Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies

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CHAPTER 7

Problems in the Comparison of Speech Acts Across Cultures*

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INTRODUCTION

The cross-cultural comparison of speech behavior has always attracted considerable interest. In the past decade applied linguists, increasingly aware of its implications for language teaching and learning, have become particularly interested in this field of study. Making use of terminology from the anthropological, the sociological, and the philosophical literature, researchers adopted the term *speech act* as a minimal unit of discourse upon which to focus their investigations. A working assumption has been that such named speech acts as apologies or requests are translatable from language to language and that what was needed was to discover the set of linguistic realizations which performed the same specific function in each language.

A recent effort to collect and analyze cross-cultural speech act data has been undertaken by an international group of researchers. This group, called the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), has been studying requests (directives) and apologies across cultures through the use of an elicitation instrument in the form of a written questionnaire.

Using our experience as members of the CCSARP project, we will attempt to set forth some of the most noticeable characteristics of the findings from the CCSARP questionnaire as compared with results from our own and others' ethnographic work. We will also point out some of the major pitfalls we have encountered in the use of a questionnaire for large scale data collection.

Within the range of named speech acts which are potential objects of sociolinguistic study, the choice of apologies and directives are particularly good ones in that they have already attracted considerable attention, perhaps because of the insights they can provide into social values and relationships. Both directives and apologies, as speech acts, have been examined as means of maintaining the social order and as indicators of distance and dominance in relationships. They have also been used to reveal the role that pragmatic competence plays in speaking a language. For the purposes of the discussion, in this paper we will focus our attention specifically on apologies.

An extensive discussion of apologies has been carried out by scholars in the field of sociology, most notably Erving Goffman. In Goffman's work, which uses ritual and drama as a metaphor for social life and language, apologies and other *remedial interchanges* between speakers are considered part of an actor's *preservation of face* or as part of the system of social sanctions and rewards that encourage appropriate behavior. Remedial interchanges serve, according to Goffman, to prevent the worst possible interpretation of events from being made. In the case of apologies, they are an acceptance that social norms have been broken, an acceptance of responsibility by the speaker, and an implicit self-judgement against the speaker. Within Goffman's judicial metaphor, an apology is one of the exchanges in which speakers instantaneously make a charge, reach a verdict, and hand down a sentence against themselves, the "crime" being a failure to follow social norms.

Although Goffman's discussion of apologies as members of a set of interchanges that maintain the public order is a rigorous one, it is based more on introspection than observation. His insightful discussion of the function of apologies and other exchanges, such as *accounts*, as order-maintaining devices has contributed to the conceptual framework in which other, empirical, studies of apologies can be made. These empirical studies are the basis for cross-cultural investigations into both the formal aspects of apologies and the social conditions in which they are called for.

Empirical investigations of apologies have been carried out by numerous scholars in the past decade. Owen (1980) has examined the various frameworks of analysis put forth by Goffman (1971), by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), by the ethnomethodologists Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), and finally argues for a model inspired by the work of Brown and Levinson (1978). Basing their studies of apologies on the need to know native speaker norms in order to enhance efforts at second language proficiency, Cohen and Olshtain (1981), Olshtain (1983), and Olshtain and Cohen (1983) have carried out several studies

in which they examine the use of apologies by first- and second-language learners, working principally within the framework of speech act theory set forth by Searle. Their studies show, among other things, that the rules of speaking of a person's first language come into play in their use of a second language. Other empirical studies of speech acts, such as Blum-Kulka's (1982, 1983) work on directives, point out that the conventional use of certain forms in the realizations of speech acts will likely be language-specific, and will not be readily translatable across languages according to their *literal* meanings. Blum-Kulka cites the work of Green (1975) to show that speech acts are not necessarily carried out by reference to the same pragmatic preconditions in all languages. She gives the example of a reference to a future act of a hearer, which is conventionally interpreted in English as a request for action, and in Hebrew as a request for information. By pointing to the possibility of this cross-cultural pragmatic difference, Blum-Kulka reveals the possibility of problems of "effectiveness" in learning a second language.

The elicitation instrument used in CCSARP was translated into each language being studied. The instrument originally consisted of 16 items, eight of which were intended to elicit apologies, plus the following demographic information for each subject: age, sex, birthplace, mother tongue, and length of time in the language community of the questionnaire if it is not the mother tongue. Social distance and social dominance are the two independent variables used to establish the situation and participants for each item. Each item consists of a setting and a brief dialogue. The setting gives a brief introduction of the two participants and the social situation. Following the setting is a dialogue consisting of from two to eight turns in which one of the participant's response is either left blank or not totally completed. The subject is to read the item and write in what he or she thinks should be the response in that particular situation. The following two items intended to elicit apologies are taken from the elicitation device used by the CCSARP project.

1a. AT THE PROFESSOR'S OFFICE
The professor had promised to return the student's term paper that day.
Student: I was going to talk to you about my term paper, if it's all right.
Professor: _____
Student: Uhu. When do you think you'll have it marked then?

