

# THE INTERLANGUAGE OF APOLOGIZING: CROSS-CULTURAL EVIDENCE

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I'm sorry, so sorry,  
Please accept my apology...  
*Brenda Lee, 'I'm Sorry' (1958)*

## INTRODUCTION

In terms of their actional characteristics, apologies relate in important ways to other frequently studied expressive speech acts. Like the speech acts of thanking, complimenting, and complaining, apologies occur post-event. Complimenting and thanking involve events deemed praiseworthy by prevailing social norms; complaints and apologies refer back to events which constitute norm infringements. By complimenting and thanking, an event is made into a praiseworthy occasion; by complaining about or apologizing for its occurrence, an event is made into a transgression. In terms of value attribution, the relationship between event and speech act is reflexive rather than unilateral. Complaints, thanks, and compliments commonly hold the addressee to be causally involved in the preceding event; the agent assuming responsibility for the event necessitating the apology is the speaker. Compliments differ from thanks in that thanks require that the addressee's preceding action be beneficial to the speaker; compliments refer to addressee-related events which do not need to be beneficial to anybody in particular. The actional descriptors referred to above allow us to distinguish compliments, thanks, complaints, and apologies schematically:

	Event	e-Evaluation	e-Actor	e-Recipient
Compliment	post	good	H	H
Thanking	post	good	H	S
Complaint	post	bad	H	S
Apology	post	bad	S	H

*Table 1:* Actional features of four expressives.

e = event

According to Brown and Levinson (1987:65–68), each of the four expressives involves a different kind of face-threat: compliments constitute threat to H's negative face, complaints, to H's positive face, thanks, to S's negative face, and apologies, to S's positive face. One problem with this classification is its lack of explanatory value for the patterns by which these speech acts are typically realized, in particular, whether their force, in the unmarked case, tends to be mitigated or aggravated. Requests, for instance, are threatening to H's negative face, yet unlike compliments, which fall into the same category, they are usually mitigated. In order to explain why complaints tend to be mitigated (House & Kasper 1981, Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987, in press) whereas compliments (Wolfson 1983, Holmes 1988, Herbert 1989), thanks (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986, in press) and apologies (Olshtain 1989 and references below) tend to be aggravated in force, it seems necessary to look for a less 'paranoid' theory of linguistic action than Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (Schmidt 1980). While rejecting and evasive responses to compliments (Holmes 1986) lend empirical support to the alleged threat to H's negative face inherent in compliments, and anecdotal evidence of litotes as realization forms for compliments are indicative of the same properties, these realization patterns are outnumbered by upgraded and accepted compliments in the speech communities studied to date. In terms of their actional properties, complaints relate to a negatively evaluated H-event and thereby damage H's positive face. Compliments and thanks refer to a positively evaluated H-event and thus directly support H's positive face. Apologies presuppose a negatively evaluated S-event and thus pose a threat to S's positive face. Predictions from

these face-related properties to preferred mitigation or aggravation can be made by invoking Edmondson's H-Support Maxim: '1. Support you hearer's costs and benefits! 2. Suppress your own! 3. Give benefits when you receive them!' (1981:279). Thus complaints (just as requests) are typically associated with mitigation, whereas compliments, thanks, and apologies as H-supportive acts warrant aggravation (Holmes 1989). Aggravation rather than mitigation in the case of apologies would also be predicted by Leech's Modesty maxim (1983:136ff) and Gu's 'Self-denigration maxim' (1990).

Apologies can be defined as compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S was causally involved and which is costly to H. This conceptualization is supported by Goffman's (1971) view of apologies as remedial interchanges, remedial work serving to re-establish social harmony after a real or virtual offense. Following Goffman's distinction of ritual and substantive compensation, apologies can be classified into those redressing virtual offenses which are remedied by the sole offering of an apologetic formula, and apologies supplying redress for actual damage inflicted on the addressee, sometimes including an offer of material compensation. Both kinds of apology have been demonstrated to vary cross-culturally (cf. references below).

Ritualistic apologies are sometimes distinguished from substantive ones by different formulae. Thus in (American) English, ritualistic apologies with the formula 'excuse me' are offered as territory invasion signals when addressing strangers (e.g. prior to asking direction), as announcements of temporary absence from ongoing interaction (e.g. in order to answer the phone), or upon virtual or real intrusion of another person's physical space (e.g. passing somebody in a narrow hallway). Borkin and Reinhart define the function of 'excuse me' as 'a formula to remedy a past or immediately forthcoming breach of etiquette or other light infraction of a social rule' (1978:61). 'I'm sorry', in their analysis, is used in a wider range of contexts, especially 'in remedial interchanges when a speaker's main concern is about a violation of another person's right or damage to another person's feelings' (ibid.). Borkin and Reinhart's analysis is given strong empirical support by House (1988). She found that in 7 apology contexts involving substantive offenses, native speakers of British English (N = 100) used 'I'm sorry' up to 80%

of the possible choices. In 6 of these contexts, 'excuse me' did not figure at all, in one of them it was used with negligible frequency (3%).

The ritualistic function of much apologetic behavior, and its cross-cultural variability, has also been noted by Coulmas (1981) in his analysis of expressions of gratitude and indebtedness in a number of Western languages as opposed to Japanese. Coulmas notes that in many contexts requiring expressions of gratitude in Western cultures, such as upon receiving a gift, Japanese requires an apologetic formula such as 'sumimasen'. The function he ascribes to ritualistic apologies in Japanese concurs with the functional properties of 'excuse me' described by Borkin and Reinhart, viz. indicating 'the speaker's willingness to conform to conventional rules and social expectations. (...) Verbal apology occurs even if there was no serious or real offence as a precaution against inadvertent misconduct or unanticipated negative interpretation of one's performance' (1981:84).

While Borkin and Reinhart's analysis suggests that acquiring appropriate formulae for ritualistic apology is problematic for nonnative speakers (NNS), substantive apologies confront learners with a more complex learning task. First (as with ritualistic apologies), they have to identify the occurrence of an event that requires apology. This may require restructuring their cultural knowledge as such events have been shown to vary cross-culturally (Olshtain 1983). Secondly, the severity of the offense and the weights of contextual variables such as power and distance need to be assessed—another potential trap as perceptions of these social variables are also subject to cross-cultural variation (House 1988, Vollmer & Olshtain 1989). Finally, appropriate output strategies have to be selected. While all available evidence points to a universally valid apology speech act set (Olshtain 1989), preferences for strategy choice are contextually and cross-culturally at variance (*ibid.*). As Garcia (1989) has demonstrated, cultural differences do not only obtain in preferences for local strategic choices but for global approaches to the speech event, such as opting for a deference versus a solidarity style.

While we do not believe that language users actually go through the motions of planning linguistic action in the serial fashion outlined above (Schmidt, *in press*), appropriate apologizing requires the specified knowledge



components, and the language user's ability to access this knowledge fast and flexibly. In interlanguage pragmatics, only a few studies have addressed the issue of how NNS apologize in ongoing interaction with a native (NS) or NNS interlocutor, and the available studies (Kasper 1981, Trosborg 1987, Garcia 1989) have analyzed NNS's performance in terms of their pragmatic knowledge (what semantic formulae do they use) rather than examining how pragmatic knowledge is accessed under immediate processing constraints.

Studies of IL apologizing have essentially addressed the same research question—the accessibility of apology strategies to NNS—yet they have examined this issue by means of different data gathering procedures. Rintell and Mitchell (1989) compared NS and NNS use of apology strategies in their responses to written and oral Discourse Completion questionnaires and found only slight differences between the two conditions. In order to review previous substantive findings and assess further instrument effects, the results of five studies are summarized in Table 2.

