

A Contrastive Study on the Strategies in the Public Apologies and the Daily Apologies

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Abstract. In recent years, a new kind of speech act— making public apologies through the mass media—has caused great concern. Based on the data analysis of some open apologies in English, the great differences in public apology strategies are found from those in daily-life apologies and English public apologies clearly bear their own characteristics. The register theory is applied to help explain those phenomena so as to facilitate a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the apology speech act, which will, in turn, lead to more successful communications between people.

Introduction

As for an apology, people often think of words like "I'm sorry" and "excuse me". In fact, an apology is a complex speech phenomenon that occurs between a specific situation and a particular communicative object and has a unique communicative function. J. Holmes defined an apology as: assuming that A is an apologizer, B is offender, an apology is the process that A apologizes to B in order to make up for his own offense, to save B's face, and to restore the balance of A and B of the speech act (p376) [1]. It can be seen that an apology is a sign of politeness. However, the "apology" is, in essence, contrary to the face of the maintenance of the apology, which is known as the "threat face behavior" (FTA). As a result, people often adopt a variety of strategies in their apologies to reach the victims of saving face, repair the interpersonal relationship; Meanwhile, it can minimize the loss of "face".

Apology speech act has already draw many scholars' attention. Many studies discusses how language learners learn or use an apology speech act from interlanguage pragmatics as the branch of second language acquisition. There are also some pragmatic characteristics and laws of the speech act of apology from the perspective of social pragmatics. We find that almost all research is aimed at everyday life. Nowadays, it is a common phenomenon for celebrities to make public apologies via modern media such as blog, We-chant; However, studies on public apologies are rare.

Comparison between the Public Apology and the Daily Apology

As previously mentioned, an apology is a way to save the other person's face and may threaten his own "face" speech. Therefore, no matter whether a public apology or a daily apologize is, the apologizer will take some strategies to reduce their potential loss of "face", so the research on apology strategies and classification becomes the key in the study of apology speech act. On the basis of the predecessors' research achievements on apology strategies, this study compares public apologies in open letters with daily apology strategies, and tries to reveal the use of apology strategies in public apology.

Apology Strategies. To research the use of the apology strategy, you must first understand the classification of the apology strategy. There are already many researches on it. This study adopts the classification method proposed by A. Trosborg who divides the apology strategy into seven categories[2]. We regard the “no apology” as 0 strategy, so there are, totally, 8 strategies.