1b. AT THE PROFESSOR'S OFFICE
The student has borrowed a book from her professor, which she promised to return today. However, she realizes that she forgot to bring it along.
Professor: Miriam, I hope you brought the book.
Miriam: _____
Professor: Okay, but please remember it next time.

After collecting a corpus of questionnaire responses, investigators were to use a system of predetermined categories to encode the demographic information for

each respondent and the linguistic features used to express the apology. The coded data was then analyzed for possible social correlates with the linguistic features of the apologies. Furthermore, the coding scheme permits cross-cultural comparisons of the data collected in the different languages involved in the project.

Situations which elicit Apologies in American Culture

As participants in CCSARP, we tried to take the cross cultural question into account by undertaking an auxiliary study to the questionnaire used in the project. By means of participant observation we attempted to examine the actual conditions which elicited apologies in everyday interactions in American English, hoping to discover the range of apology-inducing circumstances. We expected that at least some of this information would be useful in follow-up studies comparing speech acts across cultures.

In general our investigation revealed that apologies were made as recognition of a speaker's own failure to meet an implicit or explicit obligation to another. These failures, intentional or not, ranged from the breaking of a piece of property to the breaking of a social contract. Relationships between status unequals such as students and teachers, between status equals such as co-workers or classmates, between people as socially distant as total strangers or as familiar as family members, are all based upon a largely uncodified set of obligations. Whether the obligation is to act or refrain from acting, or merely to carry out an act in an appropriate way, membership in a culture implies knowledge of what may be expected within a particular social relationship. At the same time, a certain amount of latitude exists in the negotiation of this social contract. Not all peer relationships are equally solidary, and not all unequal relationships are similarly distant. Direct observation of the way in which these obligations determine the need for apologies in each culture should be used as an aid in developing a framework for analysis.

While this more ethnographic approach toward data collection is likely to yield a richer set of variables to account for differences in sociolinguistic behavior, we recognize that no study can uncover them all. We also recognize that many of the important obligations have already been represented in the CCSARP questionnaire. For example, our preliminary findings show that the basic obligations covered by the project questionnaire did indeed operate in American society. Namely:

- The obligation to keep a social or work-related commitment or agreement. For example, one speaker says to a friend:

2. "I can't make it to your party. I'm sorry."
   or, an employee arriving an hour late for work, greets his boss with:

3. A: "Sorry"
   B. "Hi, Dave."

* The obligation to respect the property of others.
  For example, a woman walks into her friend's house, holding the door for the cat to go out, then, seeing her friend's expression, says:

4. A: "Isn't the cat allowed out?"
   B: "No, we keep him inside."
   A: "Oh, I'm sorry—I'm so used to letting our cat out, I didn't even think. Shall I try and get him back?

* The obligation not to cause damage or discomfort to others.
  For example, in a car:

5. A: (stopping suddenly while driving so that passengers lurch forward)
   "Shit. Sorry. Excuse me."

Although these three categories were very much in evidence in our observational data, there were a number of others, often more subtle and difficult to describe. If we are to come to a better understanding of how apologies work in American English, and to reach the point of being able to compare this speech act across cultures, we must make an attempt to understand some of these more elusive obligations.

A case in point is the obligation not to make others responsible for one's welfare. For example, after complaining about personal problems the day before, a woman said to a close friend:

6. "I'm sorry I was in such a bad mood yesterday. I shouldn't have bothered you with my troubles."

Apparently she felt that even a long-standing friendship did not entitle her to unlimited attention.

Speakers also shared an obligation not to appear to expect another person to be available at all times. Three examples of apologies given for disturbing another person will show that this obligation operates in a wide range of situations:

7. A woman customer walks into a place of business.
   A: "Hi, Sam, I hope this is a good time for you.
   B: "Well, actually, I'm supposed to be at a meeting upstairs this minute.
   A: "Oh. I'm sorry. I knew I should have called first.
8. A student walks into her professor's office.
   A: Nancy? I hate to bother you but I need your signature.

9. A woman making a telephone call to a friend, begins by saying:
   A: Nancy? Hi, this is Helen. I'm sorry to bother you but. . . ."

In addition to these, there also seems to be an obligation, not only to remember people we've met, but not to confuse strangers with acquaintances. For example, in an encounter at a university, the speaker, walking up to another person, says:

8. A: Did you get that stuff for Marie?"
   B: (No response)
   A: "Didn't you see Marie?"
   B: "What stuff?"
   A: "Oh, I'm sorry! You look so much like a student of mine!"

Clearly, there is the potential for offense in mistaken identities.

Still another of the more subtle obligations is that which may develop between peers to protect one another from sanctions from those in authority over them. For example, after being advised by a co-worker to perform a job in a certain way, a speaker was reprimanded by the owner of the plant. The speaker called his co-worker over to question his advice:

9. A: "Jim, come here. Tom was saying that we don't need to do the perf because this is going to be numbered anyway."
   B: "Yeah?"
   A: "Should we have thought of that?"
   B: "Maybe. I didn't think of that. Sorry."

