

Acceptance and Rejection of Responsibility by Account Making, Instrumental and Non-Instrumental Concerns, and Mitigating Circumstances

著者	TAKAHASHI Akiko, OBUCHI Kenichi
journal or publication title	Tohoku psychologica folia
volume	57
page range	46-57
year	1999-07-01
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10097/56208

Acceptance and Rejection of Responsibility by Account Making, Instrumental and Non-Instrumental Concerns, and Mitigating Circumstances

TAKAHASHI AKIKO (高橋亜紀子)¹ and OHBUCHI KEN-ICHI (大淵憲一)¹
(*Tohoku University*)

We attempted to examine the effects of situational factors and of instrumental and non-instrumental concerns on account selection. We asked 135 Japanese university students to read the scenarios describing harm situations, in which an actor unintentionally harmed another person, and to rate how the actor would be likely to use four different accounts (apology, excuse, justification, and no account). The results showed that the victim's demand for compensation evoked the actor's economic concern, which in turn increased the usage of the responsibility-rejecting accounts (excuse and justification). Mitigating circumstances increased the perceived justifiability of the harm, which in turn increased the responsibility-rejecting accounts. Relationship closeness did not substantially affect account selection, but the concern for interdependent identity, which we assumed to be evoked in close relationships, increased the usage of the responsibility-accepting account (apology). Although apology was predominant among other accounts, the present results suggested that account selection largely depended on situational factors such as mitigating circumstances or demand for compensation.

Key words: Responsibility, accounts, apology, excuse, justification.

Introduction

Two Issues in Account Research

Accounts are regarded as a verbal tactic to reduce blame of others for a negative outcome by influencing other persons' judgments or perceptions (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Weiner, 1995). Types of accounts such as apology, excuse, or justification are distinguished by their extent to which they accept or reject responsibility (Weiner, 1995; Schoenbach, 1990). In order to reduce blame, it seems the best for an actor to reject responsibility for the negative outcome (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). Therefore, researchers have focused on excuses or justification because they are to reduce or reject responsibility (Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Weiner, 1995). However, there is an inconsistency in the research on accounts; that is, some empirical studies have found that actors most frequently chose apologies, accepting responsibility, across different cultures and genders (Itoi, Ohbuchi, & Fukuno, 1996). These findings suggest that accounts involve different motives or concerns other than rejection of responsibility.

Another issue is authenticity of accounts. Most researchers have regarded account as a

1. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts and Letters, Tohoku University, Kawauchi, Aobaku, Sendai, 980-8576, Japan.

tactic motivated by instrumental concerns such as avoidance of blame or protection of personal identity (Schoenbach,1990; Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Tedeschi & Riess,1981). Its effects depend on whether it is accepted by others or not. It is paradoxical that people are likely to accept an account when they perceive that it is authentic, not strategic. Authentic accounts are apologies which involve a regret, feeling of guilty, or sympathy with a victim, or justifications which are made based on a belief of justice. This type of accounts is spontaneous, being distinguished from strategic accounts which an actor makes in expectation of material or social rewards. Unlike most account researchers, lay persons believe the existence of authentic account, and they forgive an account-maker when it happens. Is authenticity of accounts an illusion? Are all accounts more or less a strategy or deception?

In this study we dealt with these issues, that is, acceptance or rejection of responsibility by accounts and authenticity of accounts, by analyzing instrumental and non-instrumental concerns of account making.

Instrumental and Non-Instrumental Concerns

Which types of accounts to accept or reject responsibility an actor chooses may depends on with what he or she is concerned in the situation. An instrumental concern is to reduce personal costs (Itoi et al.1996; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991; Weiner,1995). Acceptance of responsibility of a negative outcome is usually followed by a variety of costs, a typical one is economic loss as compensation for a victim. If an actor is strongly concerned with the economic cost, therefore, we assumed that he or she is motivated to reject responsibility.