Strategy 0: apologizer does not take on responsibility

Strategy 1: minimizing the degree of offence

Strategy 2: acknowledgement of responsibility

Strategy 3: explanation or account

Strategy 4: expression of apology

Strategy 5: offer of repair

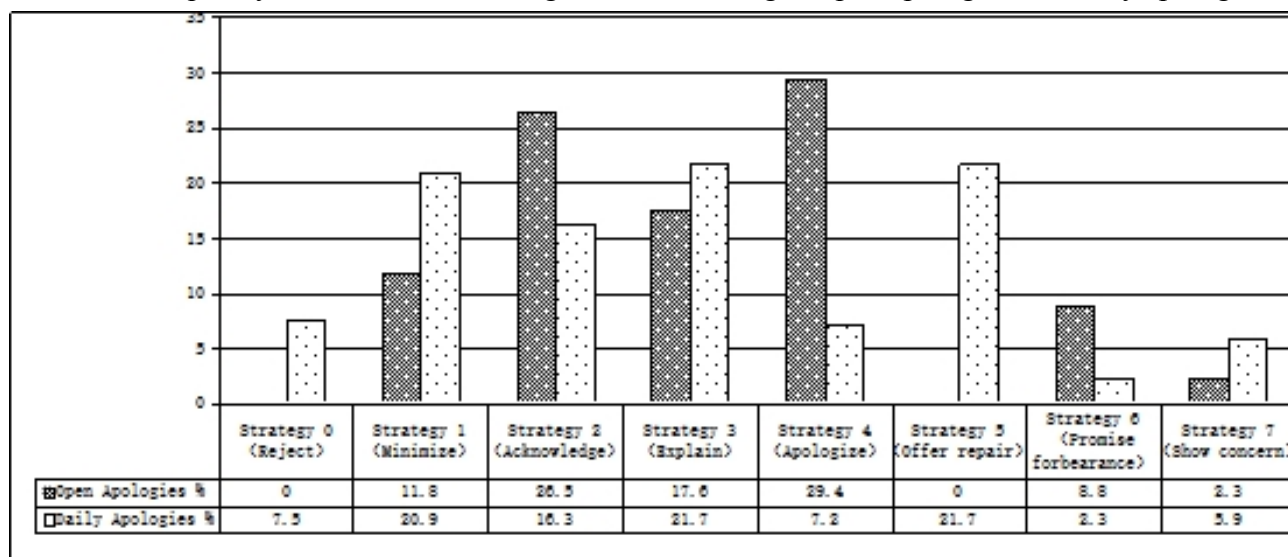
Strategy 6: promise of forbearance

Strategy 7: expressing concern for hearer

In practice, an apologizer take an apology by the combination of several strategies above. Generally speaking, the higher the level of apology the speaker wishes to express, the more likely he is to choose multiple apologies[3].

Data Statistics and Comparison. Based on the apology strategies by A.A. Trosborg, we searched out the public apologies made by western public figures, government and corporate representatives on the Internet in recent years, from which 10 were randomly selected, such as Michael Phelps taking drugs, US Spy Plane Crashes in China. In order to better reflect the characteristics of the English public apology strategy, we compared it with the daily apology research data (Trosborg 1987:228). The results are as follows:

Table 1 Frequency distribution of Strategies 0-7 according to open apologies and daily apologies.



It can be seen from the Table 1 that the frequency distribution of the eight strategies used in public apologies and daily apologies, the frequencies of Strategy 0 (Reject), Strategy 7 (Show concern), and Strategy 6 (Promise forbearance) are lower, less than 10%, and the rates of Strategy 1 (Minimize) and Strategy 3 (Explain) are higher than 15%. There are significant differences on Strategy 1 (Minimize), Strategy 2 (Acknowledge), Strategy 4 (Apologize) and Strategy 5 (Offer repair). The frequency of Strategy 1 (Minimize) in public apology is 9% less than that in daily apology; approximately 26.5% of Strategy 2 (Acknowledge) is in open apology while only 16.3% in daily apology; the frequency of Strategy 4 (Apologize) that accounts for approximately 29.2% in open apology is just 7.2% in daily apology; the percentage of Strategy 5 (Offer repair) taking up 21.7% in daily apology is not adopted by public apology.

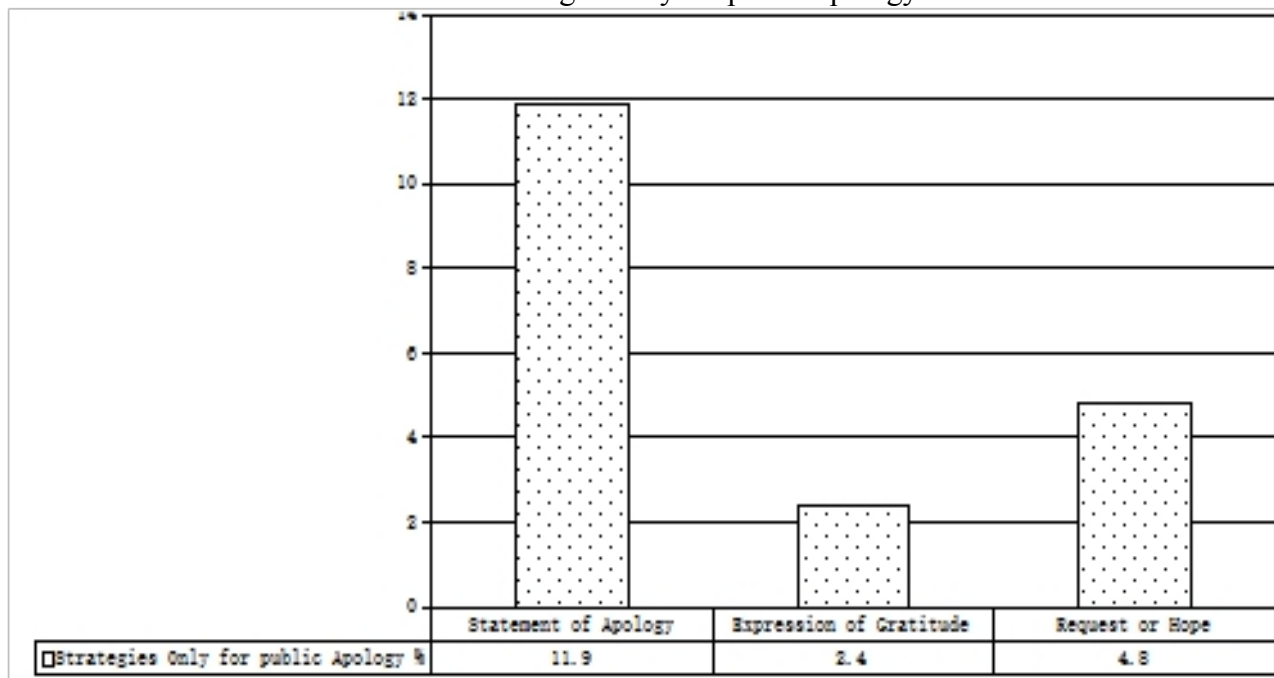
In the analysis of public apologies, we found that there were other apologies except the eight apologies. Based on their usage, this paper is briefly summarized into three categories:

1.Statement of Apology: public apology speech act is often accompanied by an apologetic statement, whose purpose is to enhance (or create) the consensus between the apology, shorten the psychological distance, lay the foundation for further follow-up topics.

2.Expression of Gratitude: this is to express gratitude to those who have forgiven their behavior or support themselves.

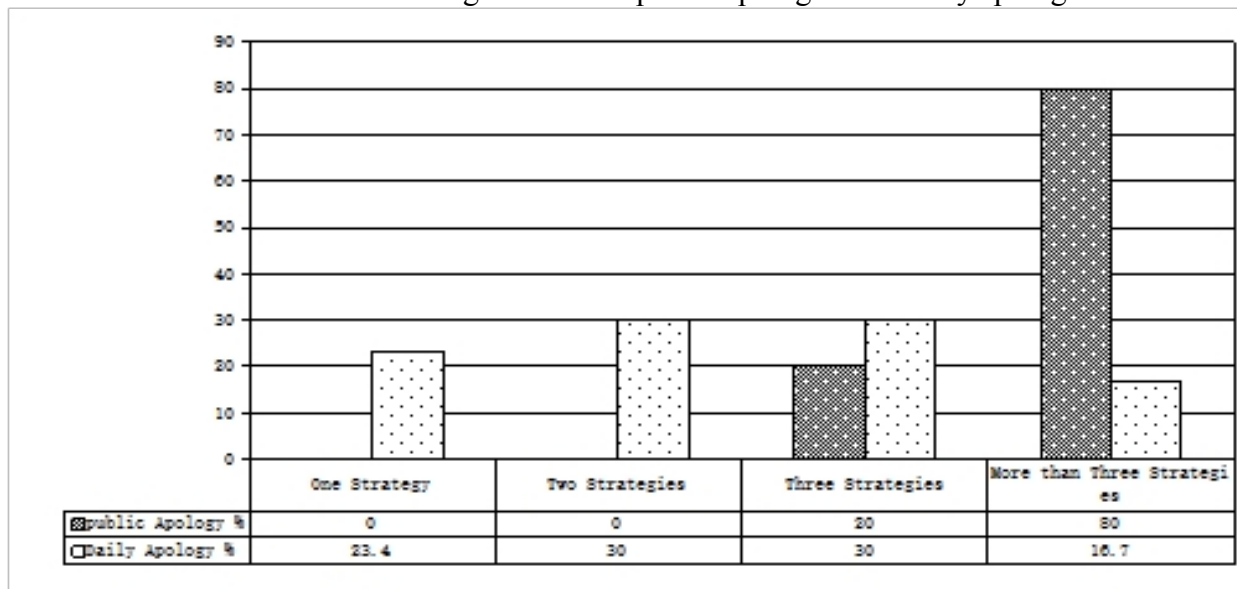
3. Request or Hope: in order to reduce the pressure from the public and the harm to the apologizee, an apologizer requests apologizee's and the public's forgiveness or hope to obtain their supports again.

Table 2 Strategies only for public apology.



