral norms

Both the Australian and Taiwanese informants made reference in the interviews to the need to include standard components of an apology, namely, an IFID, an explanation or account, and an offer of repair or redress. They also emphasised the importance of sincerity in evaluating the apology in relation to im/politeness. It was claimed by both Australian and Taiwanese informants that their perceptions of Wayne's level of sincerity in making the apology was based on who initiated the apology sequence, and the degree to which the offence was perceived to lie outside of his control (and thus *intentions*). A perception of a greater level of sincerity was associated by informants with the offender (i.e., Wayne) initiating the apology rather than it being occasioned through a priming move on the part of the offended party (i.e., Joyce), and with an account or explanation which framed the offence as being outside of the offender's control and so *unintended* (cf. Arundale 2008: 257; Haugh 2008a: 101, 2008b: 224-225, 2008c: 69-71, 2009: 108). However, through closer analysis of the respective interviews with the informants it emerged that "sincerity" (in relation to evaluations of im/politeness) does not mean exactly the same thing to Australians and Taiwanese. It is these differences in moral evaluations of "sincerity" that we argue underlie the intercultural variation in evaluations of im/politeness of the apology.¹⁰

significant ($X^2 = 0.667$, $p = 0.05$, $df = 1$). Further analysis of possible gender differences within the same cultural group (that is, Australian males versus Australian females, and Taiwanese males versus Taiwanese females) revealed no statistically significant differences either. In other words, there was no discernible influence of gender on ratings of im/politeness in this context. No age-related trends emerged across either the Australian or Taiwanese respondents either. The ratings of im/politeness were fairly robust across different age groups, at least in the 18-50 year old age span. We readily acknowledge, however, that a more subtle gender or age effect might be discernible in a larger sample, and thus the influence of gender or age on evaluations of im/politeness remains an open question.

¹⁰ While there is not sufficient space here to explore intracultural variation in evaluations of im/politeness, it is worth noting that the Australian respondents demonstrated greater variance in their evaluations compared to the Taiwanese. Those Australians who evaluated the apology as "not impolite" took into account Wayne's attempts to index a friendly and casual stance in making the apology. Australian respondents who evaluated the apology as "(very) impolite", on the other hand,

Perceptions of *sincerity* and thus politeness in the case of Australian speakers of English arise from the being attentive and showing interest in the other person (Obana and Tomoda 1994: 41), and through indexing a casual interactional stance, which is reflective of the so-called Australian preference for informality (Goddard 2006: 69, 2009; Peters 2007: 251).¹¹ A number of Australian informants, for instance, explicitly linked their evaluations of the apology as polite to Wayne's attempts to show friendliness to Joyce by asking about herself and her mother, as seen in the excerpt below.

(5) AM6: 0:16

- 4 AM6: he seemed like- the way he was speaking, that he was
 5 genuinely sorry
 6 I: M[mm
 7 AM6: [for not being able to attend her meeting,
 8 he acknowledged the fact that he couldn't actually attend?
 9 I: M::mm.
 10 AM6: And u::m that when she suggested that they make another
 11 time he was keen for that, and he seemed concerned with
 12 her mother's issu:e and also with her and how she were, so
 13 I think if he didn't really want to speak to her, then he- he
 14 could have been a lot less polite.
 15 I: O:kay.

After claiming that he believed Wayne was sincere in his apology about not turning up to the restaurant (line 5), the informant justified his belief by invoking Wayne's attempts to be attentive (lines 11-12), and to show that he genuinely wanted to interact with Joyce (lines 10-11, 13-14). The informant also claimed that not expressing friendliness through this kind of attentiveness would have made the apology much less polite (line 14).

Another informant suggested that since the apology was occasioned within a casual frame (i.e., the invitation was a causal one), the informal stance taken by Wayne in his apology was appropriate.

(6) AF7: 1:19

- 4 AF7: from his to:ne and his phrasing
 5 I: mm [mm
 6 AF7: [so because it was just
 5 a casual "Oh yeah, we'll catch up?" his apology was polite
 6 enough for that.