Another instrumental concern is to protect personal identity (Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). It should be conceived as an instrumental concern since this is a desire for social rewards such as positive evaluations or impressions by others. We assumed that a decision of whether to accept or reject responsibility is determined by which types of identity an actor wants to make. In their cultural theory of self, Markus and Kitayama (1991) distinguished interdependent self and independent self. Those who value interdependent self are concerned with relationships with others or group membership, and therefore, they like to present themselves as closely connected with groups or organizations. We assumed that those people are likely to accept responsibility for an negative event in order to reduce conflicts with others. On the other hand, those who value independent self are concerned with personal uniqueness and autonomy, and therefore, they like to present themselves as distinguished from others or groups (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). We assumed that those people are likely to reject responsibility for an negative event in order to protect their self-esteem and personal identity.

Non-instrumental concerns of account making have been less attended than instrumental concerns. However, sometimes, an actor might feel an internal feelings such as guilt or sympathy or belief of justice to explain his or her act, without any instrumental concerns. We assumed that there is a dimension of authenticity in account making and it is rated by the extent to which acceptance or rejection of account is determined by the actor's private judgment of responsibility. A responsibility-accepting account (i.e., apology) is authentic, if the actor judges

that he or she is actually responsible for the negative event, and a responsibility-rejecting account (i.e., excuse or justification) is authentic, if the actor judges that he or she was actually not responsible for the negative event. On the other hand, the accounts which are divergent from the private judgments of responsibility are not authentic but strategic. In short, we assumed that an actor's private judgment of responsibility is an index of authenticity of account making.

Situational Determinants of Account Choice

Research have shown that account choice is influenced by situational factors (Schoenbach, 1990, pp. 91-120). For example, Itoi et al. (1996) found that when the harm was severe, both Japanese and American participants were less likely to use assertive accounts such as justification or denial, and that Japanese participants were more likely to use denial or give no account when the victim was a stranger than when the victim was a friend, but American participants' account preference was not influenced by the relationships. We interpreted that these situational factors do not directly determine account choice, but do it indirectly by affecting the actor's concerns or judgment of responsibility.

As a situational determinant, first, we focused on closeness between an actor and a victim. Which types of identity an actor wants to present may depend on the relationship. It was found that close relationships or in-group situations were found to reinforce an actor's concern for interdependent self-presentation, while non-close relationships or out-group situations encouraged the actor to present himself or herself as more independent person (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). These researchers suggest that the closeness between an actor and a victim influences the actor's concern for identity, which in turn determines his or her account choice, as Itoi et al. (1996) found. The second situational factor we focused on in this study was a demand by the victim for compensation. We assumed that the demand for compensation evokes the actor's economic concern, which in turn determines his or her account choice. The third factor was mitigating circumstances. Its presence lessens an actor's controllability of the outcome, and therefore, increases justifiability of his or her behavior. Attribution research has found that observers are less likely to attribute responsibility of a harmful outcome to the actor when they perceive the situation involve mitigating circumstances than when they do not perceive so (Weiner, 1995, pp. 190-192; Baron & Richardson, 1994, pp. 336-340). Therefore, we assumed that an actor expects that his or her responsibility-rejecting accounts will be accepted by others when the situation has mitigating circumstances. Mitigating circumstances may also influence the actor's private judgment of responsibility, that is, when the actor perceives mitigating circumstances in the situation, he or she does not judge that he or she is responsible for the negative outcome. For these reasons, the presence of mitigating circumstances may determine an actor's account choice.

Hypotheses and Research Design

Based on the above discussion, we made the following hypotheses. A demand from a victim for compensation would increase an actor's economic concern (*Hypothesis 1*), which in turn would increase the likelihood of usage of responsibility-rejecting accounts and decrease the

likelihood of usage of responsibility-accepting accounts (*Hypothesis 2*). A mitigating circumstance would increase the likelihood of usage of responsibility-rejecting accounts and decrease the likelihood of usage of responsibility-accepting accounts (*Hypotheses 3*). It would also decrease the actor's judgment of responsibility for the negative outcome (*Hypotheses 4*), which in turn would increase the likelihood of usage of responsibility-rejecting accounts and decrease the likelihood of usage of responsibility-accepting accounts (*Hypothesis 5*). Closeness of the relationship between the actor and victim would increase the actor's concern for interdependent identity and decrease the actor's concern for independent identity (*Hypothesis 6*), and the concern for interdependent identity would increase the likelihood of usage of responsibility-accepting accounts, while the concern for independent identity would increase the likelihood of usage of responsibility-rejecting accounts (*Hypothesis 7*).