Holmes (1989) investigated the realization of apologies in an ethnographically collected corpus of 183 remedial interchanges produced by adult NS of New Zealand English (NS NZE). Hers is not a cross-cultural study but will be reported to provide a baseline of naturally occurring speech, against which the elicited data can be matched. Olshtain (1983) examined apology performance in role plays, enacted by NS of American English (NS AE), Russian (NS Rus), and Hebrew (NS Heb), and by American and Russian learners of Hebrew (IL E-Heb, IL Rus-Heb). Role play was also employed by Trosborg (1987) in a study involving NS of British English (NS BE), NS of Danish (NS Dan), and three groups of Danish learners of English at different levels of proficiency. Table 2 includes the figures for the lower advanced level (IL Dan-En). House (1988) used a Discourse Completion Task to study apology realization by NS of British English (BE NS), NS of German (NS Ger), and German learners of English (IL Ger-En). By means of the same DCT questionnaire, Kasper (in preparation) looked at the apology responses

	IFID	Intensi- fier	Respon- sibility	Account	Minimi- zation	Repair	Verbal Redress
ethno. (Holmes)							
NS NZE	61	NR	9	23	NR	5	2
RP (Olshtain)							
NS AE	92	NR	100	42	NR	0	0
NS Rus	66	NR	75	33	NR	0	0
NS Heb	66	NR	58	33	NR	8	0
IL E-Heb	69	NR	92	23	NR	0	0
IL Rus-Heb	64	NR	71	21	NR	0	7
RP (Trosborg)							
NS BE	7	NR	24	22	21	22	5
NS Dan	6	NR	33	18	25	12	6
IL Dan-E	8	NR	41	13	14	21	2
DCT (House)							
NS BE	80	40	70	3	13	15	9
NS Ger	69	31	66	5	11	13	4
IL Ger-E	73	48	80	6	16	14	8
DCT (Kasper)							
NS Dan	72	22	49	18	9	13	8
IL Dan-E	75	27	82	5	16	16	5
IL Dan-Ger	68	15	75	10	12	23	1

Table 2: Selection of apology strategies (%) by fifteen groups of informants.

provided by NS of Danish (NS Dan) in comparison with Danish learners of English (IL Dan-En) and Danish learners of German (IL Dan-Ger).

Throughout the five studies, apology realizations were coded according to the semantic formulae identified as constituting the apology speech act set (Olshtain & Cohen 1983, Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989). Figures reported in the studies have been summarized according to these categories.

Most subjects apologized explicitly by means of an Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) such as 'I'm sorry' and stated whether they assumed responsibility for the offense (Responsibility), e.g., by blaming a third party ('the kitchen must have mixed up the orders'), admitting the offensive act ('I forgot to bring your book'), or by self-blame ('it's my fault'). The extremely low frequencies of IFID provided by the British-English and Danish speakers in

Trosborg's role plays do not seem to be the result of a language or instrument effect since high frequencies of IFID were supplied by speakers of the same languages in Kasper's DCT study and by Olshtain's role players. This suggests differential contextual effects in Trosborg's data as opposed to the other studies. Intensification of apology ('I'm very/terribly sorry') was only reported in the DCT studies, where the English NS and German-English IL users upgraded their apologies more than the Danes and the German NS. Except for the Danish NS, who provided the same amount of explanations or accounts for the offense in the role play and DCT, the interactive conditions elicited considerably more accounts than the non-interactive DCT. This instrument effect may be indicative of different psychological and discourse-structural conditions. Subjects may feel more psychologically pressed to account for purported misdeeds in a direct encounter with the offended party, and in ongoing discourse where they can distribute various apologetic acts over several turns. Accounts may even be requested by the interlocutor, a possibility precluded by the one-turn response in a DCT. The British-English and Danish NS tended to minimize the severity of the offense (e.g., 'it's only a tiny scratch (s. l. on your car)') more in the role plays than in the DCTs, which suggests a similar effect as in the case of accounts. The greater effort of these speakers to minimize the offense is consistent with their reluctance to explicitly apologize and take on responsibility. Repair, or compensation for the incurred damage ('I'll bring it in tomorrow'), was offered with about the same frequencies as minimization. Olshtain's role plays and Holmes' ethnographic data provided very few instances of repair. Expressions of concern for the hearer ('I hope you didn't wait long') or promises of forbearance ('it won't happen again'), conflated as 'verbal redress', were used extremely rarely by all groups across conditions.

For the majority of NS and IL users, expressing an explicit apology and making a responsibility statement were the essential components of apology, whereas providing explanations, minimizing the offense, and offering repair and verbal redress were more optional and, as demonstrated by Olshtain (1989), context-dependent strategies. This summary thus extends Olshtain's findings (1983, 1989) to a wider range of languages.

The variation in supplied apology strategies raises a number of questions. For instance, why do Holmes' informants make considerably fewer responsibility statements than any other group? Our bet is that this is due to the type of apology included in Holmes' corpus. Even though Holmes does not comment on this, her offense categories 'space' and 'talk' offense in particular suggest that she included ritualistic apologies in her corpus. The apologetic formulae by which ritualistic apology is performed very often do not co-occur with other redressive activity. As the role plays and DCT questionnaires exclusively provide contexts for substantive apologies, the naturalistic data set does not provide an adequate base line for the two types of elicited data. Furthermore, the conspicuous difference between Trosborg's role plays and the remaining elicited data suggests close attention to contextual factors in the study of apology.

Research to date has examined apology behavior in a variety of Western cultures and languages. While these studies have been important in providing preliminary evidence for a universally valid apology speech act set, and the differential selections from this set according to contextual factors, it is requisite to extend the scope of study to non-Western languages and cultures to advance the fundamental issue in cross-cultural pragmatics, viz. the universality and specificity of linguistic action. One of the methodological problems in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparison is to determine whether the contextual conditions in which the speech act behavior under study occurs are perceived as the same or different by the groups to be compared (Arndt & Janney, in press). With specific reference to apologies, Wolfson, Marmor and Jones comment that 'a cross-linguistic study of apologies may well reveal that the notions of offense and obligation are culture-specific and must, therefore, become an object of study in themselves' (1989:180). Brown and Levinson's politeness theory predicts that the weightiness of face-threatening acts, computed by adding the values of social distance, dominance, and degree of imposition as perceived by actors in a given context, determines the kind and amount of redress afforded in the performance of FTAs (1987:76). According to theory and empirical evidence (Kasper 1990 for overview), both the weights and values of contextual factors vary cross-culturally. In the cross-

cultural study of apology, it is therefore essential to establish what constitutes an offense, how members of different cultures perceive offense contexts, and how these perceptions are reflected in output strategies.

### THIS STUDY

The central research questions we wish to examine in this study are:

1. How are contextual factors in a variety of offense contexts perceived by Thai and American informants?
2. How is the selection of apology strategies determined by contextual factors?
3. What patterns of intracultural and intercultural variability are observable in the selection of apology strategies by Thai NNS of English as compared to NS of Thai and American English?

Informants in this study were 423 Thai graduate students at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, at an intermediate level of proficiency in English, and 30 NS of American English who were students at the University of Hawai'i.

Data were collected by means of two questionnaires. The Assessment questionnaire included 20 items, each of which specified a different offense context (see Appendix 1 for sample item). Informants were asked to rate these contexts on a 5-point rating scale for 4 context-internal factors (Severity of offense, offender's Obligation to apologize, Likelihood for the apology to be accepted, offender's Face-loss) and 2 context-external factors (social Distance and Dominance) (for the distinction between context-internal and context-external factors, see Brown & Fraser 1979, Blum-Kulka & House 1989). The selection of the context-external factors Distance and Dominance (power) follows Brown and Levinson's weightiness formula (1987:76) and their argument that Distance and Dominance constitute 'very general pancultural dimensions which nevertheless probably have 'emic' correlates' (1987:76). The context-internal factors are assumed to function as components of Brown and Levinson's dimension 'degree of imposition', specified for the speech event of

apologizing. Severity of offence and Obligation to apologize were found to distinguish different types of offense by Olshtain (1989). Likelihood for the apology to be accepted was added in view of an analysis of apology responses, however it is included in the present study to examine possible interdependence between this and other contextual factors, and effects on the selection of apology strategies. Offender's Face-loss was included since, as Vollmer and Olshtain note, 'the expression of responsibility seems to be linked directly to the S's cost and loss of face which results from performing the speech act of apologizing' (1989: 198), and which consequently can be expected to have an impact on the redress afforded in carrying out an apology. The Dialog Construction (DC) questionnaire included the same offense contexts as the Assessment questionnaire. Informants were asked to supply the offender's and the offended person's turn (see Appendix 2 for sample item). Since the apology response was elicited from the informants rather than being provided as part of the questionnaire items, the instrument differed from the standard Discourse Completion questionnaire (Levenston & Blum 1978, Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989). For this study, only the first pair parts were analyzed.