Implicit to this claim by the informant is the notion that being casual is interpretable as friendliness and thus polite. In this case, then, a less casual apology might have

claimed the explanation given by Wayne was not specific enough and thus inadequate, and also emphasised the fact that Wayne was not the one to initiate the apology sequence. Amongst the Taiwanese respondents, the minority who evaluated the apology as "neither polite nor impolite" rather than "(very) impolite" had all spent a considerable length of time in Australia, which suggests there may have been some L2 cultural influence on their evaluations. We believe, however, this latter hypothesis would require a much larger sample than five speakers to be adequately defended.

¹¹ An association between friendliness and evaluations of politeness amongst American English speakers has also been noted in previous research (Brown and Levinson 1987: 283; Ide, Hill, Carnes, Ogino and Kawasaki 1992; Lakoff 1973)

been interpreted as overly formal (and thus overpolite). This would not be consistent with the emphasis often placed on avoiding “any overt show of respect” in interactions amongst Australian English speakers, which is said to have “implications of familiarity, friendliness and equality” (Wierzbicka 2002: 1194–1195). In other words, perceiving Wayne as showing friendliness in this interaction was associated by many of the Australian informants with their evaluation of the apology as polite (or at least “not impolite”). It appears, then, that in the minds of the Australian respondents, evaluations of the apology as “polite” (or “not impolite”) were closely related to their perceptions of friendliness in the discourse surrounding the apology. This indicates that evaluations of im/politeness are holistically grounded, being discourse-based impressions rather than utterance-based as is claimed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), and in much of the subsequent literature on apologies.

As we discussed in the interactional analysis of the apology sequence in the previous section, however, Joyce did not align with Wayne’s attempts to index friendliness through showing attentiveness. She thus indexed a disaffiliative stance, which we argued was indicative of diverging interpretations on the part of Joyce and Wayne about the purpose of the interactionally achieved action of “catching up”. More specifically, while the Australian informants associated friendliness with evaluations of im/politeness, this was not mirrored amongst the Taiwanese informants, who like Joyce, appeared to see this friendliness as irrelevant to their evaluations of the apology as im/polite. This difference in associating friendliness with evaluations of im/politeness or not was noted by one of the Australian informants as illustrated below.

(7) AM4: 4:08

- 70 AM4: But then it wasn’t- it wasn’t radically impolite either=
 71 I: mm=
 72 AM4: =and in the context, and then in a sense went about
 73 retrieving it by asking about the family, you know
 74 I: m:m.
 75 AM4: a:::hm (0.2) he didn’t pursue that much but then she
 76 didn’t either, like, he wasn’t given much of an opportunity
 77 <to take that further>, [yeah] in a sense=
 78 I: [mm] =yep.
 79 AM4: so she was fairly, I mean she shut down (.) options
 80 I: yep
 81 AM4: for him there too=
 82 I: =yeah?

In this excerpt, the informant gives an account for why he evaluated the apology as “not impolite”, having previously explained why he evaluated the apology as “not polite” based on what he perceived as a lack of a clear explanation from Wayne (data not shown). He claims that the apology was “not impolite” because Wayne asked about Joyce’s family (lines 72-73). However, he also notes that Joyce “shut down” these questions (lines 79-81), and so Wayne was not able to fully pursue this line in the interaction (lines 76-77). In this way, the informant orients to the interculturality of this interaction through highlighting difference, and also arguably indexes solidarity with Wayne in negatively characterising Joyce’s actions (i.e. as “shutting down options”). Such metapragmatic awareness on the part of the informant indicates that the lack of alignment by Joyce with this particular line of action in the interaction

is open to interpretation as disaffiliative on her part, but affiliative on Wayne's part. It thus constitutes further evidence that perceptions of friendliness form part of the evaluation of the apology as im/polite in the case of Australians, but not in the minds of Taiwanese.¹²

In the case of the evaluations of im/politeness of the apology by Taiwanese Chinese, there is considerable support for the broader claim made in the literature that the notion of sincerity (*chengyi*) is crucial to evaluations of politeness (Gu 1990). In explicating Gu's (1990: 239) Principle of Sincerity, Hua, Wei and Yuan (2000) claim that it "often means that the initiator of an action, be it a gift offer, *apology*, or expression of gratitude, repeats the action several times to show what s/he intends to do is genuine, while the recipient of the action seeks confirmation of the initiator's genuine intention" (Hua Wei Yuan 2000: 99, emphasis added). This emphasis on repetition of the apology as a means of showing sincerity (*chengyi*), as well as a way to secure uptake of the offer of redress (i.e., another meeting at a specific later date) was referred to by a number of Taiwanese informants in the follow-up interviews.

