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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the variables in perceptions of (im)politeness in an intercultural apology, focusing on discussion of the cultural and gender differences. Through the study's instrument, a conversation between an Australian and a Taiwanese Chinese speaker, the study suggests that there are indeed some differences in perceptions of (im)politeness across different cultural groups, since the participants from these two backgrounds tend to use distinctive strategies to make apologies. The study's findings indicate that the cultural factor is more influential in the perceptions of (im)politeness than the gender factor. The gender differences found in these perceptions require further investigation with a bigger sample. Regarding the cultural factor, a polite apology perceived by Australian speakers emphasises expressions of friendliness in the interaction, whereas a polite apology perceived by Taiwanese speakers focuses on showing chengyi 'sincerity' from the apologisee towards the recipient. Specifically, the study's implication is that different perceptions of (im)politeness may result in communication breakdown or misunderstanding and thus may bring up the awareness of cultural differences in intercultural communication. Based on the empirical data from the native informants, the study concludes that the perception of (im)politeness is culturally determined, indicating the significance of the appreciation of cultural difference in order to avoid communication breakdown.

### Keywords

intercultural, politeness, apology, im, australian, perceptions, chinese

### Disciplines

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## Australian and Chinese perceptions of (im)politeness in an intercultural apology

WEI-LIN CHANG\*

### *Abstract*

*This study aims to explore the variables in perceptions of (im)politeness in an intercultural apology, focusing on discussion of the cultural and gender differences. Through the study's instrument, a conversation between an Australian and a Taiwanese Chinese speaker, the study suggests that there are indeed some differences in perceptions of (im)politeness across different cultural groups, since the participants from these two backgrounds tend to use distinctive strategies to make apologies. The study's findings indicate that the cultural factor is more influential in the perceptions of (im)politeness than the gender factor. The gender differences found in these perceptions require further investigation with a bigger sample. Regarding the cultural factor, a polite apology perceived by Australian speakers emphasises expressions of friendliness in the interaction, whereas a polite apology perceived by Taiwanese speakers focuses on showing chengyi 'sincerity' from the apologisee towards the recipient. Specifically, the study's implication is that different perceptions of (im)politeness may result in communication breakdown or misunderstanding and thus may bring up the awareness of cultural differences in intercultural communication. Based on the empirical data from the native informants, the study concludes that the perception of (im)politeness is culturally determined, indicating the significance of the appreciation of cultural difference in order to avoid communication breakdown.*

### 1. Introduction

Apologies are one of the many speech acts frequently used in human interaction. Numerous studies provide definitions of an apology as well as examining its functions. Olshtain and Cohen (1983: 20) claimed that "an apology is called for when social norms have been violated, whether the offence is real or potential". In addition, Aijmer (1996: 81) also argued that:

What seems to be necessary is that the 'apologiser' has done something which is annoying or damaging to the person to whom the apology is addressed. The apologisee now regrets having done the act and takes responsibility for it by uttering an apology.

These definitions indicate that the intention of the apologisee is to produce an utterance in order to redress the offence. The functions of an apology have also been examined in studies to gain understanding of further functional aspects of

the speech act. Trosborg (1995), for example, claimed that the act of apologising requires an action or an utterance which is intended to 'set things right': the function of an apology is coincidental with the social goal of maintaining harmony between speaker and listener. Moreover, from a sociolinguistic perspective, Suszczynska (1999) argued that the act of apologising is to save the hearer's face, but is a face-threatening act for the speaker (see also Brown and Levinson 1987). Therefore, apologising is a critical component of maintenance of the social and relational harmony because the speech act serves as a redressive act for the offence.

Since apologising is a crucial element of maintenance of social and relational harmony, an act of apologising thus enacts an important role in the social practice of politeness. According to Watts (2003:169), linguistic politeness may be realised by means of both formulaic and semi-formulaic utterances. Apologising is one of the commonly used linguistic and formulaic expressions which carry out indirect and appropriate speech acts on the "politic behaviour of a social situation". The study by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) argued that apologetic language such as 'I'm sorry' or 'I apologise' is marked as an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID); these are characterised formulaic, routinised expressions. Thus, apologetic language is used to perform a polite act towards the listener through linguistic markers.