The two questionnaires included the following contexts:

1. A and B are friends. A has had an accident with a car borrowed from B. (Damaged Car)
2. A and B are friends. A borrowed a magazine from B and poured coffee over it. (Ruined Magazine)
3. At a staff meeting, teacher A contradicts teacher B. (Contradiction)
4. At a staff meeting, teacher A accuses teacher B of being a poor teacher. (Poor Teacher)
5. At an office, a junior colleague forgets to pass on a private message to a senior colleague. (Private Message Low-High)
6. At an office, a senior colleague forgets to pass on a private message to a junior colleague. (Private Message High-Low)
7. At an office, a junior colleague forgets to pass on an important business message to a senior colleague. (Business Message Low-High)



8. At an office, a senior colleague forgets to pass on an important business message to a junior colleague. (Business Message High-Low)
9. At a restaurant, a customer changes her mind after the order has already been taken. (Order Change)
10. At a restaurant, a waiter spills food on a customer's clothes. (Food on Customer)
11. At a restaurant, a waiter brings the wrong order. (Wrong Order)
12. At a restaurant, a customer spills food on a waiter. (Food on Waiter)
13. At Bangkok airport, a customs official messes up a traveller's suitcase. (Messed-up Bag)
14. At Bangkok airport, a traveller is caught trying to smuggle a Buddha out of the country. (Smuggled Buddha)
15. At Bangkok airport, a customs official breaks a legally purchased statue when searching a traveller's suitcase. (Broken Statue)
16. At Bangkok airport, a traveller is unable to produce a customs form. (Customs Form)
17. A professor has not yet graded a term paper which a student was supposed to pick up. (Ungraded Paper)
18. A student forgets a book she was supposed to return to her professor. (Borrowed Book)
19. A professor misplaces a student's term paper and fails the student. (Failed Student)
20. A student plagiarizes from a published book and is found out by a professor. (Cheating Student)

Items in both questionnaires were randomized. The Assessment questionnaire was filled out by 30 American NS of English and by 30 Thai NNS of English. Both versions were in English, however for the Thai study, conceivably difficult vocabulary items were glossed in Thai.

The DC questionnaire was prepared in an English and in a Thai version. The English version was filled out by 30 NS of English and by 288 Thai

NNS of English. The Thai version was filled out by 136 Thai NS.

## RESULTS

### The Assessment study

The mean ratings and standard deviations of contextual factors in each offense situation are included in Appendix 3.

Calculation of Pearson Product Moment Coefficients revealed no statistically significant correlation between the context-external factors Distance and Dominance, nor between any of the context-external and the context-internal factors. This finding lends support to Brown and Levinson's thesis of the mutual independence of contextual factors (1987:80f). However we hesitate to conclude that such independence would continue to obtain in ongoing interaction. While a static, snapshot-like view of an interactional configuration, as represented by the questionnaire items, suggests the integrity of Distance and Dominance relative to each other and to the interactional content, conversational interchanges where apologies are jointly negotiated may well evidence a dynamic and interdependent fluctuation of participants' ascriptions of Distance and Dominance (e.g. Aronsson & Sætterlund-Larsson 1989), and of these context-external with context-internal factors.

The ratings of context-internal factors by both Thai and American informants yielded high correlations between Severity and Obligation (American  $r = .7210$ ,  $p < .000$ , Thai  $r = .6815$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Severity and Likelihood (American  $r = -.6382$ ,  $p < .002$ , Thai  $r = -.7505$ ,  $p < .000$ ), Severity and Face-loss (American  $r = .7564$ ,  $p < .000$ , Thai  $r = .5848$ ,  $p < .007$ ), and Obligation and Face-loss (American  $r = .8528$ ,  $p < .000$ , Thai  $r = .7401$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Overall, then, it can be concluded that Severity of offense is systematically related to the offender's Obligation to apologize (corroborating Olshtain's finding about the covariance of Severity and Obligation, 1989: 160), the Likelihood for the apology to be accepted—the more serious the infringement, the less the likelihood for the apology to be successful—and the extent to which the offender's (positive) Face is adversely affected. Furthermore, Face-loss and Obligation can be viewed as

codeterminant: more Face-loss requires more Obligation to apologize, and more Obligation entails more Face-loss.

The demonstrated interrelatedness of context-internal factors can be understood as an explication of Brown and Levinson's contextual dimension 'degree of imposition' (1987:76) for the speech act of apology. What is noteworthy is the strong congruence by which Thai and American informants perceived the relationships between the context-internal factors, and the lack of interrelation expressed in the ratings of the context-external factors. However rather than drawing hasty conclusions about congruent social perceptions by members of widely different cultures, we feel that two caveats are in order. First, the Thai questionnaire was administered in an English version. The assessments given by the Thai informants may therefore represent their perceptions of offense contexts in English-speaking cultures rather than in their native culture. Their approximation of the American ratings might be taken as an expression of intercultural competence, a construct parallel to interlanguage competence. To what extent the Thais' intercultural perceptions are reflective of, or different from, their social perceptions in their native culture can only be examined by comparative Thai material, which we unfortunately were unable to collect.

Secondly, the noted correlations obtained across the 20 contexts represented in the questionnaire. They do not allow predictions of the values assigned to contextual factors in individual contexts. In the remainder of this section, we shall take a closer look at the contextual assessments of different offense situations. Statistically significant differences between the Thai and American ratings were determined by MANOVA. In order to facilitate the following presentation, we shall divide the continuous ratings into three categories: low (1 – 2.3), medium (2.4 – 3.7), and high (3.8 – 5).

**Severity of offense.** Only Order Change and (according to the American raters) Borrowed Book were perceived as light offenses. Medium Severity was assigned to offenses involving low material costs (Ruined Magazine), inconveniences rather than infringements of legal rights or entitlements (Ungraded Paper, Contradiction, Messed-up Bag, Private Messages), or mishaps occurring as part of a job (Food on Waiter, Wrong Order). These offenses represent minor impositions on somebody's time, money, physical space, energy, or face wants; they warrant no legal claims to redress.

High Severity offenses have major real-life consequences rather than involving easily repairable inconveniences. They may constitute illegal action (Cheating Student), high material costs (Broken Statue), potential or real obstruction of regular procedures and negligence of professional obligations (Business Messages, Failed Student), or violation of a person's physical integrity without this being an accepted job or task risk (Food on Customer).

Offenses which were rated as less severe by American than by Thai informants were Borrowed Book, a routine fact of American academic life, and Smuggled Buddha. For cultural outsiders, taking a Buddha statue out of Thailand constitutes no more than a petty offense, in legal terms. For Thais, the act is not just illegal but sacrilegious, expressing contempt of religious beliefs and of the most significant symbol of Thai culture. Americans gave higher Severity ratings than the Thais to Wrong Order, Private Message High-Low, Poor Teacher, and Cheating Student. Whereas the Thais assigned contradicting a colleague and questioning his or her professional competence the same medium Severity rating, the Americans perceived the 'Poor Teacher' allegation as much more serious.

**Obligation to apologize.** Except for Order Change, which was rated low on Obligation by the Thais, both groups of informants perceived the offender's Obligation to apologize as medium or high in all contexts. However, the American raters gave as many as twelve offenses higher scores on Obligation than the Thais. A consistent relationship was discernable between Obligation and Severity in the ratings by both groups. 1. Offense contexts received the same ratings on Obligation as on Severity. Thais and Americans

perceived thirteen contexts as similar on these dimensions. This finding is consistent with the assessment of seven offense contexts by Israeli raters, reported by Olshtain (1989). 2. Offenses received a categorically higher rating on Obligation than on Severity. In the American ratings, the low Severity offenses Order Change and Borrowed Book scored medium on Obligation, and five medium Severity offenses (Ruined Magazine, Wrong Order, Food on Waiter, and the Private Messages) registered high on Obligation. The Thai raters assessed six medium Severity items as high on Obligation (Private Message Low-High, Wrong Order, Food on Waiter, Borrowed Book, Damaged Car, Messed-up Bag). This relationship between Severity and Obligation has not been reported in previous apology assessment studies (House 1988, Olshtain 1989, Vollmer & Olshtain 1989).