It seems that the relationship between these workers called for them to protect one another from criticism.

These are some of the many categories calling for remedial behavior which have been observed in American society. Only further observation will reveal the complex network of responsibility and only study of a similar nature in other societies can provide a basis for meaningful comparison.

Apologies Across Cultures

It is important to recognize that most recent scholarly investigations of apologies have focused on the pragmatic and formal aspects of this speech act. All are based on the assumption that the notion of *apology* refers to the same social act in all of the cultures studied. Little attention has been paid so far to cross-cultural differences in the situations which elicit apologies in the first place. This difference lies at a deeper level still than the question of what pragmatic means a speaker uses to carry out the act.

Previous studies of apologies have all been based on an unspoken assumption

of the kinds of social offense that call for remediation. Yet 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. In examining data collected from speakers of different cultural backgrounds, we must keep in mind that situations which elicit apologies in one language could easily fail to do so in another. Just as different cultures divide the color spectrum into noncorresponding or overlapping terms, so the repertoire of speech acts for each culture is differently organized.

It is an empirical question as to whether a specific situation will elicit an apology, for example, in all speech communities. With respect to the questionnaire currently being used as a tool for investigating both apologies and requests, our observational data indicates that, for apologies, the situations elicit the expected responses for the most part. Of course, a more detailed analysis will yield some rather more subtle points.

An example of the difficulties encountered in attempting to elicit a specific speech act through the use of the "same" situation (discourse completion dialogue) translated into a variety of languages is shown by the dialogue labeled 1a. In this dialogue a professor is asked whether he has graded a student's paper; the most common American response was not a precoded ("routinalized") remedial expression such as "I'm sorry," but rather by what the CCSARP coding scheme encodes as explanation, such as, e.g., an utterance that contains reference to one of the prerequisites for the speech act of apology, "I haven't had time to read it yet." In the CCSARP framework, an explanation can count as an apology. Yet, our native speaker reaction was that although a reason had been given, no offense was acknowledged and thus the response did not count as an apology. This points to an important source of possible cross-cultural differences. If cultures differ in the ways in which explanations or "accounts" (Goffman) are judged as apologies, then this must clearly be taken seriously in future cross-cultural comparisons. The fact that, in American responses, the professor gave the student an account, but not an apology, takes on added significance when we see that, in a reversed situation, American respondents did produce an apology from a student to a professor.

Our "American" interpretation of the response given by the professor to the student as an explanation but not an apology points to a general problem which must be confronted in cross-cultural studies. That is, we must allow for the possibility that a particular questionnaire item may elicit different speech acts from different groups.

Coulmas (1981, p. 70), in discussing the cross-cultural comparison of speech acts, is very explicit on this point:

> It cannot be taken for granted that interactional routines are defined in an identical manner in different cultures. The consequences for the analysis of linguistic acts are clear. The question of how a given communicative function is verbally realized in another speech community must always be conjoined with the question of how

this function itself is defined by the members of the community in question, and what status it has in the framework of its overall communicative pattern. It is one thing to state the semantic equivalence of linguistic expressions of two given languages. An assessment of their equivalence in terms of communicative function is quite another thing. The difficulty boils down to the general question of how speech acts can be crossculturally compared and 'translated'. To treat speech acts such as thanks and apologies as invariable abstract categories is surely a premature stance.

Even in societies where it has been established that a named speech act can be translated, one cannot assume that what appears to be the same situation will result in the same speech act. An important factor conditioning the decision to an appropriate response is the effect of status or relative dominance between interlocutors. Generally, role relationships, along with their attendant sets of obligations, differ across societies. Thus, in the case of American society, as illustrated by the example of the two student–professor interactions, the status of a professor relative to a student may be far greater than in one of the other societies from which data were collected, and this could easily have affected the respondents' decisions about the very obligation to apologize.

For these reasons it is necessary to recognize from the outset that in a cross-cultural study one must allow for the possibility of eliciting differing speech acts in response to the same situation. It should, therefore, be regarded as an interesting finding that Americans completing the questionnaire dialogue, which is intended to elicit an apology from a professor to a student, often responded quite differently.

Native Speaker Perception

While questionnaires are useful in the ways described above, we need to be careful not to conclude that findings from them represent the actual distribution of linguistic forms that occur in naturally occurring interactions. Sociolinguistic research has repeatedly demonstrated the inadequacy of native speaker intuitions. This inadequacy manifests itself in two major ways. On the one hand, when native speakers are asked to report what they or others would say in a given speech situation, their responses are often very different from the speech behavior which is actually observed. On the other hand, native speakers have been shown to be unaware that there is a difference between their perceived speech behavior and their actual speech production. Some examples from the sociolinguistic literature will throw light on this point.