In order to examine these hypotheses, we conducted a role-taking experiment, presenting Japanese participants with hypothetical scenarios in which an actor unintentionally harmed someone. Each participant read two different scenarios in one of eight experimental conditions, across two levels of three situational variables (mitigating circumstance, relationship closeness, and demand for compensation). We asked the participants to rate the likelihood of the actor's usage of each of four accounts (apology, excuse, justification, and no account), and in order to measure the mediating variables, we asked them to rate the actor's concerns (economic concern and interdependent and independent identities) and his or her judgment of responsibility.

Method

Participants

A hundred and thirty-five Japanese university students (67 men and 68 women) voluntarily participated in the study. They were randomly assigned into one of eight experimental conditions which were made by combining the levels of closeness, demand for compensation, and mitigating circumstance. The numbers of participants in these conditions were 15 through 20, including almost the same number of men and women.

Procedure and Scenarios

There were two basic scenarios (the visit and the cafeteria scenarios), both of them described an actor accidentally harming the other person. In the visit scenario, an actor called on the other person's house and accidentally broke the person's expensive tea cup. In the cafeteria scenario, an actor spoiled the other person's lunch by accidentally spilling coffee on it. In both scenarios, the victims were described as being the same gender and same age as the actors.

As stated above, eight versions of each scenario were developed by combining two levels of relationship closeness, two levels of mitigating circumstance, and two levels of demand for compensation. In the close-relationship condition, the harm-doer and the victim were described as close friends. In the not-close condition, they were described as strangers. In the mitigating condition, the harm-doer's behavior was described as justifiable, that is, the scenario included an event lessening the actor's controllability for the negative outcome: A child playing run against the

actor (the visit scenario) and a third person looking aside bumped into the actor. In the not-mitigating condition, such an event was not included. The victim demanded the harm-doer to compensate the harm in every scenario, but, in the not-compensation condition, the victim said, "It does not matter."

Each participant were given two scenarios and instructed to read them as though they had been the harm-doer in those scenarios. The order or presentation of the scenarios were randomly changed.

Dependent Measures

After reading each scenario, the participants were asked to respond to the three questions as a manipulation check. On a 9-point (0-8) scale, they were asked to rate how strongly they perceived the victim demanded the harm-doer to compensate the harm, how close they perceived the harm-doer and the victim were, and how much they perceived the harm-doer's behavior as justifiable.

Then, the participants were presented with the four account types (apology, excuse, justification, and no account)², and asked, once more on a 9-point (0-8) scale, to rate how likely they would use each if they were the harm-doer. Depending on the situation, each account type was expressed in a slightly different manner, although its conceptual components were identical throughout. Apology was described as acceptance of responsibility and saying "I am sorry," excuse as reducing responsibility by referring to the uncontrollable event, justification as denying responsibility by stressing that his or her act should be justified, and no account as saying nothing about the negative outcome.

After rating the likelihood of usage for each account, the participants were presented 6 items to measure concerns involved in account preference. On a 9-point scale, they were asked how importantly they would regard each concern item if they were the harm-doer. Two items measured a concern for interdependent identity ("I want other persons to regard me as a considerate and friendly fellow" and "I want other persons to regard me as a cooperative person"). Two items measured a concern for independent identity ("I want other persons to regard me as an autonomous person" and "I want other persons to regard me as an assertive person"). Two items measured an economic concern ("I do not want to loss money" and "I want not to pay money"). Finally, the participants were asked to rate, on a 9-point scale (0-8), the extent to which they felt responsible for the negative outcome if they were the harm-doer.