(8) TM3: 0:22

- 8 TM3: 我感覺他一直想把電話掛掉,
'I feel he wanted to hang up the phone quickly'
- 9 這樣很不禮貌
'This was very impolite.'
((section omitted))
- 10 I: 是因為對話的長度讓你覺得他急著掛電話還是因為他的道歉很短
'Is it because of the length of the conversation, or because of his short apology that you think he was in a hurry to hang up the phone?'
- 11 TM3: 他的道歉很短,讓我覺得他是急著要掛電話,
'His apology was very short, so I think he was in a hurry to hang up the phone'
- 12 因為他說之後要 call Joyce, 但是 Joyce 沒有回應,就講別的
'Because he said he will call Joyce afterwards, yet he continued talking about something else before Joyce responded to that'
- 13 I: 嗯嗯, okay
'hmm hmm, okay'

In this excerpt, the informant gives two accounts as to why he evaluated the apology as impolite. First, he implies that the apology needed to be repeated by claiming that he felt that Wayne wanted to finish the conversation, and thus get his apology, over and done with quickly (line 8), and in saying that the apology was very short (lines 10-11), and thus impolite (*bu lǐmào*) (line 9). Second, he suggests that while Wayne made an offer of redress, namely, meeting at another time with Joyce and her family, since he did not allow his offer to develop into an actual specific date for meeting again (line 12), and thus did not secure uptake of his offer. This emphasis on

¹² Such a claim is supported by a separate study of "sentence politeness" of apologies (Koyama 2001), in which it was found that while American native speakers of English associated their evaluations of the politeness of different apologies with friendliness (as well as deference and formality), non-native speakers of English from "East Asian backgrounds" (including Chinese, Japanese and Koreans) did not associate their evaluations of the politeness of apologies with friendliness (p.90).

repetition and securing uptake of an offer of redress is consistent with the claim that the Principle of Sincerity (*chengyi*) (Gu 1990: 239) underlies evaluations of politeness in (Mandarin) Chinese.

However, it emerged through the follow-up interviews with Taiwanese informants that there are two further dimensions of sincerity (*chengyi*) that are relevant to evaluations of apologies as polite, impolite, and shades between. The first is the importance placed on showing an emotional connection between interactants in making an apology. This is because a certain level of familiarity between Wayne and Joyce's family is evidenced in the fact that Joyce's mother invited Wayne and his wife to go out to dinner. Such familiarity means expressing some emotional commitment towards Joyce and her family in the conversation on Wayne's part would be expected by Joyce.

(9) TF5: 0:15

- 4 TF5: 他沒有道歉啊, 我覺得他接到電話很不在意,
'He didn't apologise. I feel he didn't care much
[about this] when he received the call'
- 5 我覺得很生疏沒有那種, 像我們一般人-
'I think [his response] was unfamiliar, normally like us-'
- 6 假設你請他吃飯, 一定是有一定的交情才會請他吃飯,
'Supposing you invited him to dinner, certainly there would have some
level of emotive relationship (*jiao qing*) at which you would invited
him to dinner'
- 7 I: 嗯, okay
'hmm, okay'
- 8 那我覺得這個人是完全沒有誠意跟你做朋友,
'So I think this person was completely insincere about being friends
with you'
- 9 我聽他跟你談話我覺得他沒有跟你很親,
'From what I heard of the conversation, I think he was not
very close [or]'
- 10 I: 嗯
'hmm hmm'
- 11 很熟悉, 是很冷淡的, 是非常沒有誠意的
'familiar with you, [he is] being really cold, with complete insincerity'

In the excerpt above, the informant accounts for her evaluation of the apology as impolite in terms of Wayne demonstrating a lack of familiarity with Joyce (line 5), which she thinks would be expected if he were sincere about making friends with Joyce's family (line 7).¹³ This is because emotivity (*jiaoqing*) underlies the building and maintenance of relationships (*guanxi*) in interpersonal relationships in Taiwan (Chang and Haugh in press), including friendships (line 8). The informant perceived Wayne as not showing familiarity or warmth (lines 9 and 11), and so the apology was interpreted by her as not being sincere. Consequently, the apology was evaluated as

¹³ This interview was conducted by Joyce.

impolite. It is worth noting that the informant here also indexes solidarity with Joyce in characterising Wayne's actions as "insincere", as well as invoking normative (and thus cultural) expectations about dinner invitations.