The ratings of individual offense items on Obligation thus permit us to elaborate the correlational finding 'the more severe an offense, the more it warrants apology': Either the obligation to apologize is directly proportionate to the severity of the offense, or the perceived need to apologize categorically exceeds the degree of the norm infringement. This latter finding strongly suggests the precedence of relational over transactional concerns in much human interaction: in the interest of restoring social harmony, remedial action in form of apology is seen as required even if the offense is a minor matter. Building on Goffman's (1971) discussion of ritual and substantive apology (also Owen 1983), the following analogy comes to mind: Ritual apology is offered as redress to virtual offenses, i.e. to events that might, but did not, cause offense. By the same token, factual minor offenses can be magnified into virtual major infringements through disproportionate offer of redress. The benefit accruing from a disproportionate (and acted-upon) need to apologize is to re-establish the implied parties—offender and offended person—as fully competent and responsible participants in the business of social interaction. There was, however, one exception to the patterned relationship between Severity and Obligation. In the Thai ratings, Smuggled Buddha was assessed as the highest offense of all (4.7) yet assigned to medium Obligation (3.5). There were no indications from the ratings of the other context-internal factors to explain this irregularity since although Smuggled Buddha registered low on Likelihood and high on Face-loss, so did other items which were assessed as strongly requiring



apology. We think that perhaps the informants reasoned strategically on this item: Since an apology is concomitant with admitting to an offense which is a major cultural and legal infringement, an escape route for the offender might be to pretend ignorance by not apologizing. We shall see whether this speculation bears out in the Thais' choice of apology strategies.

**Likelihood of apology acceptance.** The Thai raters did not perceive Likelihood for the apology to be accepted as low in any context, whereas the American raters felt that acceptance was unlikely in Broken Statue, Cheating Student, and Smuggled Buddha. These three contexts, which (except for Smuggled Buddha in the American ratings) registered highest on Severity in Thai and American assessments, were also given the lowest ratings in the medium category by the Thais. Likewise, Thai and American raters perceived the same seven offenses as having a high Likelihood for apology acceptance. All of these offenses had been given low ratings on Severity.

**Offender's Face-loss.** All offense contexts were perceived as involving medium or high damage to the offender's face by both Thai and American raters. However, the Thais considered only four contexts—Contradiction, Poor Teacher, Order Change, and Private Message High-Low—as less than highly face-threatening. The Americans, on the other hand, felt in as many as nine contexts that the offender's face was not severely threatened. In addition to the four contexts also rated as medium for Face-loss by the Thais, the Americans attached only minor Face-loss to low and medium Severity offenses which were due to an oversight rather than to an intentional norm infringement, and which did not involve high costs to the offended party (Ruined Magazine, Messed-up Bag, Customs Form, Ungraded Paper, Borrowed Book). For the Thais, minor Severity of an offense did not entail minor Face-loss. Out of twelve medium Severity offenses, the Thais rated nine high on Face-loss. The highest Severity offenses were also given the highest ratings on Face-loss by Thais and Americans. The emerging pattern is thus that for the Americans, offender's Face-loss and Severity of offense were co-determinant. In the Thai informants' perception, by contrast, high Severity and high Face-loss were interrelated, but lower Severity may be outweighed by other factors which may make an event highly threatening to the offender's



face even in the absence of much damage in objective terms. Such factors seem to include demonstration of undesirable personal attributes such as clumsiness, carelessness, or forgetfulness. We are reluctant, however, to draw further inferences from these differential ratings, since they may well be indicative of conceptual differences between the notion of 'face' in Thai and American culture. Comparative ethnosemantic study of the concept of 'face' in both cultures and languages is needed, exploring its meaning and function within each cultural context (cf. Hu 1945 for an examination of the concept of face in Chinese culture).

Finally, of the context-external factors Distance and Dominance, we shall only examine Distance, since no effects were found for Dominance on any of the other contextual factors, nor on the selection of apology strategies.

**Distance.** With few exceptions, the Thai and American ratings of Distance reflected the social role relationship between offender and offended party. Thai and American informants agreed in perceiving the closest relationships between friends, and the most distant relationships between strangers in service and administrative encounters. Differences are noticeable in the two groups' perceptions of student-professor and work relationships. Both groups assessed the relationships between student and professor as medium Distance, corresponding to 'acquaintance' as opposed to familiars or strangers. Yet for the Thais, student-professor tended more towards the low end of the medium Distant category ( $> 3$ ), whereas for the Americans, it approximated closer to the high end of medium Distance ( $< 3$ ). Possibly, Thais perceive the prototypical relationship of students and professors more similar to that of distant family members, while Americans regard it more as a work relationship involving participants on different levels of positional hierarchies. The latter view is supported by the ratings of relationships between colleagues, which the Thais perceived as more distant than the Americans in four out of six cases. Previous studies with different populations are consistent with either the Thai or the American assessments of social Distance in the two types of role relationships. German and British raters assessed relationships between colleagues as less distant than student-professor relationships (House 1988:305), whereas Israeli informants perceived more Distance between colleagues than between student and professor (Olshtain 1989:160). Note that neither the Thai

nor the American ratings indicated any evidence of differential perceptions of Distance between the relationships of teachers and office colleagues on the one hand, and between co-workers at different ranks on the other hand.

Our findings on the Assessment study can be summed up as follows:

1. Thai and American raters perceive context-external and context-internal factors as unrelated.
2. Context-internal factors in offense contexts are highly interrelated. Severity covaries with Obligation to apologize, Likelihood for the apology to be accepted, and offender's Face-loss, lending support to Olshtain's hypothesis that 'severity of offense is the representative contextual factor in the socio-pragmatic set of the apology' (1989:160).
3. Thai and American raters consistently perceive Obligation, Likelihood, and Face-loss as higher than Severity of offense, suggesting the primacy of interpersonal concerns over transactional goals in much remedial exchange.
4. Despite the overall consistent relationship of contextual factors in the American and Thai assessments, individual offense contexts may be characterized by constellations of contextual factors which are not predictable from the general pattern, and which vary cross-culturally. In each of the 20 situations, Thais and Americans differed in their perception of at least one contextual variable, most on Obligation, least on Likelihood.

By way of summary, Figure 1 presents the two language groups' differential assessments.

	Obligation	Face-loss	Distance	Dominance	Severity	Likelihood
Borrowed Book		★	★		★	★
Messed-up Bag	★	★	★			★
Poor Teacher	★	★			★	
Private Mess. H-L	★		★		★	
Wrong Order	★				★	★
Smuggled Buddha		★		★	★	
Ruined Magazine	★		★	★		
Cheating Student			★		★	
Private Mess. L-H	★		★			
Business Mess. L-H	★			★		
Business Mess. H-L	★		★			
Food on Customer	★	★				
Food on Waiter	★	★				
Customs Form		★		★		
Contradiction			★	★		
Damaged Car	★					
Order Change	★					
Failed Student	★					
Ungraded Paper		★				
Broken Statue				★		

Figure 1: Differences in American and Thai assessments of contextual factors.

### The Dialog Construction Study

The DC data were coded into the following major categories:

IFID – Illocutionary Force Indicating Device, specifying the force of apology (I'm sorry, I'm afraid)

Upgrader – Element increasing apologetic force (I'm terribly sorry, I really didn't mean to hurt you)

Taking on Responsibility – speaker admitting the offense, including self-blame (How stupid of me), lack of intent (I didn't mean to do this), and admission of fact (I haven't graded it yet)

Downgrading Responsibility or Severity of offense – (a) utterance reducing speaker's accountability for the offense, including excuse (My watch had stopped), justification (I was suddenly called to a meeting), claiming

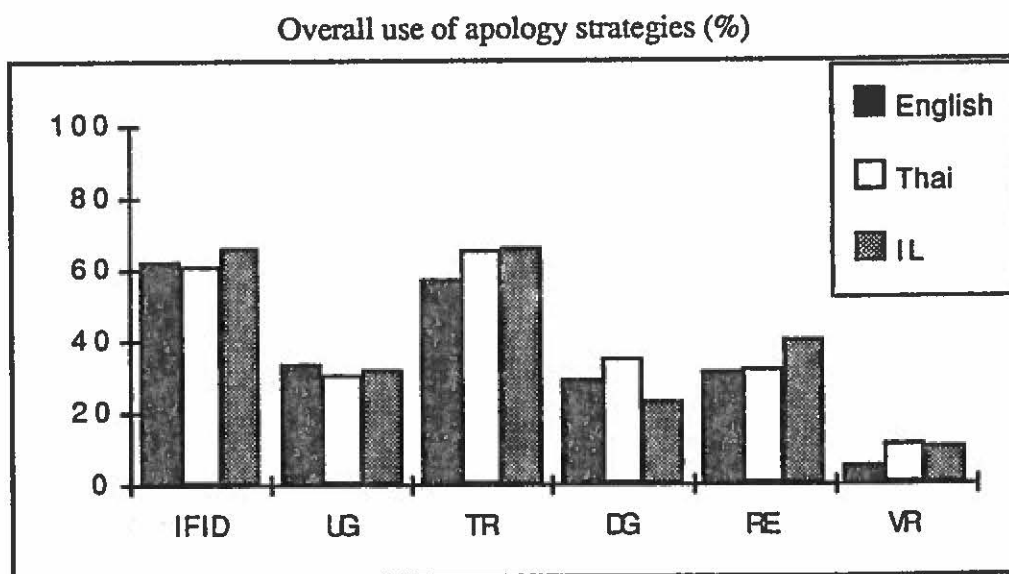
ignorance (I didn't know you were expecting me), problematizing a precondition (we weren't supposed to meet before 12), or denial (I didn't do it); (b) utterance reducing severity of offense (I'm only 10 minutes late)

Offer of Repair – speaker offering to remedy damage inflicted on offended party by an action to reconstitute H's entitlements (I'll pay for the damage, I'll have it marked tomorrow)

Verbal Redress – speaker showing concern for offended party (I hope you weren't offended), efforts to appease (let me buy you a drink) or promise of forbearance (it won't happen again)

Interrater reliability was established through consensus coding by three raters (Thai and English NS data) and two raters (Thai-English interlanguage data).