Results

Manipulation Check

An ANOVA was done for the ratings of perceived demand by using the victim's demand for compensation, relationship, mitigating circumstance, gender of the participants, and scenarios (the visit or cafeteria) as independent variables. Only scenario was a within-participant variable

2. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts and Letters, Tohoku University, Kawauchi, Aobaku, Sendai, 980-8576, Japan.

and the others were between-participant variables. A main effect of the victim's demand for compensation was highly significant, $F(1, 119) = 135.86, p < .01$: the participants in the compensation condition ($M = 5.12$) perceived the victim much more strongly demanding the harm-doer to compensate than those in the non-compensation condition ($M = 1.83$). This effect of the victim's demand for compensation was larger in the close condition than in the not-close condition, $F(1, 119) = 4.12, p < .05$. The participants rated the demand for compensation as being more strong in the visit scenario ($M = 4.93$) than in the cafeteria scenario ($M = 3.44$), $F(1, 119) = 26.76, p < .01$.

In an ANOVA of the ratings of perceived relationship closeness, a main effect of the manipulation of relationship was highly significant, $F(1, 119) = 30.05, p < .01$: the participant rated the relationship between the harm-doer and the victim as more close in the close condition ($M = 4.76$) than those in the not-close condition ($M = 3.20$). An interaction of the manipulation of relationship x scenarios was significant, $F(1, 119) = 9.08, p < .01$: When the harm-doer and the victim were strangers to each other, the participants rated the relationship as more close in the cafeteria scenario ($M = 4.06$) than in the visit scenario ($M = 2.35$), $F(1, 133) = 40.17, p < .01$, though the effects of the manipulation of relationship were significant in both scenarios, $F(1, 133) = 32.12$ and $32.59, ps .01$. An interaction of gender x mitigating circumstance was significant only in the visit scenario, $F(1, 133) = 10.59, p < .01$: The male participants rated the relationship between the harm-doer and the victim of the visit scenario as more close in the mitigating condition ($M = 4.97$) than in the non-mitigating condition ($M = 3.89$), $F(1, 132) = 4.84, p < .05$, while the female participants rated in the opposite direction ($M = 4.14$ vs. 5.33), $F(1, 132) = 5.70, p < .05$. Further, the participant rated the relationship as less close when the victim strongly demanded a compensation ($M = 3.32$) than when the victim did not so ($M = 4.60$), $F(1, 119) = 20.81, p < .01$.

In an ANOVA of the ratings of the perceived justifiability, a main effect of mitigating circumstance was highly significant, $F(1, 119) = 155.58, p < .01$: the participants rated the harm-doer's behavior as much more justifiable in the mitigating condition ($M = 5.40$) than in the non-mitigating condition ($M = 1.89$). The effect of mitigating circumstance was relatively smaller in the cafeteria scenario than in the visit scenario, $F(1, 119) = 34.12, p < .01$, and relatively smaller in the close condition than in the not-close condition, $F(1, 119) = 4.14, p < .05$, though it was significant in all these conditions, $F(1, 133) = 210.26$ and $41.39, ps < .01$, $F(1, 132) = 101.86$ and $52.83, ps = .01$. A significant interaction of the victim's demand x scenarios, $F(1, 119) = 7.27, p < .01$, indicated that only in the visit scenario, the participant rated the harm-doer's behavior as more justifiable when the victim strongly demanded for compensation ($M = 4.52$) than when the victim did not so ($M = 2.94$), $F(1, 133) = 10.29, p < .01$.

There were some unexpected differences between the scenarios and interactions between the independent variables, but the main effects of the experimental manipulations of the victim's demand, relationship, and mitigating circumstance were larger than them. Therefore, these manipulations were successful.

Effects of Situational Variables on Account Preference

For the rated likelihood of account usage, an ANOVA was performed using the victim's demand, relationship, mitigating circumstance, gender of the participants, account type, and scenario as independent variables. Account type and scenario were within-participant variables and the others were between-participant variables. We did not analyze four-way or higher interactions because they were too complicated to interpret.