The second additional dimension of sincerity (*chengyi*) that was referred to by informants was the notion of *keqi* ('showing restraint in expressing one's wants or acknowledging one's own abilities') (Haugh 2006: 20), and the related notion of *buhaoyisi* ('showing embarrassment'). We suggest that *chengyi* and *keqi* are reflexively related in that being *keqi* is interpreted as showing *chengyi* ('sincerity'), and that showing *chengyi* can be interpreted as being *keqi*. Thus, in making apologies, expressing *keqi* occasions an expression of *chengyi*, while an expression of *chengyi* occasions an expression of *keqi*. In other words, being *keqi* ('restrained') in accepting an apology creates interactional space for the other interactant to show further *chengyi* ('sincerity') in his or her apology (for example, by repeating the apology or giving a more detailed explanation or account), while expressing an apology with greater sincerity (*chengyi*) creates an interpretive frame where the other interactant may show *keqi* ('restraint') in accepting the apology (similar to the preferred response to apologies in English discussed by Robinson [2004]). This reflexive relationship between *chengyi* and *keqi* can be seen in the simultaneous indexing of a *buhaoyisi* ('embarrassed') stance by both the one making the apology and the one receiving it. As noted in our previous interactional analysis of the intercultural apology in section three, diverging interpretations of Joyce's expression (from a Taiwanese perspective) of *keqi* in receipting the apology did not occasion a further expression of sincerity (*chengyi*) through repetition of the apology IFID or giving a more detailed account on Wayne's part. This divergence in interpretations was argued to be culturally-motivated by one of the informants in the follow-up interviews.

(10)TF2: 0:40

- 31 TF2: 某些方面就不 okay, 就像 Joyce 說你可能很忙所以忘記了,
'[I am] not okay with some of his responses, such as when Joyce said "I think maybe you were busy with something and probably forgot"'
- 32 然後他的承接語讓我蠻 surprised 的, 因為以台灣人來說這是給對方
一個台階下,
'Then I was quite surprised by his response. Because normally when Taiwanese say this, it is a way to de-escalate this [tension or confrontation]'
- 33 可是我覺得是不同文化的關係, 他可能真的就是很忙
'I think this is to do with different cultures. Maybe he was really busy'
((section omitted))
- 34 I: 嗯嗯, 為什麼會覺得驚訝?
'hmm, hmm. Why are you surprised?'
((section omitted))
- 35 那要是我們回答的話絕對不會說, 喔對啊對啊我很忙,
'If we [Taiwanese] were the ones apologising, [we] would definitely not say "yeah, I am really busy actually"'
- 36 對方可能還是會 focus 在說 "我真的很抱歉很抱歉, 就是我爽約這樣

子”

‘Maybe the other one would still focus on saying that “I am truly sorry really sorry that I didn’t show up”.’

37 可是不會去承接說我很忙, 其他對我來說都 okay 但是這方面我有點嚇到

‘But I would definitely not respond and say “I am busy”. I am okay with the rest [of the conversation] apart from this. But I was quite shocked [by what he said here]’

38 I: 嗯嗯嗯

‘hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm’