However, when judging an (im)polite apology, the speaker's and recipient's perceptions of the degree of the offence are decisive, so the recipient's and speaker's points of view, perceptions of the degree of offence, and the extent of the expected reprimand have to be taken into account (Trosborg 1987: 148). Other influential factors which have been examined through a few studies are the nature of offence, the familiarity of the individuals, the social status of the participants and so on (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Fraser 1981; Fukushima and Iwata 1985; Olshtain and Cohen 1983). Those factors may influence individuals making an apology, in terms of politeness as well as their strategies of apology. On the other hand, another influential factor began to appeal to researchers from the 1990s. Cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences are also vital factors influencing variation in speech acts (Félix-Brasdefer 2006; Huang 2004; Suh 1999; Trosborg 1995; Young 1994). In other words, different cultural backgrounds may lead to different productions of the speech act as well as different perceptions of the level (im)politeness. Therefore, the need for this study from a cross-cultural perspective is originally motivated by those arguments from previous studies, in order to examine the perceptions of (im)politeness of an intercultural apology across speakers of Australian English and Chinese.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Apology strategies

An apology is offered to express regrets for an offence in order to restore the social and relational harmony between the two participants. Trosborg (1995: 374) argues that the apology serves as a remedial act to facilitating face-saving for the apologiser and recipient. This face-saving act has two roles: protective orientation towards the apologiser and defensive orientation towards the recipient (Goffman 1972: 325). As such, in order to have the recipient accept the apology, the apologiser has to apply different strategies to cover the offence, depending on the severity of the damage to the perception of self. The study by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) argues that apologies can be performed by any one of the following strategies, or any combination or sequence of them: IFID, taking responsibility, promise of forbearance, expression of embarrassment, explanation or account, offer of repair, distracting from the offence.

- a. IFIDs are formulaic, routinised expressions in which the speaker's apology is made explicitly, e.g. 'I am sorry' or 'I apologise'.
- b. Taking responsibility is used by the speaker to express responsibility for the offence which created the need to apologise, in an attempt to placate the hearer, e.g. 'I missed the bus...My mistake'.
- c. Promise of forbearance is used by the speaker whenever the of guilt is strong enough: he or she feels the need to promise that the offensive act will never occur again, e.g. 'I'll make sure that I am here on time...'
- d. Expression of embarrassment, e.g. 'I feel awful about it...'
- e. Explanation or Account is used by the speaker to give reasons to the hearer, e.g. 'and there's a terrible traffic jam...'
- f. Offer of repair is uttered by the speaker to make up for the offence if the inconvenience or the damage which affected the hearer can be compensated for, e.g. 'Let's make another appointment...'
- g. Distracting from the offence can be generally divided into two strategies, query precondition and future remark, e.g. 'am I late? Let's go to work then...'

The above strategies are presented in the order people use them in normal circumstances. The strategies used reflect the apologiser's perception of the offence and what now needs to be enacted to satisfy the recipient, using different combination of strategies.

## 2.2 Cultural considerations

As suggested earlier, according to previous studies the application of the apology strategies may vary across many influential factors, such as social status, familiarity of the participants, gender, age or cultural background. In this study, the factors of cultural difference and gender difference are taken into consideration to examine whether there is any difference between how the Australian and Taiwanese participants perceive an intercultural apology in terms of politeness. With regard to cultural differences, (im)politeness has to be discussed prior to exploring the issue of perceptions across cultures.

Politeness in English is personified by “someone who is polite, has good manners and behaves in a way that is socially correct and not rude to other people” (Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners 2001: 1186). The studies by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), which propose a universal model of politeness theory, have been advocated by numerous studies in Anglo-Saxon societies for decades. The notion of face, which is derived from Goffman’s (1967) seminal work, is regarded as the ‘kernel element’ underlying politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1978: 63). Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) argue that the concept of face is “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”. This public self-image comprises two desires: one is positive face, which encompasses the desire to be approved of and appreciated by others; the other is negative face, which encompasses the desire to be unimpeded by others. Thus, politeness theory, which draws from the concept of face, claims that negative politeness and positive politeness are used to maintain or save every individual’s negative and positive face. Positive politeness is a “social behaviour conveying friendliness or expressing admiration for the addressees”, whereas negative politeness is a “behaviour that avoids impeding or imposing on others” (Holmes 2006: 686). A further assumption is that the conceptualisation of face is shared across cultures, and indeed how people maintain this social necessity in interactions is something that can be applied as universal language usage (Brown and Levinson 1978: 67). Since face is the core of interactional concern in terms of politeness, politeness arises from reducing ‘face-threat’ by applying positive and negative politeness strategies.

