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Two Codes for Remedying Problematic Situations: Japanese and English Speakers' Views of Explanations and Apologies in the United States

Mariko Kotani

Graduate School of Intercultural Communication, Rikkyo University, 3-34-1 Nishi-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo 171-8501, Japan

ABSTRACT

This study describes speech codes used by Japanese and English speakers in remedying problematic situations. By analyzing in-depth interviews, the study reveals the Japanese-speaking participants' use of a code in which offering detailed explanations can be a way to deny having caused another person discomfort, thus being incompatible with their meaning of "apology." The English-speaking participants used a code in which offering and listening to explanations is a way to show that they care about the relationship and to seek forgiveness. The analysis illustrates how the participants used these codes as a resource to draw a boundary between two speech communities.

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In this paper, I describe Japanese and English speakers' assumptions regarding how to remedy problematic interpersonal situations. When social actors face problematic situations, they often deal with such situations by engaging in certain communicative practices. One such practice, a remedial episode, refers to "restorative sequences of behavior occurring in problematic situations" (Morris, 1985, p. 74) and involves the "negotiation of rules for social interaction" (p. 70).[1] As a result of successfully managing situations through the negotiation of rules and assumptions about appropriate conduct, the original problems may be remedied, the relationships between participants may be restored, and the rules for appropriate conduct may be upheld.

When problematic situations involve participants from more than one speech community, the "taken-for-granted" (Hopper, 1981; see also Fitch, 2003) or unstated rules and assumptions that the participants negotiate are expected to be more diverse than situations involving speakers from the same community. Furthermore, assumptions concerning the remedial episode itself may not be the same across communities. For example, with regard to "account," a kind of action within a remedial episode, Scott and Lyman (1968) stated, "the types of accounts appropriate to each speech community differ in form and in content" (p. 62; see also Buttny, 1987a, 1987b, 1993). If participants differ in what they consider

CONTACT Mariko Kotani mkotani@rikkyo.ac.jp

appropriate remedial actions, then engaging in a remedial episode as a way to deal with a problematic situation may become a source of further problems and complexity.

To explore culturally appropriate means of remedying problematic situations, Japan and the United States can provide a suitable case of comparison because they have been described as having contrasting systems of communicative practices. For example, social psychological studies have identified different remedial strategies that are likely to be used in Japan and the United States. Hamilton and Sanders (1983) found that in judging wrongdoing, the Japanese are more attentive to the duties and obligations of actors' social roles, whereas Americans emphasize actors' deeds and mental states. Hamilton and Hagiwara (1992) found that Americans use relatively "aggressive" strategies in their remedial efforts (denying or justifying rather than admitting their own faults or offering apologies), whereas the Japanese seem to focus more on maintaining the quality of interaction and thus use "mitigating" strategies. In Sueda and Wiseman's (1992) study, the American respondents were more likely than their Japanese counterparts to use autonomy-preserving strategies such as justification, statements of fact, humor, and aggression (see also Ting-Toomey, 1988).

To explain these different approaches to conflict, intercultural communication scholars have used the concepts of individualistic-collectivistic values (Triandis, 1995), high- and low-context cultures (Hall, 1976), and different face concerns (Ting-Toomey, 1988). In cultures that are considered to subscribe to individualistic values, such as the United States, people tend to use a direct, low-context conflict style of expressing meaning in words, are more concerned with self-face maintenance, and use more competitive or dominating styles. In cultures that subscribe to collectivistic values, such as Japan, people have been found to use an indirect, high-context conflict style in which meanings are embedded in context, to be more concerned with other-face or mutual-face maintenance, and to use more obliging and avoiding styles (Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

These studies elucidate the cultural influences regarding the choice of strategies that Japanese and Americans are likely to make, but they also have limitations. First, most of these studies used survey questionnaires as a method of investigation asking to rate, for example, the likelihood of offering different types of accounts, assuming that the meanings of each strategy and conflict style are the same across cultures. If members of each speech community attach different meanings and values to the same actions, then it is insufficient to compare the different strategies that are used in the two speech communities. Second, these studies do not sufficiently provide the reasons for the different choice of strategies. The concepts such as collectivistic-individualistic values, high- and low-context cultures, and other- and self-face concerns are helpful in explaining certain aspects of the differences but do not fully explain, for example, why Japanese tend to not use many words in remedying offenses and why Americans tend to convey meanings in words and use "aggressive" strategies. Third, these studies do not delve deeply into members' perspectives of their actual experiences. Consequently, there may be subtle nuances that may escape notice in these cross-cultural studies and the concepts used to explain them. To complement the previous findings, it is necessary to investigate, from members' perspectives, the meanings and assumptions regarding how to appropriately remedy problematic situations in each speech community. The ethnography of communication, and speech codes theory in particular, can provide a suitable framework to serve this purpose.