The informant begins in this excerpt by giving an account of her evaluation of the apology as impolite, namely, that Wayne’s response to Joyce’s receipting of his apology was “surprising” (line 32) and even “shocking” (line 37). She claims that Joyce offered “being busy with something” as an account for why Wayne and his wife did not turn up in order to reduce the tension (in this case, a threat to the face of Joyce and her family) arising from the three offences (lines 31-32). She also explicitly invokes “culture” as a resource in her account (lines 32, 33), and identifies herself as a member of this culture (line 35). This offering of an account to the offender by the offended party to de-escalate tension or confrontation is thus a recognisable practice amongst Taiwanese (line 32), which is oriented towards saving face (*liu mianzi*), in this case Wayne’s face. In attempting to save Wayne’s face, despite the offence on his part, Joyce is indexing a *keqi* (‘restrained’) stance in receipting his apology, which reflexively occasions interactional space for Wayne to express further *chengyi* (‘sincerity’) in making his apology, for instance, by repeating an apology IFID (line 35) in order to index a *buhaoyisi* (‘embarrassed’) stance. The informant notes that Wayne does not do this (line 34), however, but rather asserts that he was busy (line 34), which she found shocking (line 36), as Wayne was not expressing the expected ‘embarrassed’ (*buhaoyisi*) stance in relation to his apology. It is this lack of expression of being embarrassed (*buhaoyisi*) on the part of Wayne, despite interactional space being opened up by Joyce through her reflexive expression of being *keqi* (‘restrained’) in accepting his apology, which underlies the informant’s perception of the apology as insincere, and thus her evaluation of it as impolite.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have examined a naturally-occurring intercultural apology both from the perspective of the participants themselves through an interactional analysis of the apology as a form of social action, and from a metapragmatic perspective, where we analysed evaluations of im/politeness made by Australian and Taiwanese informants. In doing so we have proposed a firmer empirical basis for the analyst to make inferences about whether the interactional achievement of diverging interpretations of meanings and actions in intercultural discourse is culturally motivated or simply idiosyncratic to the situation or individual participants. These diverging interpretations are reflective of the way in which apologies can become a site of negotiation and discursive struggle, as Glinert (2010) argues in relation to collective apologies.

We have also suggested another possible solution to the dilemma of how the analyst can make more confident inferences about evaluations of im/politeness that arise in interaction apart from follow-up interviews with participants, namely, seeking evaluations of the action(s) by third parties. This metapragmatic approach also has the advantage of giving the analyst a window into empirical norms by allowing a statistical analysis of ratings of im/politeness of the same interaction across different cultural groups, and insight into moral norms underlying evaluations of im/politeness through examining metadiscursive commentary about those evaluations made by informants from those cultural groups. We argue that the robust nature of these results, despite there being some intracultural variation in evaluations of im/politeness, particularly amongst the Australian respondents, grounds more firmly our conclusion that Joyce evaluated Wayne's apology as impolite, while Wayne evaluated his own apology as polite, or at least not impolite.

Another finding from our interactional analysis of the apology and the subsequent follow-up interviews with Australian and Taiwanese informants is that evaluations of im/politeness of an apology are not necessarily centred on individual utterances (that is, the apology IFID and accompanying apology strategies, such as accounts, offers of repair and so on), but may in fact arise from discourse-based impressions (Haugh 2003; Usami 2002, 2006), which has implications for how we interpret sentence or utterance-based studies of evaluations of im/politeness.

There is, however, still much work to be done in exploring more carefully the links made by people between perceptions of sincerity and evaluating apologies as polite, impolite, overpolite and shades between. And while we have focused here on intercultural differences in evaluations of im/politeness, the data suggests that there is also considerable intracultural variation in such evaluations. Although there was a general trend for Australians to evaluate the apology as polite, or at least not impolite, and for Taiwanese, on the other hand, to evaluate it as impolite, there was variation across these evaluations, particularly amongst the Australians. Developing a more nuanced understanding of cultural influences on evaluations of im/politeness thus remains necessary if we are to retain the well-attested finding that there are indeed differences in how im/politeness is conceptualised and evaluated across cultures.

Transcription conventions (from Jefferson 2004)

(.)	micro-pause
(0.2)	timed pause
()	uncertainty about transcription
-	cut-off of prior sound in a word
hhh	hearable aspiration or laugh particles
.hhh	hearable inbreathing
◦	markedly soft speech
<u> </u>	stressed word or part of word
↑↓	marked rises or falls in pitch
?	rising intonation
[]	overlapping talk
=	talk 'latched' onto previous speaker's talk
:	stretching of sound
(())	transcriber's description of non-verbal activity
> <	markedly rushed or compressed talk
< >	markedly slower talk

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Appendix 1: Transcription of the telephone call made by Joyce to Wayne