Blom and Gumperz (1972) in their study of dialect-switching in Norway, established these facts in a striking way. Through tape recording informal conversations, the researchers found that participants, despite statements to the contrary, frequently switched from their local language into standard Norwegian. Unaware of which language they had been speaking, they were shocked and

angry when the tape was played back. Once it was proved to them that they had been highly inaccurate in reporting or even noticing their own speech behavior, they promised to exercise more control in future. However, when Blom and Gumperz analyzed later tapes, they discovered that even a heightened awareness did not enable participants total control over which language they used.

In his classic study, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*, Labov (1966, p. 480) showed that New Yorkers exhibit the same lack of conscious awareness about their own speech as did the Norwegian subjects studied by Blom and Gumperz. As Labov puts it:

> New Yorkers also showed a systematic tendency to report their own speech inaccurately. Most of the respondents seemed to perceive their own speech in terms of the norms at which they were aiming rather than the sound they actually produced.

The discrepancy between norms and behavior is readily seen in the study of speech acts. In responding to questions about how they go about giving invitations, Wolfson, D'Amico-Reisner, and Huber (1983) found that native speakers of American English described themselves as using forms which were rarely or never observed in actual interactions. These speakers expressed strong disapproval of forms which they were heard to use frequently.

It is important to recognize that academic training in cultural and/or linguistic analysis does not, in itself, put individuals in a position to be objective about their own speech behavior, or about the patterns which obtain in their own speech communities. An interesting example of this fact is given in the description of a study of sex differences in language done in Amsterdam (Brouwer, Gerritsen, & deHaan, 1979). A group of linguists at the Institute of General Linguistics at the University of Amsterdam used their intuitions to develop a list of features which they thought distinguished men's from women's speech behavior in Dutch. Following this with an empirical study in which they collected and analyzed actual speech data, the authors have the following to say:

> The results of our investigation of speech differences between the sexes are very different from what intuition had led us to expect. It appears that an intuitive approach has evident shortcomings (p. 47).

Written Responses

With regard to the comparison of data yielded by questionnaires versus those collected through an ethnographic approach, a fundamental question has to do with the validity of written responses to short dialogues which, by their very nature, lack the context of an ongoing verbal interaction. In fact, there are two questions here. One is, how much can we assume that written responses are representative of spoken ones? The second is, can we hope that short, decontextualized written segments are comparable to the longer routines typical of actual

interaction? Beebe (1985) made a careful and explicit comparison of data collected through the use of discourse completion tests (DCTs) such as we used in the CCSARP questionnaire, and that collected by tape recording naturally occurring telephone interactions.

In her study of referrals, she discovered the following differences between what people write in questionnaires and what they actually say:

> written role plays bias the response toward less negotiation, less hedging, less repetition, less elaboration, less variety and ultimately less talk (p. 3).

In concluding the paper Beebe (1985, p. 11) points out in exactly what ways questionnaires or DCTs fail to reflect actual naturally occurring speech behavior. The following is her list of the differences she found between the data from questionnaires and those from spontaneous speech:

1. actual wording used in real interpersonal interaction;
2. the range of formulas and strategies used (some, like avoidance tend to get left out);
3. the length of response or the number of turns it takes to fulfill the function;
4. the depth of emotion that in turn qualitatively affects the tone, content, and form of linguistic performance;
5. the number of repetitions and elaborations that occur; or
6. the actual rate of occurrence of a speech act—e.g., whether or not someone would naturistically refuse at all in a given situation.

What do Questionnaires Yield

Even in using questionnaires to collect data about speech behavior within a single culture, an important research question arises. That is, in what ways are the responses one can collect and analyze in this way actually representative of what occurs in day-to-day interaction? In the previous section we discussed some of the limitations of using questionnaires for cross-cultural studies. In this section we will discuss what can be gained through the use of questionnaires.

We know, from studies conducted by such researchers as Cohen and Olshtain (1981) and Olshtain and Cohen (1983) on apologies, Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) on expressions of gratitude, and Beebe (1985) on refusals, that large scale data collection of this type produces good information on the set of formulas considered appropriate to a given situation. Beebe (1985, p. 10), in her study cited above, found that

> Discourse Completion Tests are effective means of:
> (1) gathering a large amount of data quickly;
> (2) creating an initial classification of semantic formulas and strategies that will occur in natural speech;

(3) studying the stereotypical perceived requirements for a socially appropriate (though not always polite) response;

(4) gaining insight into social and psychological factors that are likely to affect speech and performance; and

(5) ascertaining the canonical shape of refusals, apologies, partings, etc. in the minds of the speakers of that language. However, they are *not* natural speech and they do *not* accurately reflect natural speech.

What we have also discovered is that even more subtle sociolinguistic patterns will often be reflected in the data collected through DCTs. A great advantage in the use of such questionnaires is that DCTs can be given to a large number of subjects within a short period of time. Because of this, it is an excellent means of corroborating over a wider population results that have been obtained by ethnographic studies.