Politeness theory has also seen extensive debate in intercultural studies (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003; Gu 1990; Haugh 2006; Mao 1994; Matsumoto 1988; Watts 2003). The dimension of politeness being considered can differ across cultures. Both ancient teachings – the Record of Ritual (*Liji*) – and Gu’s more recent definition of politeness in Chinese (1990: 238) include being humble about oneself and showing respect towards others. However, regarding politeness in modern Chinese (Mandarin) or *limao*, Haugh (2006:20) suggests that the notion of *keqi* ‘restraint’ and *chengyi* ‘sincerity’ are more prominent than the traditional definition in earlier society due to shift away from an emphasis on hierarchical relations. *Limao* involves “showing restraint both in the form of a reluctance to

indicate what the individual wants, acknowledging one's ability or competence (*keqi*), and sincerity in terms of what one says and does (*chengyi*)" (Haugh 2006: 20). In other words, it is important to show restraint and sincerity during interactions in Chinese culture in order to be 'polite' (*limao*).

According to the variables in terms of perception of politeness, the speech act apology may be realised in different patterns, may be used distinctively across various factors or may carry specific cultural values. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate the perceptions in an intercultural apology between Australian English and Taiwanese speakers. The aim is to explore whether cross-cultural and gender factors influence the participants' use of apology strategies and their perception of an apology in terms of (im)politeness. The research questions are as follows:

1. Are there differences in the perceptions of (im)politeness in an intercultural apology between Australian English and Chinese speakers?
2. Are there differences in the perceptions of (im)politeness in an intercultural apology across genders?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants of the quantitative questionnaire included 20 Australian and 20 Taiwanese Chinese speakers. Each cultural group was divided into two groups: ten females and ten males. Most were university students, but participants also included a QIBT student, a TAFE student, and two workers. All of the participants were born in their respective countries and were native speakers. The Australian participants' ages ranged from 18 to 32 years, and that of the Taiwanese participants from 20 to 31 years. For the qualitative interviews, informants were randomly selected from the participants of the quantitative questionnaire. There were six informants from each cultural group, three females and three males.

#### 3.2 Instrument

The intercultural conversation used as the instrument for this study was a conversation between an Australian and a Taiwanese Chinese involving making an apology for not showing up for dinner with others at a restaurant. All the participants were given both a transcription and a sound recording of this conversation and were asked to rate the level of politeness according to their perceptions of making an apology (see Appendices 1 and 2). This intercultural apology was provided in the study in order to examine how the native speakers of these two cultures perceived the apology in terms of (im)politeness.

### 3.3 Procedure

Most of the participants were randomly selected at university, where the student researcher was able to explain the purpose of the study to the participants face-to-face. However, for some of the Taiwanese Chinese participants, the student researcher had to send out the questionnaires to Taiwan through email, as there was difficulty in accessing a sufficient number of Taiwanese university students in Australia. For the quantitative questionnaires, the participants were asked to complete a survey after listening to the conversation recording. The Taiwanese participants were also provided with a simplified conversation transcript while listening to the conversation in order to avoid difficulty in understanding the content. After the questionnaire, 12 participants were selected as informants for the ethnographic interviews: six Australian and six Taiwanese informants, with three females and three males in each cultural group. The interview questions were specifically focused on discovering the native speakers' perceptions of apology in terms of (im)politeness and were designed to elicit the distinctive perspectives across intercultural communication. The questions, open-ended to allow the participants to discuss the topics flexibly, would provide this study with emic perspectives on (im)politeness of apology; as well, the responses would serve as a sociocognitive construct to support the discussion of the quantitative data later on.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Significant differences between Australian and Taiwanese Chinese perceptions

From the result of the questionnaires shown in Table 1 below, it appears that the Australian and Taiwanese participants have different perceptions of the degree of (im)politeness in the given context of the apology.