The distribution of apology strategies across offense contexts and language groups is included in Appendix 4. The overall strategy distribution by language groups is displayed in Figure 2.



*Figure 2:* Overall use of apology strategies (%) by NS of English (English, N = 30), NS of Thai (Thai, N = 136), and Thai NNS of English (IL, N = 288). IFID = Illocutionary Force Indicating Device, UG = Upgrader, TR = Taking on Responsibility, DG = Downgrading, RE = Offer of Repair, VR = Verbal Redress.

Consistent with previous studies, IFID and Taking on Responsibility were used in more than half of the possible cases. Upgrading apologetic force, Downgrading responsibility or severity of offense and offer of Repair were supplied in one third of all contexts, and Verbal Redress was expressed on about every tenth occasion or less. In the following, we shall examine the contextual distribution of strategies by comparing strategy use in each context between pairs of language groups (NS English – NS Thai, NS English – IL users, NS Thai – IL users).

**IFID.** Overall, correlational analysis revealed no effects from the contextual factors on the selection of IFIDs, the exception being Obligation, which was found to covary with the use of IFIDs by the IL group ( $r = .6588$ ,  $p < .002$ ).

In 16 out of the 20 situations, the three language groups agreed in their frequency of IFID suppliance. All groups used few IFIDs (between 14 and 50%) in low Severity contexts such as Order Change and Customs Form as well as in high Severity situations such as Cheating Student and Smuggled Buddha. Thus the Thais matched their medium rating of Smuggled Buddha on Obligation by providing few apologetic formulae. Conversely, IFIDs were supplied with high frequency (80–96%) in response to high Severity offenses such as Broken Statue and Food on Customer, which received identical IFID frequencies as the medium Severity offense Food on Waiter. The inverse relationship, for some offenses, between Severity and IFID was especially pronounced in the English data: In the lowest Severity context, Borrowed Book, 83% IFIDs were supplied, as was in the medium Severity contexts Ungraded Paper and Wrong Order (86%), while the high Severity item Damaged Car only elicited 47% IFIDs. Contradiction and Poor Teacher were assigned to different Severity categories (medium and high) in the American Assessments, yet no significant difference obtained in the frequencies of IFIDs in these contexts. These two items were both assessed as medium offenses by the Thai raters, which is reflected in the frequencies of IFIDs provided by Thai NS and IL users. All three language groups used the same frequencies of IFIDs in response to the Messages offenses (60–81%). The difference in Severity between Private and Business messages was not matched by IFID suppliance.

The theoretically interesting point emerging from the highly variable use of IFIDs is its intricate relationship with Severity of offense. By responding to low Severity offenses with an explicit apologetic formula, the offender symbolically emphasizes her eagerness to repair whatever minor norm infringement has occurred. Not using IFIDs to remedy high Severity offenses may have either of two functions: an offender may avoid admitting responsibility for the offense committed, which would be concomitant with an explicit apology. Conversely, where the offender is prepared to assume responsibility, an all-purpose apologetic formula, which is also used for ritualistic apology, might not be felt to adequately convey a substantive apology for a major offense. An expression of apology which is propositionally related to the specific offense might be more apt to convey the sincerity of the speaker's regret.

**Upgrading the Apology.** Upgrading of apology correlated highly with Obligation ( $r = .7628$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and Face-loss ( $r = .7248$ ,  $p < .000$ ) in the English data, and with Obligation in the Thai-English IL data ( $r = .6887$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Except for Obligation and IFID, which covaried in the IL data, Upgrading was the only strategy which correlated with context-internal factors. This is remarkable since it reveals that for the English NS, Obligation to apologize and Face-loss have their behavioral correlates not in the use of apologetic formulae, nor in expressing responsibility, but in the intensification of either or both of these strategies. This makes good sense, considering the routinized nature of apologetic formulae: in order for them to count as sincere apology, they warrant Upgrading, which serves to emphasize their substantive nature. The IL users, while sharing with the English NS the preference to express Obligation through Upgrading, also increased their use of IFIDs with greater Obligation. If this can be taken to indicate that the NNS regard IFIDs just as apt a means to express Obligation as Upgraders, it might reveal a tendency for the NNS to underdifferentiate the apologetic function of IFIDs, compared to English NS use.

In all three groups, Upgrading correlated highly with IFID (English:  $r = .6906$ ,  $p < .001$ , Thai:  $r = .7636$ ,  $p < .000$ , IL:  $r = .8014$ ,  $p < .000$ ). To the extent Upgrading was used to intensify an IFID, it could be claimed that the covariance expresses the relationship between an independent (IFID) and a



dependent variable (Upgrader). Yet it must be remembered that Upgrading was coded when it operated on other apology strategies as well, for instance on Lack of Intent as a subcategory of Responsibility (e.g. I really didn't mean to hurt you). However no covariance could be established between Upgrading and any other apology strategy.

Least Upgrading (0–20%) was afforded across language groups to the low Obligation and low Face-loss context Order Change, the medium Obligation offenses Customs Form, Contradiction, and Smuggled Buddha, and to Poor Teacher, which had been rated high on Obligation by the American and medium by the Thai informants. Consistent Upgrading was furthermore provided in Business Message Low-High. In half of the offense contexts, Upgrading was supplied differentially by the three groups. In four situations, the Thai NS provided fewer Upgrading than the English NS, which is reflective of their lower ratings of these offenses for Obligation (Failed Student and the restaurant situations Wrong Order, Food on Waiter and Food on Customer). The reverse—the Thais providing more Upgrading than the English NS—was true in Messed-up Bag, where the English informants did not upgrade at all, and Ungraded Paper. The IL users closely approximated target norms in all but one context (Messed-up Bag).

**Taking on Responsibility.** Taking on Responsibility was the only apology strategy that covaried with a context-external factor, viz. Distance, in all three groups (English:  $r = -.6514$ ,  $p < .001$ , Thai  $r = -.6418$ ,  $p < .001$ , IL:  $r = -.7165$ ,  $p < .000$ ). English and Thai NS and Thai-English NNS thus agreed in expressing the more responsibility for the offensive act, the closer they were to the offended person; conversely, the more distant the relationship to the offended party, the less they were likely to admit accountability.

Consistent with the ratings for Distance, in Damaged Car and Ruined Magazine, involving two friends, all groups of informants expressed Responsibility in 89–98% of the possible cases. In the four Message offenses, taking place between co-workers, offenders assumed Responsibility with a frequency of 66–93%. The Thai NS and IL users afforded the same amount of Responsibility in the four Message contexts, irrespective of status relationship (senior to junior or vice versa) or Severity of offense (private versus business

message). The Thai NS consistently provided very high Responsibility frequencies (91–93%), the IL users supplying less (76–84%). Curiously, the English NS expressed more Responsibility for failing to pass on a private message than for a business message. Two of the student-professor contexts also registered high for Responsibility, Borrowed Book and Failed Student. These items clearly illustrate that Severity of offense is not operative in determining whether or not an offender explicitly assumes Responsibility: Borrowed Book, which ranged lowest on Severity in the American ratings, elicited the highest amount of Responsibility (I forgot to take it along); Failed Student, one of the highest Severity offenses, was afforded almost as much Responsibility. High Distance relationships such as all waiter-customer interactions registered low on Responsibility (3–47%). The failure of Severity to predict whether or not offenders take on Responsibility was also manifest at the lower end of the Responsibility scale: The lowest frequencies of Responsibility were observed in the lowest Severity contexts Order Change as well as in the high Severity context Smuggled Buddha. However, the Thais' reluctance to assume Responsibility for the Smuggled Buddha reflected its medium rating on Obligation. In seven contexts, more Thai NS than English NS assumed Responsibility, but only in two of these situations (Food on Customer and Broken Statue) did the IL users follow their native pattern.