A main effect of account type was significant, $F(3, 354) = 144.04, p < .01$. The participants rated that, as a harm-doer, they would be most likely to apologize and least likely to give no account, all the differences between the account types were significant (all $ps < .05$): apology ($M = 5.63$), excuse ($M = 2.60$), justification ($M = 2.27$), and no account ($M = 1.93$). There were significant interactions of account type x the victim's demand, $F(3, 354) = 29.61, p < .01$, account type x mitigating circumstance, $F(3, 354) = 103.37, p < .01$, and account type x the victim's demand x mitigating circumstance, $F(3, 354) = 5.90, p < .01$. Figure 1 indicates that the participants rated that they would less likely to use apology and more likely to use excuse and justification when the victim strongly demanded compensation than when the victim did not so, $F(1, 132) = 10.32, 25.46, \text{ and } 25.97$, all $ps < .01$, and when the situation involved mitigating circumstances than when it did not, $F(1, 132) = 136.29, 69.97, \text{ and } 73.19$, all $ps < .01$. As a result, only when there were both the victim's strong demand and mitigating circumstances, the participants rated that they would more likely to use excuse and justification than apology.

A significant interaction of account type x mitigating circumstance x scenarios, $F(3, 354) = 3.59, p < .05$, indicated that the effect of mitigating circumstance on account was larger in the visit scenario than in the cafeteria scenario, $F(3, 354) = 88.73 \text{ and } 47.16, ps < .01$.

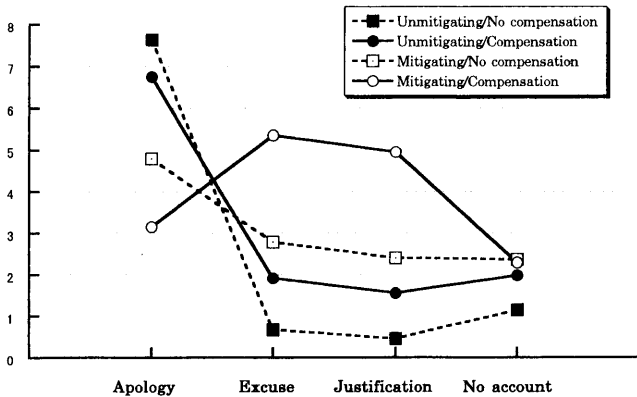


Figure 1. Effects of demand for compensation and mitigating circumstances on the rated likelihood of usage of accounts.

Path Analysis Among the Variables

As stated in the introduction, we assumed that the effects of situational variables (relationship closeness, the victim's demand for compensation, and mitigating circumstance) on account choice were mediated by the participants' concerns (economic and identity concerns) and judgment of responsibility. Based on this assumption, we attempted a path analysis among the measures by using stepwise regression analysis. In the first series of regression analyses, the dependent variable was either the rated concern for independent identity, the rated concern for interdependent identity, the rated economic concern, or the judgment of responsibility, and the independent variables were the perceived relationship closeness, the perceived demand for compensation, and the perceived situational justifiability. In the second series of regression analyses, the dependent variable was the rated likelihood of usage of each account and the independent variables were all the other measures. In these analyses, we averaged the ratings of each variable in the two scenarios.

Significant Betas in the regression equations were shown in Table 1. The perceived situational justifiability lessened the judgment of responsibility and reinforced the economic concern. The victim's demand also evoked the economic concern. Inconsistent with our expectations, however, the perceived relationship closeness did not influence either of the identity concerns. Apology was facilitated by the judgment of responsibility and the concern for interdependent identity, but suppressed by the perceived justifiability and the victim's demand

Table 1 Significant β s in Two Series of Stepwise Regression Analyses.

Independent variables	Independent identity	Interdependent identity	Economic concern	Judgment of responsibility
Situational variables				
Relationship closeness				
Demand for compensation			.30**	
Situational justifiability			.35**	-.70**
Independent variables	Apology	Excuse	Justification	No account
Situational variables				
Relationship closeness				
Demand for compensation	-.10*	.14*	.23**	
Situational justifiability	-.24**	.54**	.20*	
Mediating variables				
Independent identity				
Interdependent identity	.16**			
Economic concern		.21**	.20**	
Judgment of responsibility	.60**	-.21*	-.40**	-.28**
R^2	.73**	.51**	.50**	0.8**

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

for compensation. Both excuse and justification were facilitated by the victim's demand, the economic concern, and the perceived justifiability, but suppressed by the harm-doer's judgment of responsibility. Excuse was strongly determined by the perceived situational justifiability, and apology and justification was strongly determined by the judgment of responsibility in the opposite directions.