For example, in analyzing data collected through an ethnographic approach, Wolfson (1986, 1988) has observed that one very unexpected and very consistent finding is that there is a qualitative difference between the speech behavior which middle class Americans use with intimates, status unequals, and strangers, on the one hand, and with nonintimates, status-equal friends, co-workers, and acquaintances on the other. Wolfson has labeled this pattern the Bulge, because of the way the frequencies of certain types of speech behavior look on a chart. For all of the speech acts Wolfson has examined so far, the pattern is very similar in this respect. With respect to the frequency with which a particular act occurs, the degree of elaboration used in performing it, and the amount of negotiation which occurs between the interlocutors, the two extremes of social distance show very similar patterns as opposed to the middle section, which displays a characteristic bulge. When these speech acts are compared in terms of the social relationships of the speakers, the two extremes of social distance—minimum and maximum—seem to call forth very similar behavior, while relationships which are more toward the center yield marked differences. The explanation for this pattern appears to be that the social relationships at the two extremes—intimates on the one hand, and status unequals or strangers, on the other—have one extremely important factor in common: those relationships at the two extremes of social distance are relatively certain. In other words, the more status and social distance are seen as fixed, the more likely it is that people will know what to expect of one another and the less likely they are to run the risk of doing themselves social damage. It is in relationships which are less well defined that potential exists, for example, for a friendship to emerge, and it is these relatively unfixed relationships, therefore, which require the most care and negotiation in interaction.

For example, in work on compliments (Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Wolfson & Manes, 1980; Wolfson, 1983), it was discovered that the greatest majority occurred between people who were neither intimates nor strangers. Compliments

occurred at the extremes, of course, but the frequencies were very different indeed. The data on invitations are even more striking in this respect. Data collected by an ethnographic approach yielded two very clear categories for this speech act (Wolfson, 1979, 1981; Wolfson, D'Amico-Reisner, & Huber, 1983). The first consisted of unambiguous, complete invitations which stated the time, place, or activity being proposed and made a request for a response. These unambiguous invitations occurred most frequently between intimates and between status unequals—in both cases, addressees whose standing is relatively certain to the speaker. The second category of invitations were ambiguous or incomplete references to the possibility of future social commitments. An example of the latter category is the phrase, "Let's have lunch together sometime," so frustrating to nonnative speakers because they do not recognize it as the possible opening in a negotiation which may lead to a true social commitment, and therefore interpret it as insincere. In analyzing our data it soon became clear that what was particularly interesting about this sort of lead was precisely that it was an invitation, not to "get together," but to work together toward a social arrangement without risking an obvious, flat refusal. These ambiguous invitations, or *leads*, nearly always occurred between status-equal nonintimates—that is, between interlocutors who recognized their relationships as open to redefinition.

Ethnographic work done by Wolfson and by others on a range of different speech acts has turned up almost identical patterns. In her work on refusals, for example, Beebe (1985, p. 4) says:

> Our ethnographically collected data appears to follow Wolfson's hypothesis. Strangers are brief. If they want to say "no," they do so. Real intimates are also brief. It is friends and other acquaintances who are most likely to get involved in long negotiations with multiple repetitions, extensive elaborations, and a wide variety of semantic formulas.

Although the findings from the ethnographic studies discussed above all converge in revealing the pattern of the Bulge, and although all are based on relatively large samples of data, it could still be argued that the numbers of interactions and, indeed, of interlocutors recorded were still too small to be representative. What is particularly interesting, therefore, is that, if we take the coded results from the CCSARP questionnaire and arrange them along a scale of social distance, we find the same pattern emerging. If we plot out the feature which has been designated *explanation or account* we see the characteristic bulge found through ethnographic research (See Figure 1). At the two extremes of social distance, less than 40% of subjects did not include an explanation in their responses. In contrast, approximately 70% did not make use of explanations when the situation involved interaction between interlocutors who stood in the middle of the social distance continuum.
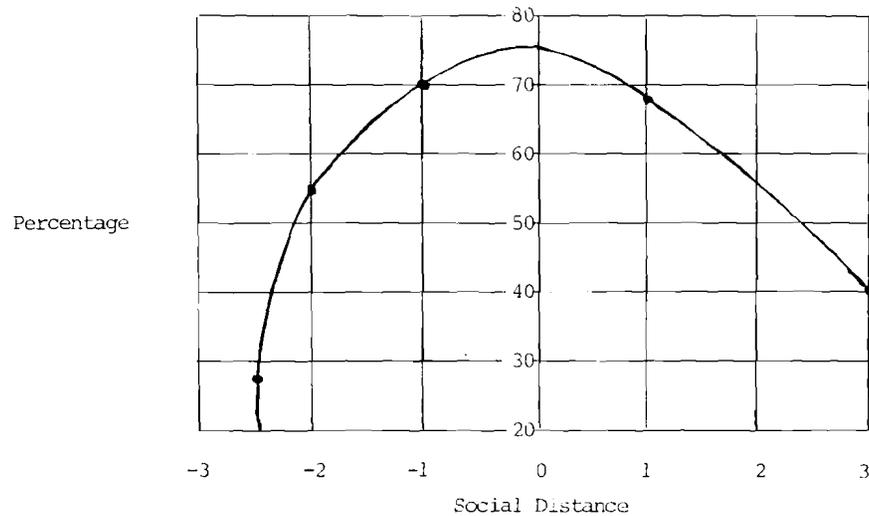
Figure 1.   Percentage of Respondents not Including an Explanation in Their Response to "Apology" Situations versus the Social Distance Between the Dialogue Participants.