In this study, I analyzed members' talk about their actual experiences of problematic events with members of the other speech community in describing, from their own

perspectives, the meanings, assumptions, and rules regarding remedial episodes. I used the ethnography of communication, and specifically, speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1992, 1997, 2008a, 2008b; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005), as a framework to explicate two speech communities' "speech codes," with a speech code defined as "a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" (Philipsen, 1997, p. 126).

Speech Codes Theory

Speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1992, 1997, 2008a, 2008b; Philipsen et al., 2005) was developed on the basis of a large body of fieldwork about culturally distinctive ways of speaking (i.e. ethnography of speaking) (Hymes, 1974). The theory is concerned with formulating codes in speech communities at particular times and places and, in turn, using those codes to interpret and explain situated communicative conduct (Philipsen et al., 2005). In this study, I aimed to formulate codes used by English- and Japanese-speaking participants in local contexts with the hope that the formulated codes would be helpful in interpreting and explaining situated interactions between members of the two communities.

The six propositions of the theory (Philipsen et al., 2005) worked as the assumptions in this study. The first proposition is that a distinctive speech code is found in each distinctive culture. On the basis of this proposition, I treated American English speakers and Japanese speakers as each sharing a distinctive culture with a distinctive speech code. This assumption, however, does not mean that there are two clear-cut sets of speech codes corresponding to the two speech communities. As the second proposition of the theory states, multiple speech codes are used in any given speech community. Therefore, I assumed that multiple codes coexist within each English- and Japanese-speaking community and, moreover, that there might be overlaps in the codes used by members of the two communities. I aimed to describe subtle differences between the two communities in culturally prominent premises, rules, and meanings involving communicative conduct in remedial episodes.

The third proposition of the theory is that a speech code implicates a culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric. Although I do not explicitly describe each speech community's ways of perceiving persons, society, and strategic actions, the speech codes that I formulate toward the end of the paper imply how the members of each culture view the nature of persons and social relationships.

The fourth proposition states that members use speech codes as a resource to attach meanings to communicative acts and, therefore, that the significance of particular acts is contingent on the codes that they use. It follows, then, that if the prominent speech codes that members use to interpret their own and others' actions differ from one another, then the same communicative acts can have different meanings. I thus assumed that an act that is considered appropriate for remedying problematic events in the Japanese-speaking community can be interpreted as not constituting a remedial episode in the speech codes that English speakers use, and vice versa.

The fifth proposition of the theory concerns where to look (and listen) to discover speech codes and is thus related to the method used in the study. Following the proposition that speech codes are inextricably woven into speaking, I used in-depth interviews as the method of the study, treating the participants' speech as a place to discover their uses of speech codes. In particular, I focused on the instances in which they talked about their assumptions being

violated in their interactions with members of the other speech community. This focus is related to the sixth proposition concerning the discursive force of speech codes in social life. Its position is that although members do not conform to speech codes deterministically, they nonetheless employ them strategically to talk about and evaluate their own and others' communicative conduct. Following this position, I assumed that although both English and Japanese speakers can challenge and resist the speech codes that I explicate here, they nonetheless experience the powerful force of these codes when they are violated. When they talk about (i.e. evaluate and explain) the violated communicative conducts using the codes, their own understanding of the codes is considered to become visible.

Methods

To have access to each speech community's code for remedying problematic situations, I conducted in-depth interviews with Japanese and English speakers and analyzed their talk about their past problematic situations. As the fifth propositions of speech codes theory states, speech codes are woven into speaking. Philipsen et al. (2005, p. 62) suggested that participants' "words and expressions about communicative conduct" are an appropriate place for listening to find evidence of a speech code. By listening carefully to how participants addressed and commented on their problematic situations, I attempted to explicate their views of codes. In the interviews, the participants may not have explicitly stated their views of codes; however, their implicit assumptions could be accessible when they encountered a different system of premises, particularly when their taken-for-granted assumptions were violated (Fitch, 2003).

Over a four-month period, I conducted in-depth interviews with 15 Japanese-speaking and nine English-speaking students at universities in a large U.S. city. At the time of the interviews with the Japanese-speaking participants, their lengths of stay in the United States ranged from one to six years. Six out of nine English-speaking participants had been to Japan, and all were studying the Japanese language. Because I wanted to ask them about their interactions with Japanese speakers, I selected English speakers who had had some interactions with Japanese people. I conducted all interviews with the Japanese participants in Japanese and conducted the interviews with the Americans in English. Each interview lasted about two hours.