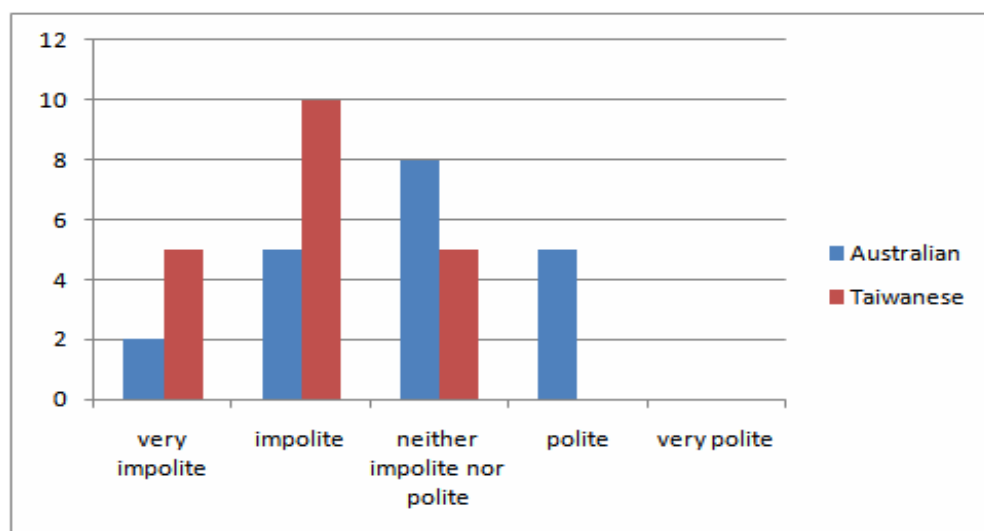


Table 1: Perceptions of (im)politeness by Australian and Taiwanese participants

From these result, it appears that the intercultural apology is accepted more by the Australian participants than by the Taiwanese participants in terms of politeness, although no one from any group rated the speech act as very polite. The perceptions of this particular apology can be further collapsed into the two key categories of appropriate and not appropriate. People who perceive the apology to be from very impolite to impolite are categorised in the 'inappropriate' group, whereas people who perceive the apology to be in the range of neither polite nor impolite to polite are categorised in the 'appropriate' group. From the results, the percentage of Australian participants who perceived the apology to be in the very impolite to impolite range is about 35%, with about 65% perceiving it to be in the range from neither impolite nor polite to polite. On the other hand, the percentage of Taiwanese participants who rated the apology to be in the very impolite to impolite range is about 75%, with about 25% in the range of neither impolite nor polite through to polite. This indicates that the Taiwanese participants expect more apologetic language for it be considered polite; however, Australian participants consider the apology to be more acceptable in terms of politeness. This difference is statistically significant ( $X^2 = 6.465$ ,  $p=0.011$ ,  $df=1$ ). Thus, the results indicate there is a significant discrepancy in perception of the apology between members of the two cultures.

At the end of the questionnaire, all participants were asked to produce an apology as if they were in the situation. The results in Table 2 below display the percentage of usage for each strategy, based on the categorisation of strategies by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). The percentage shows the frequency of usage of certain strategies by the participants from each cultural group. The participants in this section of the quantitative questionnaire are asked to demonstrate how they would perform the apology in the situation, and they are asked to produce utterances as genuinely as if they encounter the real circumstance.

Australian		Taiwanese	
1. <b>Repetitive IFID</b> : "I am really sorry...I am sorry".	30%	1. <b>Repetitive IFID</b> : "I am really really sorry...I would like to apologise"...	30%
2. <b>Explanation</b> : "I didn't make it the other day because we got lost"...	25%	2. <b>Expression of concern</b> : "hopefully this doesn't bother you at all", "express sorry to your family for me", "I hope you don't mind"...	20%
3. <b>Repair</b> : "I wish we could do something like that again..."	15%	3. <b>Explanation</b> : "You know, something emergency happened in my company..."...	30%
4. <b>Promise of compensation</b> : "I would like to buy you a dinner next time"...	10%	4. <b>Repair</b> : "Let's make it another day"...	25%
		5. <b>Promise of compensation</b> : "let me pay the cost", "I will shout you a dinner", "I would like to ask you to be my guest next time"...	30%