As can be seen from table 2, in public apologies, the percentage of the statement of apology is more than 10%, which is higher than the frequency of Expression of Gratitude, Request or Hope strategy.

Table 3 Combination strategies between public apologies and daily apologies.



As can be seen from table 3, in daily apologies, less than three types of apologies are used; however, in public apologies, more than three apologies are used.

Discussion

The statistics above show that there is a similarity in strategies of apologies between public apologies and daily apologies. First, the frequencies of apology strategies are roughly same; second, it is rarely

used to Strategy 0 (Reject), Strategy 6 (Promise forbearance) and Strategy 7 (Show concern) while the percentage of Strategy 2 (Acknowledge) and Strategy 3 (Explain) are higher.

However, the results of the data analysis also indicate that there are still significant differences in the use of the apology strategy between public apologies and daily apologies. From the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, this difference is due to the differences in the three variables of the Register, that is, Field, Tenor and Mode. From the view of Field, the former is a public, formal style; The latter is an informal style. From the point of Tenor, the former is a public figure or authority representative, they get "excessive attention to monitor" as the mass media (Lakoff, 2000:14)[4] and become the focus of public opinion, social distance between apologizer and apologizee is bigger because of less contact; The latter tends to be less social distance and more frequent contact. As for Mode, the former is monologue or written form, and the latter is the form of dialogue.

From the perspective of the Register theory, we discuss the results of the above data analysis from three aspects:

Frequency distribution of Strategies 0-7 according to open apologies and daily apologies.

The Difference on the Frequency Distribution of Strategies 0-7 between Open Apologies and Daily Apologies. From the above statistics, English speakers in public apology adopt the strategies the same as those in daily apology, but the differences in the Register caused the obvious difference on the frequencies of some apology strategies.

Strategies 1(Minimize) (11.8% : 20.9%). The frequency of Strategy 1 in public apologies is 9.1% less than that in daily apologies. This strategy attempts to justify the apologizer to partly blame in accordance with the division of responsibility. If this strategy is adopted in public apologies, it is liable to leave the public and the apologizee(s) an impression of an insincere attitude and delegate the responsibility.

Strategy 2 (Acknowledge) (26.5%: 16.3%). The use of this strategy was up to 26.5% in public apology, 10% more than that in daily apology. The public apology has already hinted at the complaineer's mistake. In addition, as a representative of the public figures or authority, the apologizer has a large social distance from the apologizee, which is inclined to adopt this strategy to get the forgiveness. At the same time, the apologizer can repair the image in the public mind by acknowledging the responsibility, showing the regretful attitude and solving the problem.

Strategy 4 (Apologize) (29.4% : 7.2%). The strategy was 29.4% in public, the highest in any public apology strategy, and well above its daily apology rate (7.2%). Apologizers in daily life have a shorter social distance and more contact, closer relationship with offenders than ones in public media, so the apologizer is neither to too much effort to save the offender's face, nor to explicitly admit his or her offend or fault to avoid further loss of his or her own face. On the contrary, in a public apology, because of a longer social gap and less contact with the offender, the apologizer adopting a direct apology would not feel too much loss of "face", instead of embarrassment. This Strategy is conducive not only to setting the apologizer's high profile, but also to reduce the social distance with the public and apologizees, which can make the loss of "face" as much as possible to get more compensation.

Strategy 5 (Offer Repair) (0: 21.7%). This strategy is to provide material compensation or verbal commitment compensation to the apologizee, which is an apology strategy that is more likely to be recognized by the apologizee. However, because public figures or authoritative representatives often cause indirect and spiritual harm to his or her fans or the public, which is not easy to use material compensation. At the same time, once the apologizer as public figures with higher social status, the higher attention of the mass media and monitoring put forward compensation, which means that full responsibility are supposed to be taken, together with the amplification effect of the media, his or her "face" would be huge threaten, so this strategy scarcely be used in the public. In daily apology, Strategy of Offer Repair can not only often quick thoroughly solve the disputes with less loss of face, but control the disadvantage impact in the range of small time and space as well, so the rate is very high, up to 21.7%.

New Strategies in the Public Apology. Based on the analysis of data, this study found that there exist some new strategies which never occurred in the daily apology. For the sake of convenient on

the research, we are called to the Statement of Apology, Expression of Gratitude, and Request or Hope.