A second explanation of the way in which the Bulge is reflected by the CCSARP data may be seen by an examination of the feature designated *taking on responsibility*, as shown in Figure 2. Here we see that 90% of those at the extremes of social distance did not take on any responsibility in their responses, where as only 60% of those in the middle of the continuum did not express some sort of responsibility.

The inverse relationship between the features *explanation* and *responsibility* shown in the graphs above seems at first glance to be counterintuitive. Why should a situation that elicits the taking on of responsibility, not also elicit a similar proportion of explanations. This seeming paradox can be understood only if we recognize that, for native speakers of American English, explanations do not necessarily constitute apologies.

Use of Aberrant Data

One of the best ways of discovering facts which did not enter into the original hypothesis is to start with data which do not fit the anticipated pattern. As we try to account for these seemingly aberrant data, we uncover variables, not included in the original design, which may be of equal or greater importance than the design variables.

As the CCSARP elicitation instrument is organized, two dimensions, social distance and social dominance, are the independent variables. In order to investi-
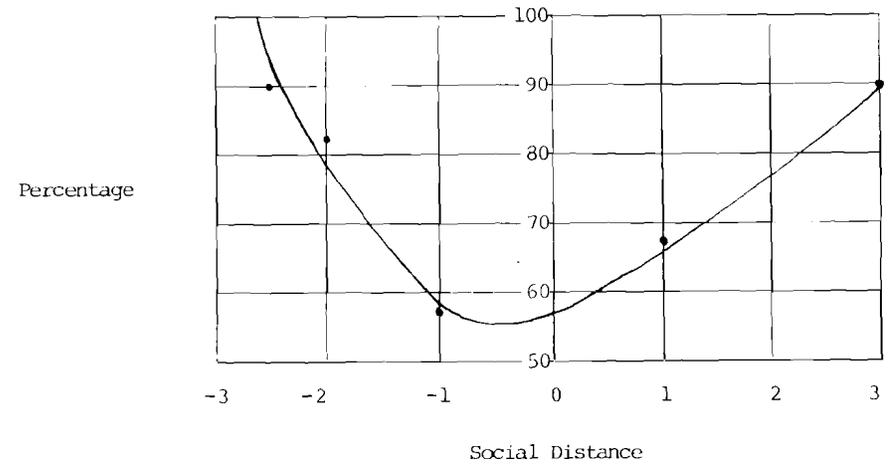
Figure 2.   Percentage of Respondents not Taking Any Responsibility in Their Response to "Apology" Situations versus the Social Distance Between the Dialogue Participants.

gate the interaction of these two variables, the questionnaire is designed such that each item corresponds to one cell in a two-by-three array, with distance being either plus or minus and dominance being plus, zero, or minus. Table 1 shows the location of the items for apologies (i.e., Q6 is situation number six on the questionnaire) within this two-by-three array. (For the full list of situations, see Chapter 1.) The relationship between the speaker and the addressee is *plus dominance* if the speaker is of higher social status than the addressee, *zero dominance* if the status of the two is equal, and *minus dominance* if the speaker is of lower status than the addressee. Social distance is plus if the participants are strangers and minus if they are not.

Table 1.   Elicitation Device Items
for Apologies Arranged According to
Social Distance and Social Dominance

	Distance	
	+	–
+	Q6	Q2
		Q10
0	Q12	Q14
–	Q8	Q4

Each apology response item was originally coded according to twelve features:

Table 2.   Features for Coding Responses to Request and to Apology Items.

Address Terms
General Perspective*
Use of an IFID
Type of IFID
Routinalization*
Intensifiers
Taking on Responsibility
Explanation or Account
Offer of Repair
Promise of Forbearance
Minimizing the Degree of Offense
Concern for Hearer

*The items titled General Perspective and Rou-
tinalization have been dropped from the list by the
CCSARP group because they were found to be diffi-
cult to code reliably.

The coding of a response consists of deciding for each feature which of several categories is appropriate. Each category has been assigned a numeric code, and thus, for the appropriate category, its corresponding code is assigned to that feature. Table 3 illustrates the categories and their assigned codes for the features of Address Terms, Explanation, and Promise of Forbearance.