Table 2: Apology strategies used by Australian and Taiwanese participants

Table 2 does not provide the IFID across the two groups since every participant performs an IFID in their apology, e.g. 'I am sorry' or 'I apologise'. In other words, the results indicate differences in making an apology across the members of the two cultures. From these results, we can see that the participants share the same percentage of 30% for making repetitive IFID in utterances. Repetitive IFID suggest that 30% of the participants in both groups tend to perform apologetic language repetitively. Approximately 20% of the Taiwanese participants performed their apologies before giving explanations or reasons by showing their concern for the recipient. This strategy is not found in the strategies used by Australian participants. The percentage of expression of explanation across the two groups is fairly close: 25% of the Australians; 30% of the Taiwanese. Regarding the strategy of repair and promise of compensation, there are disparities in the figures of the two groups: Taiwanese participants appear to use those two strategies more than the Australians.

It was found that Australian and Taiwanese participants view an apology differently, reflecting different perspectives on the definition of a polite apology. The Australian participants' comments in the interviews suggest there are three prominent components to being to making a polite apology:

1. Taking responsibility

"Usually sorry would be involved, making it's more like your fault...humbling yourself." [Interview excerpt 1]

2. Explanation

"You should always explain to someone what happened if something like that. If they really have a good excuse, stuck in the traffic or something came up, I had really a horrible day. Cos I know I've been done that." [Interview excerpt 2]

"We don't want to make excuses, you wanta give a reason if you can, cos the person wants to hear it. I mean a normal interaction you can have a bit of reason..." [Interview excerpt 3]

3. Establishing good relationship

"He tried to smooth it all over, but he is trying to maintain you know leave it open. You know you can still be friends or something.... that's a strategy anyway that people tend to use. I try to make you forget about what the call is about, how you are all these stuff. But that's not what you rang about. Just discuss about your family." [Interview excerpt 4]

Australian participants' perceptions of a polite apology suggest that Australians make an apology as a face-saving act to show politeness towards the recipient by employing these three main strategies. Regarding the act of establishing a good relationship, the participants who rate the intercultural apology as polite also noted on the questionnaires some similar perceptions of what a polite apology should be:

"Because he not only re-apologises but also asks about M's well-being, family."

"Because he let Melody know the reason, friendly to each other and considerate."

Therefore, establishing good relationships and showing friendliness are vital components in the Australian apology; this is not found in the data of the Taiwanese participants. In line with Haugh's (2006) claim, the results suggest that showing friendliness is an important factor underlying perceptions of politeness in Australian English. Thus, Australian participants tend to establish good relationships through making a polite apology in order to avoid damaging relationships between those involved after the offence.

On the other hand, the criteria for making a polite apology that appear in the Taiwanese participants' comments are quite different from those in the Australian ones:

- A. Detailed explanation, even if telling a lie is necessary
 

“A polite apology needs an explanation. The apologisee has to make sure the date for the next time in order to show sincerity of the regrets.” [Interview excerpt 5]

“I think you need to give a reason. Even if you don’t want to give a detailed reason, you still need to generally explain why you were not able to be there.” [Interview excerpt 6]

“I think you would need detailed explanations and also a repair of the offence afterwards. I would try my best to explain everything about the offence I made, even if I need to tell a lie. I think a good reason is extremely important.” [Interview excerpt 7]
- B. Expression of embarrassment
 

“If I can feel that the apologisee feels very embarrassed, then I will accept it.” [Interview excerpt 8]
- C. Showing concern about the recipient’s feeling
 

“I would try to care about the feeling of the person whom I cause the offence.” [Interview excerpt 9]
- D. Promise of compensation
 

“I would buy a gift or make it another day, for example: I may say I’ll shout next time to firstly indicate my regrets. So I think showing sincerity is to say something concrete rather than uttering something unpractical.” [Interview excerpt 10]
- E. Keeping apologising and explaining until receiving forgiveness
 