The characteristics of public apologies determine that the apologizers use a new apology strategy besides the Strategies discussed above. The apologizer needs to obtain not only the understanding of the apologizee, but also the support of the public, so the use of the apology strategy is bound to be different from the daily apology. Due to the vast majority of the public who are not apologizees or witnesses, so the apologizer usually states the apology affairs to make the public understand the cause and effect of the whole incident before the truth comes out; Otherwise, the public may listen to rumors and gossips to make a variety of guesses which would cause more damage to the "face" of the apologizer. What's more, some public apologizers may advertently make statements to reduce their "face" loss. It is acknowledged that the Statement of Strategy in public apologies can be used to clarify the facts and to distinguish the offender's responsibility for the victim. On the contrary, daily apologies usually occur between the parties, and the parties are fully aware of the incident and therefore need not state it.

A public apology is used to the Expression of Gratitude or Request or Hope because it involves not only the apologizers and the apologizees, but also the general public. On the one hand, because of the special status of an apologizer, an apologizee is forced to become the focus of public attention, which makes the apologizee bear more pressure, so the apologizer proposes a request or hope for the public in order to ease impairment or make up for the loss of the other party, and repair the harmonious interpersonal relationship on both sides. On the other hand, the apologizer has made a request or hope to the public for the negative effects of his behavior as a public figure in the society. Moreover, a public apologizer need to express gratitude to those who have always supported him or her and sincerely hope that the general public forgives his or her own mistakes, believes in his or her determination to correct the wrong behaviour and continues to support his or her career development. This Strategy can partially restore "face" of the apologizer and repair an image as the public figures. However, in daily apologies, there are limited people involved, so the apologizer does not require any hope or request, nor do they need to express their gratitude to the unrelated public.

The Difference on the Frequency Distribution of Combination of Strategies between Open Apologies and Daily Apologies. The degree of apology depends on the detriment degree on the hearer and subjective desire for the speaker to express the apology. The worse detriment the hearer suffers from and the higher the speaker desires to express the apology, the more likely the speaker chooses the means of high degree of apology or a combination of a variety of apology strategies." [5] From table 3, the apologizer, in daily life, chooses strategies combination less than three while in public apology, the apologizer usually adopts more than three strategies to combine. On the one hand, the news of the damage caused by public figures or authority representative was known and spread in the public, which makes the apologizee loss of face more seriously. On the other hand, due to the high social status of the apologizer in the public, the combination of apologies are expected to help re-establish his or her image. Since the apology behaviors in everyday life often happen between the apologizers and apologizees, other auxiliary means besides spoken dialogue can be employed, such as: pronunciation, intonation, facial expression, gesture, and posture, and other body language. American psychologists have come up with a formula: the total effect of information is equal to 7% of words + 38% voice + 55% facial expression, when people receive information from the outside world. As a result, daily apologies need not to use too many strategies to make an apology.

Conclusion

With modern media technology continuous development and expansion of the scope of people's communication, it has become increasingly common phenomena for public figures or authority representative to make a public apology via mass media, so a comprehensive system of research on the apology strategies in the public is not only a new development in the field of language research, but also a guideline on people's successful communication and a harmonious interpersonal

relationship establishment with a certain reference value. This paper has carried on the statistical analysis of the public apologies strategies by means of modern media as a new way of speech act, and employed the Register theory of systemic functional linguistics as a guide to tentative discussion. The following preliminary conclusions can be drawn: first, there exist an obvious differences on the frequency distribution of strategies between the public apologies and the daily apologies, namely: Strategy of Acknowledge and Strategy of Apology are more adopted in the former; second, some unique strategies in the public apology are found, which are named as the Statement of Apology, the Expression of Gratitude, the Request or Hope; third, the combination of multiple strategies are more used in the public apologies than that in the daily apologies.

This article just focuses on the similarities and differences on the strategies between the public apology and the daily apologies. For the variable is complex, the differences on the apology strategies for different languages (for example, Chinese and English) between a public apology and daily apology will be discussed in another article. Of course, because of the limited collected language materials, combined with the inevitable subjective factors in the research, the preliminary conclusion is looking forward to more inspection and correction by the relevant research result.

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