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NORMS OF APOLOGY DEPICTED IN U.S. AMERICAN AND JAPANESE LITERATURE ON MANNERS AND ETIQUETTE

NAOMI SUGIMOTO*

Ferris University, Japan

ABSTRACT. *In this study, a cross-cultural comparison was made of (a) types of situations requiring apology and (b) principles for constructing and personalizing apology messages, drawing examples of culturally idealized notions from Japanese and U.S. American conduct manuals. The survey first revealed that: (a) Japanese conduct manuals are more concerned with private apologies given for actions of a greater number of people in their in-group, while U.S. American conduct manuals focus more on apologies primarily for their own actions in the public places and (b) U.S. American readers are told to offer a “sincere” apology, while Japanese counterparts strive to give a “sunao-na” (indicative of amenable character) apology. While U.S. American conduct manuals stress spontaneity and originality of the words used in apology, conformity to the linguistic formulas is strongly emphasized in Japanese conduct manuals. When personalizing their apology, U.S. Americans seem to “individualize” the message, while Japanese seem to “relationalize” the message.*
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“To err is human, to forgive divine.” If this statement holds true in any culture, the act of attaining forgiveness by appropriately apologizing for the error may require more than divine skills. Literature on manners, so called conduct manuals and etiquette books, are one type of cultural resources available in many cultures to people who find themselves in the position of needing to apologize. While the degree to which these people actually apologize according to the norms depicted in this type of literature may not be directly inferred from these works, the advice given in these books clearly reveals “what a dominant segment of the population viewed

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*Ferris University, 3-6-8, Kugenuma-Kaigan, Fujisawa, Kanagawa, 251-0037 Japan. Tel.: +81-466-34-5056; Fax: +81-466-36-7778; E-mail: naomi.@city.fujisawa.kanagawa.jp

as being proper manners and desirable deportment: the behavioural codes and, more important, the *behavioural ideals*" (Wouters, 1987, pp. 406–407, emphasis original).

Books on manners and etiquette, many of which are written for women as their primary audience, are often criticized as one of the cultural means of perpetuating the status quo, or inequalities based on class, race, or gender (Foster-Dixon, 1993). Yet, this power as a cultural agent alone can warrant a careful analysis of this type of literature. "Through a cultural analysis of the symbols of the etiquette book, we may begin to unravel the ideological campaign of the quest for (utopic) tasteful behavior" (Foster-Dixon, 1993, p. 80). A cross-cultural comparison of these books, then, will provide insight into cultural similarities and differences in idealized notions of apology between the cultures compared.

It should be noted, however, conduct ideals depicted in books on etiquette are just that and cannot necessarily be taken to reflect actual practices of apology in the respective cultures. Thus, it is naive to build an argument about cultural practices of apology by treating "do's" as what every member of the culture does and "don'ts" as what every member of the culture never does. "Do's" and "don'ts" in conduct manuals sometimes reveal just the opposite. If every member of the culture apologizes uniformly and appropriately, there would be no need for etiquette books. Rather, the fact that books do offer advice suggests that variations and conflicts exist within the culture. These books show "the appropriate" but not uniformly executed ways of accomplishing communicative tasks including apology. Likewise, the advice in conduct manuals on how not to apologize or the list of "don'ts" should be taken as behaviors that are discouraged but certainly constitute part of the actual performance of apology in the culture. The fact that these options are mentioned in the conduct manuals suggests that the behaviors are within the range of the "imaginable" in the culture. Thus, hereafter, advice on, and examples of, apology given in conduct manuals are referred to as conduct ideals, and treated as examples of culture-specific norms which reflect the actual practices in each culture to a great extent, but not completely.

In this study, a large number of conduct manuals were consulted as sources of information to investigate culture-specific idealized notions about apology in Japan and in the U.S. Thirty-four books were chosen from both current and historical holdings of a variety of academic and public libraries as well as general bookstores in a Mid-Western town in the U.S. and a Tokyo suburb in Japan. Publication dates of most of the books consulted range from 1960's to 1990's. A special effort was made to create a balance between cultures in terms of time, targeted use and audience. Although a larger volume of etiquette literature in Japan than in the U.S. addresses written apologies, an effort was made to limit the cross-cultural comparison of apology texts to the same modality (spoken

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