The coded response data was then compiled for statistical analysis. Since the number of subjects completing each item of the elicitation device was different, the data has been converted to the percentage of the total number of subjects for each item. Table 4 shows the results for the feature Address Term in the apology

Table 3.   Numeric Values for Categories under Three Features of Apology Responses.

Address Term	Explanation
0 none	0 none
1 title/role	1 explicit
2 surname	2 implicit
3 first name	
4 nickname	**Promise of Forbearance**
5 endearment term	
6 offensive term	0 none
7 pronoun	1 yes
8 title + first name	
9 title + surname	

Table 4.   Percentage of Respondents for Each Category of the Feature *Address Term*

Item	n	none	title/role	surname	first name	nickname	other
Q2	28	100%					
Q4	56	88%	11%				1%
Q6	57	96%	2%		2%		
Q8	52	56%	44%				
Q10	54	89%			7%	2%	2%
Q12	49	88%	4%				8%
Q14	54	81%			17%	2%	

n = number of respondents

items. We see, then, that, for item Q6, there were a total of 57 subjects who responded. Of these, 96% did not use an address term, 2% used title/role, and 2% used first name.

Rearranging the data from Table 6 into a two-by-three array according to the dimensions of social distance and social dominance discussed earlier, allows comparisons and general patterns to be observed (see Table 5).

In the case of Table 5, percentage of responses in which no address term was used for each of the seven apology items, the results fit fairly neatly into the experimental design. Thus, in item six (Q6), which represents plus dominance and plus distance (that is to say, the speaker is of higher social status than the addressee and they are strangers), we find that 96% of respondents did not use an address term. As we move from plus dominance to minus dominance (the speaker is of lower status than the addressee), we find a corresponding decrease in percentage of respondents who do not use an address term. That is, when the

Table 5.   Perentage of Respondents Using No 'Address Term' in Apology Items.

		distance	
		+	−
d	+	96%	100%
o			
m			
i			89%
n	0	88%	
a			81%
n			
c			
e	−	56%	88%

Table 6. Perentage of Respondents Expressing No 'Concern for Hearer' in Apology Terms.

| | | distance | |
		+	−
d o m i n a n c e	+	88%	100%
			100%
	0	92%	
			54%
	−	96%	98%

speaker is of lower status than the addressee, there is a greater tendency for the speaker to use an address term than when the speaker is of higher status.

If we examine the other features in a similar manner, we find several in which the data do not conform to the expected patterns. For example, Table 6 presents the feature *concern for hearer*. There is a large difference in the use of this feature between the responses to the two items designed to portray zero dominance and minus distance (that is, a status equal relationship between acquaintances), items Q10 and Q14.

In the one case, 100% of the responses did not contain the feature *concern for the hearer*, as compared to 54% in the other situation. This finding is not only in contrast to its counterpart, but also does not correspond to the expected statistical value based upon the overall pattern.

On the principle that the discovery of outlyers such as the one in Table 6, Q14—54%, indicates the existence of additional variables at work, we made use of what we had gleaned from observational data and our competence as native speakers to try to uncover the conditioning factors.

First a comparison of the other features for these two items was made. Table 7 shows that all but two of the 10 features coded (intensifiers and offer repair) have significant differences.

Table 7. Percentage of Respondents not Including a Feature in Their Responses to Item Q10 and Item 14 (∅ Dominance and − Distance).

Item	Conc Hear	Take Respon	Expl	Min Offer	Prom Forb	Addr Term	Type IFID	Use IFID	Intens	Offer Repair
Q10	100%	83%	52%	89%	91%	89%	24%	24%	89%	94%
Q14	54%	57%	72%	100%	100%	81%	33%	30%	89%	94%

Apparently, native speakers in responding to the two situations were making distinctions which could not be captured by such broad variables as social distance and social dominance. What was different about the two questions showing zero dominance and minus distance that could be causing such variation in the results? Item 10 (Q10) involved two students, one male, one female, writing a joint term paper. The female student arrives late to a work session and responds to her classmate's annoyance. Item 14 (Q14) involves two female employees, one of whom responds to the other's having taken offense at a comment of hers.

Given the findings in the sociolinguistic literature (e.g., Wolfson, 1978; Bell, 1984), it is not surprising that such factors as sex of participants, age, degree of intimacy, frequency of interaction, and optionality of the relationship might be important and separable components of what is subsumed under social distance and social dominance. Table 8 shows some of the variables which may be affecting the responses to items Q10 and Q14. In item Q10 the interchange is between a female (F) and a male (M) participant, and in item Q14 it is between two females. For the two students of item Q10, our interpretation has them in a sort of temporary relationship as compared to the two co-workers of item Q14. In terms of frequency of contact, the two students have the option of minimizing it and the co-workers are more or less forced into daily contact. The degree of intimacy of the participants is not given.

These findings show that in some respects the two situations have indeed a great deal in common, but that the different features coded are more or less sensitive to such variables as sex of the participants, frequency of interaction, optionality, and intimacy.