“A polite apology is to keep saying sorry, apologising and explaining why I cause the trouble. I would also hope to be forgiven by the person. If I didn’t get any forgiveness from the person, then I would keep apologising. I wouldn’t stop saying sorry until he makes me feel he is appropriate.” [Interview excerpt 11]
- F. Repair
 

“I judge the impolite or polite apology depends on who arranges the next date. I think the apologisee wouldn’t do so if he has no sincerity...it can be a polite apology if the apologisee actively arranges the date for the next time.” [Interview excerpt 12]

“The apologisee has to make sure the date for the next time in order to show sincerity of regrets.” [Interview excerpt 13]

There are thus three outstanding criteria in making a polite apology according to the Taiwanese participants’ comments. Firstly, the Taiwanese respondents tended to keep apologising and explaining until the recipient indicates forgiveness. From the informants’ perspective, continuing to use apologetic language is to show one’s sincerity towards the offence and also to seek forgiveness from the recipient. Secondly, using more embarrassment expressions is important for achieving a polite apology. This corresponds to the result of

using the apology strategy of the Taiwanese participants: an embarrassment expression from the apologisee is one of the criteria for making a polite apology. Since the ethnographic interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the culturally-loaded term of embarrassment, *buhao yisi* (lit., 'not good meaning') appeared quite a few times in the interviews. To say one feels *buhao yisi* (or 'I feel embarrassed') implies feeling guilty for the offence and sorry for what the speaker has done to the recipient. Thirdly, the Taiwanese respondents tend to try to show sincerity through the apology. When asking about what a polite apology should be, *chenyi* 'sincerity' also appeared many times in the interviews. Most of the participants commented about how to show *chenyi* when making an apology, and this appears from the Taiwanese participants' perspectives to be an essential criterion in making a polite apology. Interview excerpt 14, for instance, indicates that the participant seeks not only the sincerity of the regrets from the apology but also the compensation of the offence: "I judge the impolite or polite apology depends on who says to make the date next time. I think the apologisee wouldn't say anything if he has no sincerity."

#### 4.2 Perception of (im)politeness of the intercultural apology across gender

There was only a slight difference in the perception of (im)politeness of the intercultural apology across genders, and this difference was not statistically significant ( $X^2 = 0.404$ ,  $p=0.525$ ,  $df=1$ ). This indicates that across the two cultural groups there are no discernible differences in perceptions of (im)politeness.

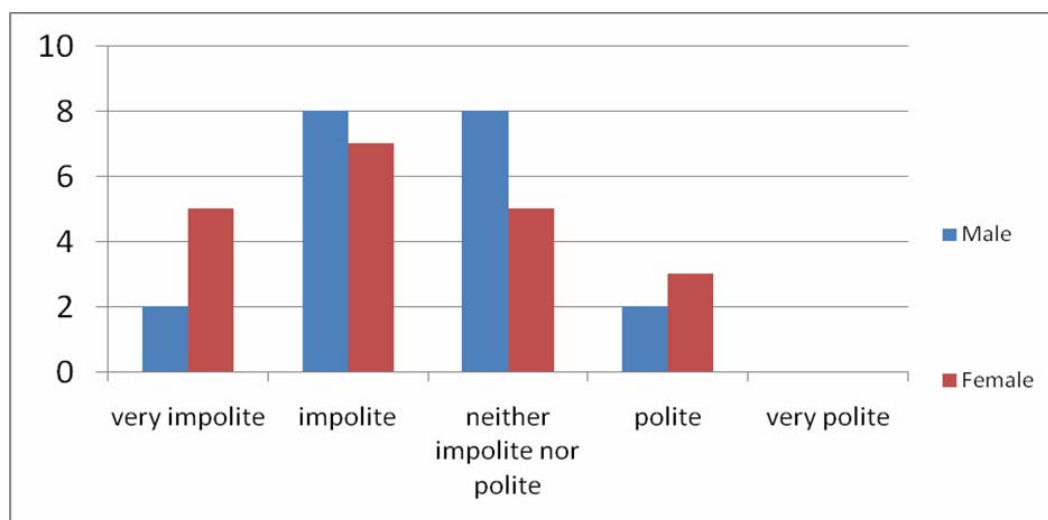


Table 3: Participant evaluations of (im)politeness of apology across gender

Table 3 displays the results from the participants across, and shows that the percentages of the perceptions of (im)politeness are fairly close according to the category of appropriate and inappropriate groups. The percentage of males who said the apology was 'inappropriate' (either very impolite or impolite) was about

50%, whereas that of females was about 60%. On the other hand, the percentage of males who said the apology was 'appropriate' (neither polite nor impolite, polite, or very polite) was 50%, whereas that of females was 40%.