At the time of the interviews, I had been in the United States for seven years. As a native speaker of Japanese who had grown up in Japan and was living in the United States, I have had daily interactions with both Japanese and English speakers. These experiences helped me to gain access to the ways in which both view the world. In addition, by interviewing the Japanese speakers in Japanese and the English speakers in English, the participants could express themselves more freely than in their second language. Furthermore, my relative familiarity with the two cultures helped me to interpret their subjective realities from their perspectives.

In the interviews, I asked the participants to recall episodes in which they had encountered problematic interpersonal situations in communication between Japanese and English speakers. I prepared the interview schedule with concrete questions including many examples of problematic events, but I used it flexibly to fit the flow of the conversations with the participants. As a result, I asked open-ended, unstructured questions to

maximize the participants' freedom to remember and describe their experiences in detail (Denzin, 1989).

I transcribed all the audiotaped interviews and compiled about 300 pages of transcripts in Japanese and 130 pages of transcripts in English. I transcribed the interview data word for word because transcription details such as the length of silence were unnecessary for this study. I conducted inductive analyses of the transcripts on the basis of the following question: What are the participants' assumptions, meanings, and rules regarding how to remedy problematic situations? Later, I translated the significant parts of the Japanese transcripts into English.

During the interviews, I asked the participants about the actions that they and others performed in each episode using several terms, such as "make excuses" (*iiwake suru* in Japanese), "justify yourself" (*seitoka suru*), "explain reasons" (*riyu o setsumei suru*), "offer accounts" (*benmei suru*), and "apologize" (*ayamaru*). I relied on the participants to choose names for these actions and accepted their use of these names. As a result of this participant-centered approach, I found that both the Japanese and English speakers related their past experiences most easily to explanation (*setsumei*) and apology (*shazai*) (see Table 1 for details). As Carbaugh (1989) stated, people's use of terms for talk identify a kind of communication practice that is familiar and important to them, and the communication practice identified with these terms is deeply cultural. The participants' choice of words implied that explanation and apology were familiar concepts to both the English and Japanese speakers. Because of the prominence of these terms in the participants' responses, the analysis focused on their views of these two actions.

The excerpts that I quote include both the participants' views of their own actions and their perceptions of the others' actions. My basis for using what Japanese-speaking participants said about English speakers as data (and vice versa) is the assumption that their taken-for-granted views often emerge when commenting on others' actions, especially when their expectations were violated (see Fitch, 2003). By analyzing their statements about how others communicated contrary to their expectations, I aimed to examine their own understanding of how problematic situations are appropriately remedied.

In the following sections, by closely analyzing the interview transcripts, I describe subtle differences in the Japanese- and English-speaking participants' views of how to deal with problematic events. On the basis of this analysis, in the concluding section, I attempt to formulate the two speech communities' speech codes used in remedying problematic situations.

Table 1. Participants' Use of Terms for Remedial Actions in the Interviews.

Japanese terms	English terms	Participants' use of the terms in the interviews
Riyu o setsumei suru *Ayamaru*	Explain reasons Apologize	Both Japanese and English speakers related their experiences most easily to these two actions
Iiwake suru *Seitoka suru*	Make excuses Justify yourself	Some Japanese speakers used *iiwake suru* but primarily in relation to their views of Americans' actions, and they rarely used *seitoka suru;* English speakers mentioned these two actions, but not as often as explaining reasons and apologizing
Benmei suru	Offer accounts	Japanese speakers never used this term; English speakers rarely used this term (they did not appear to use it in their everyday speech)

Japanese Speakers' Views

Denying Causing the Other Discomfort: The Meaning of Detailed Explanations

When I asked the Japanese-speaking participants how they perceived explanations, they talked mainly about the way "Americans" give reasons in problematic situations in which they would rather "apologize." In general, the Japanese participants did not seem to consider it natural to offer an explanation, especially a detailed one, in many interpersonal situations because, as I demonstrate, their assumption is that this action can convey the speaker's attempt to deny responsibility for causing the other party discomfort.

The following excerpt from Nozomi (aged 24, who had studied in the United States for 3 years and 2 months) illustrates the participants' view. In response to a question about how people deal with problematic events, she answered as follows:

Excerpt 1 Nozomi:

N: The Japanese would say "I'm sorry" in … any situation, regardless of whether or not one is at fault …. Also, once people apologize in Japanese, that's it. They don't give reasons because they are afraid that doing so would be the same as giving an excuse. In the U.S., on the other hand, it is often required to explain the processes by which such a mistake has been made …. My boyfriend [who is an American] … would always ask, "Why did you do such a thing?" … regardless of whether I apologized or not. But it's not like excuses – more like the right reasons. If I give reasonable explanations, he would say, "Well, that couldn't be helped." If I did some extraordinary thing because of some stupid reason, he would say, "Don't do it next time, OK?"