Discussion

Situational and Mediating Variables of Account Choice

The main finding of the present study was that account choice was strongly determined by the victim's demand for compensation and the presence of mitigating circumstances, as Figure 1 shows, and the results of path analysis suggest that their effects on accounts were partly mediated by the participants' economic concern and judgment of responsibility.

Consistent with *Hypothesis 1* and *2*, the victim's demand for compensation evoked the participants' economic concern, which in turn facilitated the usage of the responsibility-rejecting accounts (excuse and justification). Further, the demand for compensation directly influenced the account choice. Such a strong effect of the demand for compensation may be due to that the participants perceived it not only as an economic loss but also as a kind of punishment the harm-doing behavior. The demand for compensation might have caused fear and reactance on the side of participants, which might have motivated them to defend themselves by the responsibility-rejecting accounts.

For the effects of mitigating circumstances on account choice, we assumed two different psychological mechanisms. First, it may increase a cognitive efficacy for the responsibility-rejecting accounts, because the mitigating circumstance creates a high situational justifiability for the harm-doer's behavior. *Hypothesis 3* based on this assumption was supported, that is, when there were mitigating circumstances, the participants rated that they would more likely to use the responsibility-rejecting accounts (excuse and justification) and less likely to use the responsibility-accepting account (apology), as Figure 1 shows. The path analysis in Table 1 also shows that the perceived situational justifiability facilitated the usage of the responsibility-rejecting accounts and suppressed the usage of the responsibility-accepting accounts. However, it is not clear from the present results whether the account choice was mediated or not mediated by cognitive efficacy for the responsibility-rejecting accounts because it was not measured in the present study. In the future research, we must make this point clear.

Another mechanism for the effects of mitigating circumstance was assumed as that the harm-doer may not strongly feel responsible for the negative outcome if there are mitigating circumstances. Consistent with *Hypothesis 4* and *5* based on this assumption, the results of path analysis suggested that the perceived justifiability reduced the participants' judgment of responsibility, and such a reduction in the judgment of responsibility increased the usage of the responsibility-rejecting accounts and suppressed the usage of the responsibility-accepting accounts.

Previous studies have found that responsibility-rejecting accounts were less likely to be used between close friends (Itoi et al., 1996). Inconsistent with our expectation (*Hypothesis 6*),

however, the relationship closeness neither influenced account choice nor the concerns for identity. Although the manipulation of relationship closeness was successful, its effects were relatively weak as compared with those of other situational variables. *Hypothesis 7* predicting the effects of identity concerns on account choice were generally not supported, but the concern for interdependent identity facilitated the usage of apology, that is, the participants preferred apology when they wanted to present themselves as an interdependent person. The present results suggest that account choice was influenced by self-presentational concerns, as researchers have argued (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985; Snyder & Higgins, 1988). The reason why its effects were smaller than we expected might be that the measurement of concerns for identity was not perfect. Based on cultural theories of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994), we assumed that independency and interdependency are two general types as which people want to present themselves. However, it might be necessary to focus on special types of identity in the situations in which account-making is motivated. In such situations, an actor might be more concerned with moral identity, that is, he or she want to be seen by others as morally flawless. It seems important not only because the moral identity reduces the likelihood of being blamed or punished by others but also because it makes the actor accepted by others as a member of the group. In the future study, we must measure actor's concern for this type of identity.

In summary, we found in the present study that the situational variables such as the victim's demand for compensation and mitigating circumstances strongly determined account choice and their effects were partly mediated by the participants' internal variables such as economic concern and judgment of responsibility. It was further suggested that apology involved the account-maker's concern for interdependent identity.

Were accounts authentic?

In the present study, we attempted to deal with authenticity, an intriguing issue in the account research. Accounts involving concerns for economic interests or identities are regarded as strategic because they are motivated to achieve some self-interested goal. On the other hand, we assumed that accounts made based on the actor's private judgment of responsibility are authentic because they are the expressions of his or her feelings or beliefs. Since the results of path analysis indicated that the utilitarian concerns and judgment of responsibility determined the usage of every type of account, we interpret that every type of account had both strategic and authentic characters. According to the magnitudes of Betas, apology is regarded as more authentic than excuse or justification.