In order to investigate whether the influence of gender on perceptions of (im)politeness is somehow mitigated by the strong influence of cultural background, the two gender categories were further subdivided according to cultural background.

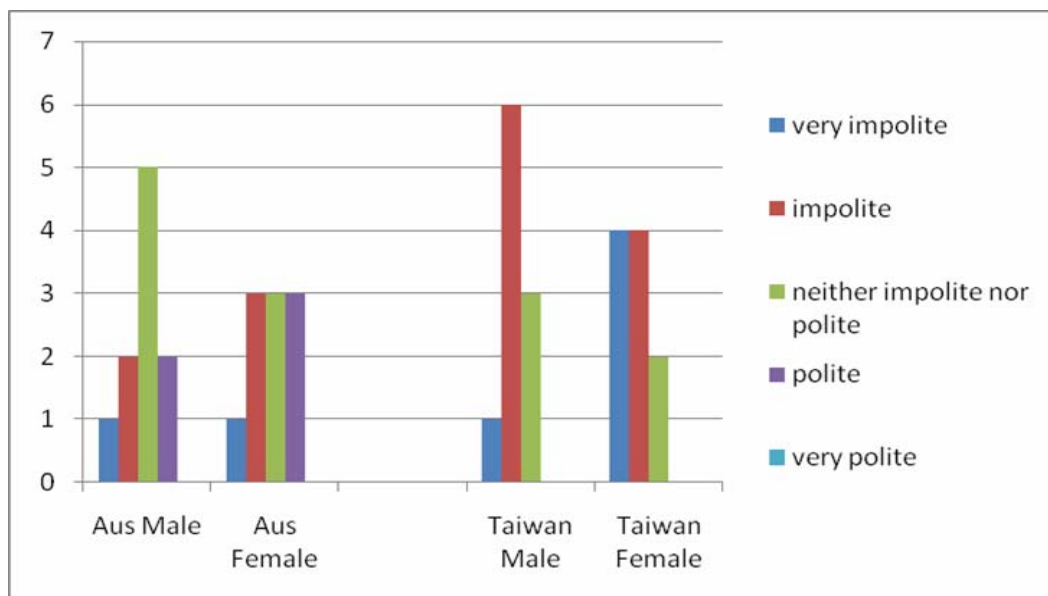


Table 4: Perceived (im)politeness of apology across gender in two cultural groups

Table 4 displays the participants divided into four subgroups: Australian female, Australian male, Taiwanese female and Taiwanese male. Taiwanese female and male subgroups appear to have a similar trend, that is, more towards perceiving the apology from very impolite to impolite, whereas the Australian female and male subgroups have a similar trend towards the category of perceiving the apology as ranging from neither impolite nor polite through to polite. For Taiwanese, there was no statistically significant difference between male and female perceptions of impoliteness, according to the chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 0.00$ ,  $p = 1.00$ ,  $df = 1$ ). For Australians, there was also no statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 0.22$ ,  $p = 0.639$ ,  $df = 1$ ). This indicates that even within the same cultural group there is no discernible influence of gender on perceptions of (im)politeness in this context.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study explores the variables in perception of (im)politeness of an intercultural apology, with emphasis on cultural and gender differences. The result of the study indicate that there are significant differences in the perceptions of an (im)polite apology across cultures, and thus provides further

evidence that cultural factors can be influential in the individual's perceptions of (im)politeness. The study indicated that there are distinctions in the perceptions of (im)politeness between Australian English and Taiwanese Chinese speakers, not only from the results of the questionnaire, but also from comments in the interviews. However, with regards to gender differences, there is no strong evidence to demonstrate that gender is a prominent factor influencing the perceptions in this study. According to the statistical analysis, the present study indicates that only the cultural factor is influential in the perceptions of (im)politeness, while the gender factor is not statistically significant.