- I**
- 1 W: hello
- 2 J: hello (.) a::h it's ↑Joyce
- 3 (0.3)
- 4 W: hello Joyce [how are ya going?]
- 5 J: [hello (.) yeah]
- II**
- 6 J: is it too late to ↑call
- 7 W: No: it's fi:ne.
- 8 J: Yeah a:h sorry hhh yeah ah sorry to call you
- 9 so late. Yeah I get your ah message, sorry cos
- 10 I didn't have time to reply to you.
- 11 (0.4)
- 12 W: ye:ah no, it's I'm- it's fine.
- III**
- 13 W: It's just, a:h, I really apologise for not to you
- 14 getting back the other day but we couldn't make it?
- 15 J: oh, that's okay. yeah, yeah, yeah. I- I just
- 16 thought oh probably you are busy with something
- 17 so you ah probably were easy to- to (0.2)
- 18 for(hhh)get it.
- 19 W: yeah we were pretty busy actua:lly
- 20 J: oh, okay, yeah, yeah that's fine. I just want to
- 21 call you, that- that- that's oka:y.
- 22 (0.2)
- 23 W: ye:ah I'll give you a- (0.2) I'll give you a
- 24 ring at a later day and u:m I'll give you a time
- 25 or a date when we're gonna come back down again.
- 26 J: yeah, sure, yeah, maybe just u:m can make another
- 27 time when you come down to Brisbane.
- 28 (0.2)
- 29 W: yeah it'll be ni:ce=actually it'll be nice to
- 30 catch up.
- 31 J: y(hh)es hhh y(hh)es oka:y ye(hh)ah so no
- 32 wo(hh)rries, that's oka:(h)y.
- IV**
- 33 W: So you been good?
- 34 J: A:h ye:(hh)s hehe ye:s good, good. [hehehehe]
- 35 W: [°hhhh°]
- 36 >°that's go(hh)od to hear°<
- 37 J: Ye:ah ye:ah just want to call you that yeah I
- 38 got your message, and ye:ah thank you for- for
- 39 a:h telling me that, °yeah.°
- 40 W: So is your mum alright?

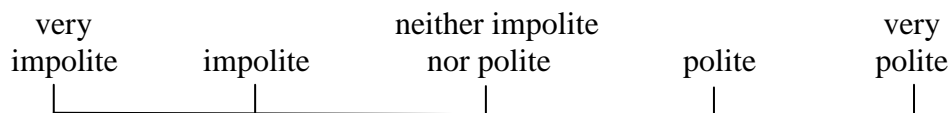
41 J: Uh:mm, ↑ye:ah she's oka:y but just u::m she needs
42 to look after my u::m grandmum so (0.3) yeah=
43 W: =yeah
44 J: [ye:ah,] ye:ah.
45 W: [°okay°]
46 things okay back in Taiwan?
47 J: .hhhhh (.) A:::h for my ah Grandmum actually
48 no:t, she's very sick now, so u:m (0.4) ye:ah no
49 but (.) my mum just need to look after her
50 and °yeah° .hhhh
51 (0.3)
52 W: O::h ri:ght okay (0.2) she gonna make it okay?
53 J: A:h yeah, yeah, sure yeah (0.2) yeah.
54 (0.2)
55 W: O::h good.
56 J: yeah hhh=
57 W: =() >everything worked out< fine?
58 J: mm mm mm yeah yeah hopefully, hopefully
59 >everything will be< yeah will be fine.
60 W: o:kay.
61 J: mm mm=

V

62 J: okay so maybe just catch up- catch you
63 up another day, and yeah just make- just call
64 me when you come down to Brisbane again.
65 (0.2)
66 W: okay Joyce, that'd be gre:at.
67 J: yeah=
68 W: =it was really nice to talk with you.
69 J: yeah hhehe me to(hh)o. Okay have a go(hh)od
70 night the(hh)n.
71 W: okay you too.
72 J: >yeah o[kay<
73 W: [()]
74 J: bye b::ye.
75 W: ↑bye bye↑

Appendix 2: The Survey Instrument

How would you rate the following interaction?



Appendix 3: Interview questions

1. Why did you rate the apology that way?
2. What would you say if you were Wayne?
3. What is a polite apology?

4. Have you had any similar experiences in making an apology or accepting an apology from someone else?