**Downgrading Responsibility or Severity.** All three groups used considerably fewer strategies to downgrade responsibility for the offense than to explicitly assume responsibility. The high Severity offense Smuggled Buddha was downgraded by far the most frequently by all groups. This supports further our earlier speculation about the Thai informants' low rating of Smuggled Buddha on Obligation to apologize. Cheating Student, another high Severity offense, was heavily downgraded by the Thai informants, whereas the English NS downgraded this offense in less than half of the possible cases. Contexts in which high Responsibility corresponded to low Downgrading were Damaged Car, Ruined Magazine, Borrowed Book, Failed Student, and Customs Form. Moreover, informants downgraded responsibility less in some contexts with high occurrence of IFIDs (Food on Customer, Wrong Order, Food on Waiter, Broken Statue). Yet some offenses, notably the undelivered Messages, were redressed both by highly frequent use of

Responsibility and fairly frequent Downgrading strategies (all groups between 25 and 52%).

With only 6 out of 20 situations in which the three language groups did not differ in downgrading responsibility, this category displayed the most intergroup variability. In most of these contexts, the Thai NS downgraded more than either or both English NS and IL users. The IL users downgraded responsibility more than did the English NS in three of the restaurant situations and in the two teachers' meetings.

**Offer of Repair.** In the American data, Repair correlated negatively with Downgrading ( $r = -.6824$ ,  $p < .001$ ): offenders will be less prone to offer Repair the more they downgrade the offense. The same logic did not obtain for the Thai data. Nevertheless, for more than half of the offense contexts, English NS, Thai NS and IL users agreed on whether or not they offered Repair.

Least Repair (0–10%) was offered in compensation for verbal or verbally conveyed offenses (Contradiction and Poor Teacher, the Private Message contexts, Order Change). Offenses which elicited Repair offers in more than half of the possible cases were those in which material compensation could be provided (Broken Statue, Ruined Magazine, Damaged Car, Food on Customer) or a neglected obligation honored (Ungraded Paper, Borrowed Book, Wrong Order, Failed Student). The language groups offered Repair differentially in three of the Message situations. Very few Repair offers were made by the Thai NS in all of the Message contexts, whereas the English NS and IL users offered Repair more frequently to compensate for the undelivered Business Messages. The IL users provided more Repair than the English NS in one type of high-Distance context, viz. customs official – traveller (Messed-up Bag, Customs Form, Smuggled Buddha).

**Verbal Redress.** This strategy ranged lowest in frequency across language groups and offense contexts. By far the most frequently chosen subcategory of Verbal Redress was Concern for Hearer. Groups agreed in affording very little Verbal Redress in the four custom official-traveller contexts, three of the waiter-customer contexts and of the student-professor interactions, and in all Message contexts (0–19%). Only one offense, Contradiction, elicited more than 20% Verbal Redress from all groups, which is

consistent with previous findings for a comparable offense in English and German (House 1988:310) and Hebrew (Olshtain 1989:161). In three contexts, only one of the groups supplied over 20% Verbal Redress: the Thai NS in Failed Student, and the IL users in Poor Teacher and Food on Waiter. In 11 contexts, either or both Thai NS and IL users provided more Verbal Redress than the English NS. Expressing concern for the offended party was thus a more common strategy for the Thais, irrespective of the language they used.

Figure 3 summarizes the contexts in which the IL users differed from the English NS in their use of apology strategies. No differences were obtained for Ruined Magazine, Private Message High-Low, and Failed Student.

	UG	TR	IFID	RE	VR	DG
Messed-up Bag	☆		☆	★		☆
Business Mess. L-H				★	☆	★
Cheating Student			★		☆	☆
Ungraded Paper			☆	☆		
Broken Statue		☆			☆	
Borrowed Book			★			☆
Food on Customer		☆				★
Food on Waiter					☆	★
Order Change					☆	★
Poor Teacher					★	★
Private Mess. L-H				☆		
Customs Form				★		
Smuggled Buddha				★		
Wrong Order					★	
Business Mess. H-L					☆	
Damaged Car						☆
Contradiction						★

*Figure 3:* Differences in apology strategies used between NS of English and Thai-English IL users.

IFID = Illocutionary Force Indicating Device, UG = Upgrader, TR = Taking on Responsibility, DG = Downgrading, RE = Offer of Repair, VR = Verbal Redress.

★ = IL users differ from English NS at  $p < 0.05$ ;

☆ = English NS differ from Thai NS at  $p < 0.05$ ;

no difference between Thai NS and IL users at  $p < 0.05$ .

Of the six apology strategies, learners and English NS differed least in Upgrading apologetic force and in the canonical strategies IFID and Taking on

Responsibility, whereas they differed most in the context-dependent strategies Repair, Verbal Redress, and Downgrading responsibility or severity of offense.

If we apply Selinker's (1969) operational definition for determining effects of language transfer to these data, the white stars indicate effects of pragmatic transfer in the Thai-English IL users' apology performance. 55% of the differences in the use of apology strategies can thus be attributed to pragmatic transfer. We are not at all convinced that this is an appropriate way to determine pragmatic transfer; however since we are not aware of a comparably rigorous method which might be more in accordance with current thinking on cross-linguistic influence, we shall accept this procedure, and the obtained results, until further notice.

To summarize our findings on the contextual distribution of apology strategies across the three languages:

1. Contextual factors operated differentially in the strategy selection. While Obligation had been found to determine the choice of IFID by NS of German and British English (House 1988), in the present study it was only the IL users who made their choice of IFID contingent on perceived Obligation to apologize.
2. The strategy most sensitive to contextual factors was Upgrading: the more Obligation and Face-loss involved in an offense, the more Upgrading of apology would be provided. Previous studies had shown NS of Hebrew to increase apologetic force in direct proportion to Severity of offense and in indirect proportion to the offender's status vis-à-vis the offended party (Olshtain 1989); the latter finding was also obtained for NS of British English and German (House 1988). These concurring results provide consistent evidence for the underspecification of IFID as an apology strategy: since routine formulae are used both in ritual and substantive function, sincere expression of regret warrants specific marking through intensification (House 1988, Vollmer & Olshtain 1989).
3. Informants were more prone to explicitly express Responsibility for the offense the closer the relationship between the offender and the offended



person. So far this finding is unique to the present study; however it makes good sense in conjunction with the influence of contextual factors on Upgrading.

4. No effect of contextual factors was found on Downgrading Responsibility, Repair, and Verbal Redress. All three of these context-dependent strategies tended to be used more frequently by the IL users than by the English NS.
5. The Thai-English IL users differed least from the English NS in their suppliance of Upgrading and the canonical strategies IFID and taking on Responsibility. Most differences occurred in the context-dependent strategies.
6. More than half of the differences in apology suppliance can tentatively be attributed to pragmatic transfer from Thai apology patterns.

Numerous questions remain. By examining Thai learners' contextual perceptions and choices of apology strategies, we have shed light on their sociopragmatic knowledge of apology. We have not analyzed their actual wordings of apology strategies, i.e. their pragmalinguistic knowledge of apologizing in English. This will require another study. How can we account for the relative over-suppliance of context-dependent strategies by the Thai learners? Our finding is consistent with House' (1988) observation that NNS tend to do 'too much of a good thing', a phenomenon she labelled 'gushing', or, less benevolently, 'waffling' (Edmondson & House 1991). Waffling had been reported to characterize request realization by learners of different native and target languages (e.g. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986, Kasper 1989). House (1988) was the first to draw our attention to a similar phenomenon in NNS apologizing, demonstrating that German learners of English provided more apology upgrading and expressions of responsibility than NS of British English. Importantly, Edmondson and House (1991) point out that all the studies in which waffling is evident are written DCTs, and remind us that waffling was not present in the interactional, negotiated discourse elicited by open-ended role plays (Kasper 1981). Therefore, waffling may well be an instrument effect of DCT—both of the Discourse Completion and Dialog Construction variety. But Edmondson and House go further in their account of waffling. In both role



play data (Kasper 1981, Edmondson, House, Kasper, & Stemmer 1984) and DCT data (House 1988, 1989), German learners of English were consistently shown to use fewer conventionalized requestive and apologetic forms than British NS. At the same time, waffling was extant in the DCT though not in the role-play data. In order to reconcile these seemingly contradictory findings, Edmondson and House refer to the differential cognitive demands of discourse production in face-to-face interaction (role-play) and written questionnaires. They argue that paucity of adequate requestive and apologetic routines characterizes learners' speech act realization in both production tasks because such routines, though available in IL, are not 'integrated into learners' discourse production systems' (285). Yet when learners' planning and execution of linguistic action does not operate under the pressures of conversational turn-taking, they will compensate for the lack of pragmatic routines by over-supplying non-conventionalized speech act realization strategies.