A theoretical problem with authenticity of accounts is a possibility that an actor's private judgment of responsibility is biased by self-interest, as conflict researchers have demonstrated (Ohbuchi, Fukushima, & Fukuno, 1995). In the present study, however, the judgment of responsibility was not significantly influenced by the victim's demand for compensation, as shown in Table 1, and its correlation with the economic concern was low, $r = -.17, p < .05$. It seems that the participants who really felt responsible for the negative outcome chose apology and those who really believed that they were not responsible for it chose excuse or justification. Therefore, the present finding suggests that an actor's judgment of responsibility is a cognitive component

of authenticity of account.

Acceptance or Rejection of Responsibility: Is Apology Predominant?

Another issue we dealt with in the present study was acceptance or rejection of responsibility by accounts. Although rejection of responsibility is stressed in theoretical analysis of accounts, (Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985), empirical studies have provided that harm-doers most prefer a responsibility-accepting account, that is, apology (Itoi et al., 1996). In the present study, also, apology was predominant as a total. However, it was not in some situations, that is, when there were both mitigating circumstances and the strong demand for compensation, as Figure 1 shows, the participants preferred excuse or justification more than apology.

Further, it is noted that the scenarios used in the present study clearly described the association of the harm-doer and the negative outcome. Such a clear association might be another condition facilitating predominance of apology because it made responsibility-rejecting accounts difficult to be accepted. If the association was more ambiguous, the participants might have been more inclined to use responsibility-rejecting accounts. Therefore, we should conclude that predominance of apology is not general, but account choice strongly depends on the situations.

References

- Baron, R. A., & Richardson, D. R. (1994). *Human Aggression*. New York and London: Prenum Press.
- Itoi, R., Ohbuchi, K., & Fukuno, M. (1996). A Cross-Cultural Study of Preference of Account: Relationship Closeness, Harm Severity, and Motives of Account Making. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, **26**, 913-934.
- Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., Matsumoto, H. & Norasakkunkit, R. (1997). Individual and collective processes in the construction of the self: Self-enhancement in the United States and self-criticism in Japan. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **72**, 1245-1267.
- Markus, H. R. & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, **98**, 24-253.
- Ohbuchi, K., Fukushima, O., & Fukuno, M. (1995). Reciprocity and cognitive bias in reactions to interpersonal conflicts. *Tohoku Psychologica Folia*, **54**, 53-60.
- Ohbuchi, K., Kameda, M., & Agarie, N. (1989). Apology as aggression control: Its role in mediating appraisal of and response to Harm. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **56**, 219-227.
- Scott, M. B. & Lyman, S. M. (1968). Accounts. *American Sociological Review*, **33**, 46-62.
- Schoenbach, P. (1990). *Account episodes: The management and escalation of conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Snyder, C. R. & Higgins, R. L. (1988). Excuse attributions: Do they work? In S. L. Zelen (Ed.), *Self-presentation: The second attribution-personality theory conference, CSPP-LA, 1986* (pp. 152-132). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Tedeschi, J. T. & Norman, N. (1985). Social power, self-presentation, and the self. In B. R. Schlenker (Ed.), *The self and social life* (pp. 293-309). London: Academic Press.
- Tedeschi, J. T., & Riess, M. (1981). Verbal tactics of impression management. In C. Antaki (Ed.), *Ordinary language explanations of social behavior* (pp. 3-22). London: Academic Press.

- Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, Co: Westview.
- Wagatsuma, H. & Rossett, A. (1986). The implications of apology: Law and culture in Japan and the United States. *Law and Society Review*, **20**, 461-498.
- Weiner, B. (1995). *Judgment of responsibility*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Weiner, B., Graham, S., Peter, O., & Zmuidinas, M. (1991). Public confession and forgiveness. *Journal of Personality*, **59**, 281-312.

(Received November 4, 1998)

(Accepted February 9, 1999)