The lack of influence of gender may seem at first glance to be counter intuitive in light of the large body of studies indicating that there are differences in politeness between males and females. However, this study has focused on *perceptions* of (im)politeness rather than on the *production* of politeness. Therefore, according to previous studies, while we might expect females to have produced a more polite apology in this context, there is no particular reason to assume that females will *perceive* this apology from a male as more impolite than males would. If females do indeed generally produce more polite apologies than males, then it would not be surprising for both male and female respondents to be intuitively aware of this when making their evaluations of (im)politeness. However, in light of the trend for females to produce more polite apologies, it might be interesting to investigate whether there would have been differences in the perception of (im)politeness of this particular apology if it had been attributed to a female rather than to a male.

There are also some limitations in this study about which researchers need to be aware in further investigations. According to the perceptions of Taiwanese participants, the length of staying overseas of those participants needs to be taken into account since cultural exposure can be another variable influencing the participants' pragmatic competence. Moreover, while the results indicate that gender is not an important factor in perceptions of (im)politeness in this case, a larger sample across more contexts is needed in order to have a more detailed analysis of the factors and also to have greater confidence in the findings.

#### **\*Author notes**

Wei-lin Chang has graduated with Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Languages and Applied Linguistics from Griffith University. Her research interests include intercultural communication and pragmatics. Her present main study field is to investigate the issues of cross-cultural communication between speakers of Chinese and English.

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### Appendix 1: Transcription of the conversation

- 1 W: hello
- 2 M: hello, oh, it's Melody.
- 3 W: hi, Melody, how are ya going?
- 4 M: ohm, Is it too late to call?
- 5 W: No, it's fine.
- 6 M: yeh, hmm, sorry to call you so late. I've got your
- 7 message, but havent got time to reply.
- 8 W: yeah, ahm, no, it's fine. It's just, a, really apologise
- 9 not getting back to you the other day we couldn't make it.
- 10 M: oh, that's okay. yeah, yeah. I just thought probably you
- 11 were busy with something and forgot it.
- 12 W: yeah. We were pretty busy actually.
- 13 M: oh, okay, yeah, yeah, that's fine. I just want to call
- 14 and tell you that's okay.
- 15 W: yeah, I will give you a ring in a later day and I will
- 16 give you a time and day when we coming down again.
- 17 M: Sure, yeah, maybe just uh can make another time when you come
- 18 down to Brisbane.
- 19 W: That will be nice actually. Nice to catch up.
- 20 M: Yes (laugh). Okay yeh so no worries. That's okay.
- 21 W: Have you been good?
- 22 M: uh yes (laugh) Yes, good good.
- 23 W: haha, good.
- 24 M: yeh yeh, just want to call you that I got your message and yeh
- 25 thank you for for uh telling me that yeh.
- 26 W: so is your mum alright?
- 27 M: yeh, she's okay, just uhm need to look after my uhm my grandmum.
- 28 So yeah
- 29 W: [okay]
- 30 M: yeh yeh.
- 31 W: Is everything okay back in Taiwan?
- 32 M: uhm, for my grandmum actually not. She's very sick now. So uhm
- 33 (0.3) yeh I don't know my mum just need to look after her and
- 34 yes.
- 35 W: Ah, right, okay, is she gonna make it okay?
- 36 M: uh, yeh yeh yeh, sure yeh.
- 37 W: hmm, good.
- 38 M: yeh (laugh) hmm hmm yeh, yeh hopefully. Hopefully everything will
- 39 be fine.

- 40 W: okay  
 41 M: okay so maybe just catch up uh catch you up another day, uh  
 42 when you come down to Brisbane again.  
 43 W: okay, Melody, that would great. It's really nice to talk to you  
 44 M: yeah yeah.  
 45 Me too. Okay, have a good night then.  
 46 W: okay you too.  
 47 M: Bye Bye.  
 48 W: Bye.

## Appendix 2: The questionnaire and interview questions

### A. The questionnaire

1. How would you rate this interaction?

very	impolite	neither polite	polite	very
impolite		nor impolite		polite

2. Why do you think so?

3. What would you say if you were Wayne?

### B. The interview

1. What is a polite apology?

2. Have you had any experience making an apology or accepting apologies from others?