Our study provides partial support for Edmondson and House' hypothesis. The Thai learners did indeed waffle, but they did NOT do so in compensation for lacking apology routines. Rather, our findings suggest that DCT, in whatever version, provides learners with an opportunity for knowledge display which is precluded for many NNS by the cognitive demands of face-to-face interaction. Comparison of learners' pragmatic performance in interactive discourse and DCT may thus throw light on the state of learners' discourse production systems, or the extent to which available pragmatic knowledge is readily accessible in conversation.

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## APPENDIX 1

Sample item from Assessment questionnaire

At a friend's home

John and Paul are good friends. John borrowed Paul's car for the weekend. Unfortunately, when he was backing up to park, he didn't see a lamppost. He hit it and damaged the rear of the car badly. He is now returning the car to Paul.

1. How close are John and Paul in this situation?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
 very close very distant

2. What is the status relationship between John and Paul?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
 John higher John = John lower  
 than Paul Paul than Paul

3. How serious is John's offense?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
 not serious at all very serious

4. Does John need to apologize?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
 not at all absolutely

5. How likely is Paul to accept John's apology?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
 very likely very unlikely

6. Does John gain or lose face in this situation?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5  
 gains face loses face

## APPENDIX 2

Sample item from Discourse Completion questionnaire

At a friend's home

John and Paul are good friends. John borrowed Paul's car for the weekend. Unfortunately, when he was backing up to park, he didn't see a lamppost. He hit it and damaged the rear of the car badly. He is now returning the car to Paul.

Paul: Is everything okay?

John: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Paul: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 3

Mean ratings ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviations of contextual factors by American ( $n = 30$ ) and Thai informants ( $n = 30$ ).

Item	Severity		Obligation		Likelihood		Face-loss		Distance		Dominance	
	Am	Th	Am	Th	Am	Th	Am	Th	Am	Th	Am	Th
1 $\bar{x}$	4.10	3.70	4.90*	4.30*	3.60	3.60	4.30	4.30	1.50	1.40	2.80	2.70
SD	0.99	0.97	0.30	0.95	1.08	1.02	0.83	0.80	0.62	0.66	0.56	0.85
2 $\bar{x}$	2.60	2.50	4.70*	3.50*	4.50	4.40	3.50	3.90	1.80*	2.80*	3.00*	4.00*
SD	1.05	0.89	0.47	0.97	0.88	0.67	1.15	0.80	0.90	0.30	0.55	1.17
3 $\bar{x}$	2.90	3.40	3.10	3.00	3.30	3.00	2.60	2.60	2.80*	3.90*	2.90*	2.20*
SD	1.12	0.89	1.31	1.25	0.82	0.96	0.96	1.07	0.95	0.86	0.36	1.31
4 $\bar{x}$	4.50*	3.60*	4.20*	3.10*	2.70	2.90	3.70*	2.60*	3.10	3.50	3.10	3.10
SD	0.56	1.05	0.87	1.15	0.99	1.19	1.06	1.14	1.24	1.33	0.63	0.50
5 $\bar{x}$	3.60	3.20	4.50	3.90	3.80	4.00	4.00	3.80	3.10*	3.60*	1.70	1.40
SD	0.96	1.02	0.56	1.00	0.76	0.87	1.02	0.86	0.69	0.76	0.94	1.05
6 $\bar{x}$	3.50*	2.90*	4.30*	3.50*	3.90	4.20	3.60	3.70	3.20*	3.70*	4.40	4.60
SD	1.02	1.03	0.97	0.92	0.96	0.82	0.87	0.83	0.73	0.86	0.91	0.84
7 $\bar{x}$	4.60	4.50	4.90*	4.50*	3.00	3.40	4.50	4.10	3.10	2.90	1.30*	1.90*
SD	0.48	0.72	0.30	0.62	1.06	1.05	0.76	0.88	0.75	0.87	0.54	0.98
8 $\bar{x}$	4.40	4.10	4.90*	4.10*	3.60	3.70	3.90	4.10	3.00*	3.70*	4.40	4.50
SD	0.80	0.76	0.40	0.76	0.99	0.85	0.94	0.91	0.91	0.94	0.88	0.96
9 $\bar{x}$	2.10	1.80	3.40*	2.30*	4.10	4.10	2.90	3.00	4.50	4.60	4.20	3.90
SD	1.14	1.05	1.26	0.96	1.09	1.15	1.20	0.41	0.76	0.72	1.01	1.37
10 $\bar{x}$	4.60	4.30	5.00*	4.60*	2.90	3.10	4.80*	4.40*	4.70	4.60	1.60	1.50
SD	0.56	0.59	0.18	0.71	1.06	1.12	0.40	0.80	0.87	0.60	1.14	0.81
11 $\bar{x}$	3.30*	2.60*	4.80*	4.00*	2.90*	4.00*	4.20	3.80	4.40	4.60	1.70	2.00
SD	0.89	1.05	0.42	1.03	1.45	0.94	0.84	0.79	0.84	0.66	0.88	0.87
12 $\bar{x}$	3.50	3.00	4.80*	4.10*	4.00	4.00	4.50*	3.80*	4.50	4.60	4.00	3.60
SD	1.28	1.05	0.50	0.75	1.13	0.98	0.88	0.82	0.96	0.72	1.28	1.17
13 $\bar{x}$	3.20	3.40	3.50*	4.10*	3.10*	3.70*	2.50*	3.80*	4.80*	4.30*	3.50	2.90
SD	1.19	1.09	1.09	0.73	1.11	0.91	1.23	0.82	0.54	0.83	1.41	0.50
14 $\bar{x}$	3.60*	4.70	3.40	3.50	2.30	2.50	3.80*	4.60*	3.90	4.40	2.30*	3.30*
SD	1.30	0.65	1.43	1.63	1.23	1.26	1.39	0.66	1.36	0.80	1.42	0.94
15 $\bar{x}$	4.60	4.50	4.90	4.70	2.20	2.70	4.30	4.70	4.80	4.60	3.40*	2.30*
SD	0.55	0.85	0.25	0.59	1.08	1.30	0.86	0.59	0.56	0.80	1.52	0.94
16 $\bar{x}$	2.90	2.80	3.30	3.10	3.10	3.50	3.60*	4.10*	4.60	4.20	2.00*	2.90*
SD	1.33	1.24	1.24	1.16	1.14	1.12	0.95	0.81	0.72	0.83	1.10	0.44
17 $\bar{x}$	2.80	3.20	3.70	3.20	4.10	4.40	3.30*	3.90*	3.20	2.90	4.60	4.40
SD	1.10	1.07	1.21	1.26	0.81	1.03	0.97	0.77	0.78	1.00	0.76	0.99
18 $\bar{x}$	1.00*	3.10*	3.80	4.10	4.50*	4.00*	3.20*	4.10*	3.10*	2.50*	1.90	1.60
SD	0.91	1.20	0.86	0.93	0.56	0.91	1.12	0.60	0.75	1.12	1.11	0.87
19 $\bar{x}$	4.70	4.50	4.90*	4.40*	3.60	3.50	4.60	4.50	3.10	2.80	4.30	4.40
SD	0.53	0.96	0.25	0.72	0.98	1.20	0.84	0.67	0.79	1.01	1.04	0.84
20 $\bar{x}$	4.80*	4.50*	4.60	4.60	2.20	2.40	4.70	4.70	3.50*	2.90*	1.40	1.60
SD	0.37	0.67	0.80	0.61	0.99	1.02	0.53	0.57	0.85	1.09	0.92	0.80

Item numbers in the leftmost column refer to the following offense contexts: 1 = Damaged car, 2 = Ruined magazine, 3 = Contradiction, 4 = Poor teacher, 5 = Private message low-high, 6 = Private message high-low, 7 = Business message low-high, 8 = Business message high-low, 9 = Order change, 10 = Food on customer, 11 = Wrong order, 12 = Food on waiter, 13 = Messed-up bag, 14 = Smuggled Buddha, 15 = Broken statue, 16 = Customs form, 17 = Ungraded paper, 18 = Borrowed book, 19 = Failed student, 20 = Cheating student. \* =  $p < 0.05$ .