If we look at the results for all of the items intended to elicit apologies, and consider all of the features, we find that two of the features, *promise of forbearance* and *minimizing the degree of offense*, shown in Table 9, were insensitive to the changes in social distance and social dominance of the speaker relative to the addressee.

Most of the features do show considerable variability for the different situations presented in the elicitation instrument (see Table 10), but, because of variables other than the design variables entering into the subjects responses, there are many aberrant points. The existence of these variables, which have not been built into the research design, should be taken into account in generalizing from the findings.

Table 8. Distinctive Features for the Social Situation Depicted in Item Q10 and Item Q14.

Item	Dominance	Dist.	Participant	Age	Option	Freq	Intimacy
Q10	0	−	F—M	same	temp low	?	?
Q14	0	−	F—F	same	perm high	daily	?

Table 9. Percentage of Respondents not Including a Feature in Their Response for Features in which Little or No Difference Occurs Versus the Distance and Dominance Dimension.

A. Promise of Forbearance	distance +	distance −		B. Minimizing Degree of Offense	distance +	distance −
d +	100%	100%	d +		100%	100%
o			o			
m		91%	m			89%
i 0	96%	100%	i 0		96%	89%
n			n			
a			a			
n			n			
c −	100%	100%	c −		100%	100%
e			e			

Table 10. Percentage of Respondents Not Using a Feature in Their Responses for Features which Vary According to the Distance and Dominance Dimensions.

C. Intensifiers Category = none	distance +	distance −		D. Taking on Responsibility Category = none	distance +	distance −
d +	84%	93%	d +		89%	89%
o			o			
m		89%	m			83%
i 0	76%	89%	i 0		69%	57%
n			n			
a			a			
n			n			
c −	81%	77%	c −		98%	88%
e			e			

E. Explanation Category = none	distance +	distance −		F. Offer of Repair Category = none	distance +	distance −
d +	44%	36%	d +		98%	96%
o			o			
m		52%	m			94%
i 0	69%	72%	i 0		57%	94%
n			n			
a			a			
n			n			
c −	69%	21%	c −		37%	98%
e			e			

CONCLUSIONS

Of major concern for much of sociolinguistic research is the application and the generalizability of its findings. Consequently, one reason often given for the use of questionnaires is that they permit the study of a large number of subjects, and thus the findings should be more general than, for example, research in which only a few subjects are involved. In this paper, we have sought to point out some of the limitations and peculiarities of data obtained by using a discourse completion questionnaire. In addition, it is important to understand that conditions may have been established unintentionally in the questionnaire items even though they never were a part of the design. These hidden factors must be taken into account in interpreting the data. For example, in a previous section, we discussed the different results obtained on the questionnaire for two situations intended to each represent a minus social distance and equal (zero) dominance between the dialogue participants. We explained these differences by the fact that the two situations are not the same, because there are several other variables which influence the responses. Likewise it should be noted that, in the case of the American data at least, there is a gender bias in the roles of the participants in the situations used to elicit apologies. In all of the situations used to represent a plus distance relationship between the participants, it is always a male who is to offer the apology. And in all of the situations used for a minus distance relationship, it is always a female except for one ambiguous case. Table 11 graphically portrays this unintentional gender bias (the gender of the person offering the apology is at the left of each dyad) which crept into the research design, no doubt because of the way our society is structured. Research on language and gender done over the past 15 years has shown that the gender of interlocuters affects their linguistic behavior. It seems then that additional situations are needed in which the sex of the dialogue participants are reversed. Since the various cultural groups represented in the CCSARP project may well differ in the extent and the ways in

Table 11. Sex of the Speaker and of the Addressee in Apology Items.

Dominance	distance + — S A	distance − — S A
+	M—F	?—?
		F—M
0	M—M	F—M
−	M—F	F—?

S—Speaker
A—Addressee

which the gender of speaker and addressee conditions speech behavior, such additional situations are needed for cross-cultural comparisons.

We have tried to demonstrate that the very problems we find as we analyze the data, and the research methodology, can help us to discover unsuspected variables and lead us to both deepen and sharpen our understanding of sociolinguistic patterns. Building on what we have learned through this investigation, we will want to go back to the collection of examples from naturally occurring interaction, asking new questions and noticing new distinctions. Once we have analyzed the new ethnographic data, we should be in a good position to redesign the questionnaire in order to get at the conditioning factors we have uncovered. Research into human behavior is notoriously "squishy" and requires multiple approaches in order to reach a level of validity which will give our analyses both predictive power and generalizability.

It is hoped that the questions raised in this discussion will encourage those interested in cross-cultural speech act research to integrate an observational methodology into the design of their studies. As the results of our preliminary study indicate, our own intuitions cannot provide us with a complete picture of the social circumstances that result in a given speech act. It is only through an iterative process which makes use both of systematic observation and increasingly sensitive elicitation procedures and analyses that we can begin to capture the social knowledge that is the unconscious possession of every member of a speech community.

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