## APPENDIX 4

Use of apology strategies (%) by NS of English (EN, n = 30), NS of Thai (TN, n = 136), and Thai NNS of English (IL, n = 288).

Item		IFID			UG			TR			DG			RE			VR		
		EN	TN	IL	EN	TN	IL	EN	TN	IL	EN	TN	IL	EN	TN	IL	EN	TN	IL
1	n	14	82	185	11	35	83	27	117	262	1	29	44	20	94	217	2	18	31
	%	47	60	64	37	27	29	90	89	91	3 <sup>ab</sup>	22 <sup>a</sup>	15 <sup>b</sup>	67	72	75	7	14	11
2	n	20	85	211	8	21	66	27	117	276	1	28	7	18	88	196	1	12	13
	%	67	66	75	27	16	23	90	91	98	3 <sup>a</sup>	22 <sup>ac</sup>	2 <sup>c</sup>	60	68	70	3	9	5
3	n	18	79	185	4	17	41	11	94	139	13	72	49	0	10	16	7	41	74
	%	60	59	65	14	13	14	37 <sup>a</sup>	71 <sup>a</sup>	49	43 <sup>b</sup>	54 <sup>c</sup>	17 <sup>bc</sup>	0 <sup>ab</sup>	8 <sup>a</sup>	6 <sup>b</sup>	23	31	26
4	n	20	79	180	5	22	49	19	81	136	15	62	66	1	9	11	2	20	58
	%	67	63	64	17	18	18	63	65	49	50 <sup>b</sup>	50 <sup>c</sup>	24 <sup>bc</sup>	3	7	4	8 <sup>b</sup>	16	21 <sup>b</sup>
5	n	23	104	219	14	73	99	27	121	217	12	63	86	1	7	14	4	15	50
	%	77	78	77	47	55 <sup>c</sup>	35 <sup>c</sup>	90	91	76	40	47	30	3	5	5	13	11	18
6	n	19	98	217	10	63	102	24	125	236	13	70	85	0	11	13	2	14	53
	%	63	73	76	33	47	36	80	93	81	43	52 <sup>c</sup>	30 <sup>c</sup>	0 <sup>ab</sup>	8 <sup>a</sup>	5 <sup>b</sup>	7 <sup>b</sup>	10	19 <sup>b</sup>
7	n	22	107	219	16	73	153	19	122	238	12	42	68	10	3	37	1	18	38
	%	76	81	77	55	55	54	66 <sup>a</sup>	92 <sup>a</sup>	84	41 <sup>b</sup>	32	24 <sup>b</sup>	35 <sup>ab</sup>	2 <sup>ac</sup>	13 <sup>bc</sup>	5 <sup>ab</sup>	14 <sup>a</sup>	13 <sup>b</sup>
8	n	18	92	225	16	58	117	22	121	238	8	44	68	8	9	51	1	22	34
	%	60	70	78	53	44	41	73	92	81	27	34	26	27 <sup>a</sup>	7 <sup>ac</sup>	18 <sup>c</sup>	3 <sup>ab</sup>	17 <sup>a</sup>	12 <sup>b</sup>
9	n	8	31	41	2	4	4	1	21	25	12	9	0	1	14	3	3	2	3
	%	27	23	14	7	3	1	3 <sup>a</sup>	16 <sup>a</sup>	9	40 <sup>ab</sup>	7 <sup>ac</sup>	0 <sup>bc</sup>	3	10 <sup>c</sup>	1 <sup>c</sup>	11 <sup>ab</sup>	2	1 <sup>b</sup>
10	n	28	115	273	23	64	206	2	62	108	3	22	7	25	84	188	1	10	10
	%	93	87	96	77 <sup>a</sup>	48 <sup>ac</sup>	73 <sup>c</sup>	7 <sup>ab</sup>	47 <sup>a</sup>	38 <sup>b</sup>	10 <sup>b</sup>	16 <sup>c</sup>	2 <sup>bc</sup>	83	63	66	2	8	4
11	n	24	85	236	13	26	84	9	41	78	4	24	31	19	79	230	0	1	16
	%	80	64	84	43 <sup>a</sup>	20 <sup>a</sup>	30	30	30	28	13	18	11	63	60	82	1 <sup>b</sup>	1	6 <sup>b</sup>
12	n	28	115	263	22	57	177	6	57	99	9	28	36	10	50	124	1	23	82
	%	93	87	92	73 <sup>a</sup>	43 <sup>a</sup>	63	20 <sup>a</sup>	43 <sup>a</sup>	35	30 <sup>b</sup>	21	13 <sup>b</sup>	33	38	44	4 <sup>ab</sup>	17 <sup>a</sup>	29 <sup>b</sup>
13	n	10	76	186	0	41	75	14	66	133	4	42	79	1	12	54	0	5	10
	%	33 <sup>a</sup>	60 <sup>ac</sup>	65 <sup>c</sup>	0 <sup>ab</sup>	32 <sup>a</sup>	26 <sup>b</sup>	47	52	47	13 <sup>ab</sup>	33 <sup>a</sup>	28 <sup>b</sup>	3 <sup>b</sup>	9	19 <sup>b</sup>	0	4	4
14	n	11	39	105	7	21	44	3	32	28	22	105	260	4	21	146	0	4	3
	%	39	30	37	25	16	15	11 <sup>a</sup>	25 <sup>ac</sup>	10 <sup>c</sup>	79	80	91	14 <sup>b</sup>	16 <sup>c</sup>	51 <sup>bc</sup>	0	3	1
15	n	23	108	236	11	61	177	7	91	140	2	15	13	13	75	181	0	8	12
	%	79	82	83	38	46	62	24 <sup>ab</sup>	69 <sup>a</sup>	49 <sup>b</sup>	7	11	5	45	57	64	1 <sup>ab</sup>	6 <sup>a</sup>	4 <sup>b</sup>
16	n	7	49	108	5	24	60	26	106	231	7	28	48	2	23	123	0	0	5
	%	24	37	38	17	18	21	87	80	81	24	21	17	7 <sup>ab</sup>	17 <sup>ac</sup>	44 <sup>bc</sup>	0	0	1
17	n	25	75	152	4	60	71	28	94	212	14	106	114	12	84	216	0	7	7
	%	83 <sup>ab</sup>	57 <sup>a</sup>	53 <sup>b</sup>	13 <sup>a</sup>	46 <sup>ac</sup>	25 <sup>c</sup>	93	71	74	47 <sup>a</sup>	80 <sup>ac</sup>	40 <sup>c</sup>	40 <sup>ab</sup>	64 <sup>a</sup>	76 <sup>b</sup>	1 <sup>a</sup>	5 <sup>a</sup>	2
18	n	25	93	166	10	50	64	29	124	212	2	40	114	17	78	216	1	18	7
	%	83 <sup>b</sup>	70	59 <sup>b</sup>	33	38	23	97	93	81	7 <sup>ab</sup>	30 <sup>a</sup>	11 <sup>b</sup>	57	59	65	3 <sup>a</sup>	14 <sup>ac</sup>	6 <sup>c</sup>
19	n	19	98	221	13	29	83	27	120	246	2	36	7	21	85	197	2	32	36
	%	63	73	78	43 <sup>a</sup>	22 <sup>a</sup>	29	90	89	86	7 <sup>a</sup>	27 <sup>ac</sup>	2 <sup>a</sup>	70	63	69	7 <sup>a</sup>	24 <sup>a</sup>	13
20	n	7	39	135	4	17	52	10	59	122	14	92	201	3	22	45	0	6	21
	%	24 <sup>b</sup>	31 <sup>c</sup>	48 <sup>bc</sup>	14	13	18	35	46	43	48 <sup>ab</sup>	72 <sup>a</sup>	71 <sup>b</sup>	10	17	16	1 <sup>ab</sup>	5 <sup>a</sup>	7 <sup>b</sup>

The leftmost column specifies offense contexts, cf. Appendix 3.

IFID = Illocutionary Force Indicating Device, UG = Upgrader, TR = Taking on Responsibility, DG = Downgrading, RE = Offer of Repair, VR = Verbal Redress.

a = EN and TN different at  $p < 0.05$ .b = EN and IL different at  $p < 0.05$ .c = TN and IL different at  $p < 0.05$ .