In this excerpt, Nozomi expressed her views of contrasting assumptions about giving explanations in the United States and Japan. On the one hand, her view of the American assumption was that an explanation is often required when one does something wrong. Her view of the Japanese assumption, on the other hand, was that an explanation is not offered in situations in which an apology is given. Her comments suggest that in the Japanese assumption, the act of giving reasons may not be compatible with an apology.

Elsewhere, I demonstrated that for Japanese speakers, the act of "apologizing" means that the person acknowledges that the other party has suffered some offense and sends a message that one is responsible for giving him or her discomfort (Kotani, 2002).[2] Nozomi's statement, "The Japanese would say 'I'm sorry' in … any situation, regardless of whether or not one is at fault," is consistent with this meaning of Japanese "apology." This statement suggests that saying "I'm sorry" acknowledges the other's suffering but does not necessarily mean admitting responsibility for causing the wrongdoing. Therefore, in her view, the Japanese would say "I'm sorry" frequently.

Nozomi expressed that giving a reason may be incompatible with Japanese "apology" because "doing so would be the same as giving an excuse." I propose that her statement implies a Japanese assumption that an explanation can be interpreted as denying responsibility for causing trouble for another person (hence, can be interpreted as an excuse). An explanation can therefore be considered incompatible with an "apology" because these two actions send conflicting messages (denying and accepting responsibility for giving another discomfort).

By contrast, her view of the American assumption is that offering reasons is interpreted as "not like excuses – more like the right reasons" and is therefore seen as appropriate. In other words, in her view, offering reasons can more easily be viewed as giving excuses

(thus considered inappropriate) in Japanese, whereas the same action can be interpreted as giving the right reasons (thus considered appropriate) in the United States. In this excerpt, Nozomi is using her views of the two contrasting assumptions to define and draw a boundary between Japanese and Americans.

The following excerpt from Satoshi (aged 26, who had studied in the United States for 2 years) supports my claim that offering explanations can be interpreted as denying responsibility in the Japanese assumption.

Excerpt 2 Satoshi:

S: When something happens, people here in the United States would like to explain reasons even when I don't particularly blame them for being late, like they say something like the train didn't come.

I: Where do you think it's coming from? Is it just a custom, you think?

S: Umm, maybe they are told to do so since they are little as a part of the education. Or maybe even when there is no real reason, they can't stand to be without a clear cause-and-effect relationship. Japanese would just say, "Sorry I'm late," when they are late. Americans would explain instead of apologizing …. Perhaps they want to emphasize at least they are not responsible but someone else is.

In this excerpt, Satoshi expressed his view that, by explaining the reasons, one can claim that he or she is "not responsible but someone else is." This view of explanation (i.e. denying responsibility) is consistent with Nozomi's statement that Japanese "don't give reasons because they are afraid that doing so would be the same as giving an excuse." The two excerpts together support the Japanese assumption that explaining the reasons can mean denying the responsibility (and thus can be interpreted as an excuse) and therefore can be considered incompatible with an "apology" (i.e. accepting responsibility for causing the other trouble). Satoshi, in this excerpt, is using his view of the two contrasting assumptions to draw a boundary between Japanese and Americans.

The next excerpt from Ken (a junior aged 24 who had studied in the United States for 2 years and 10 months) is consistent with Nozomi's and Satoshi's view of the Japanese assumption. Furthermore, this excerpt clarifies what kind of explanation is especially viewed as unnecessary.

Excerpt 3 Ken:

K: [I feel when I deal with Americans that] they give a lot of excuses in situations such as turning down an offer and not being able to keep a promise. It's not necessary to give such excuses. It's enough to say, for example, "Oh, sorry. I went out because I had something to do." But they explain what happened in great detail. That's not necessary. The way they say it or the way they explain things is really in detail …. Once the explanation started, I wouldn't listen to them …. I would think, "Yes, yes, I understand" …. I feel they give unnecessary excuses.

In this excerpt, Ken was describing his view of how Americans act on the basis of what he thought was appropriate. Like Nozomi and Satoshi, Ken's assumption was that it is unnecessary to offer an "excuse" ("not necessary to give such excuses"), whereas saying "sorry" is appropriate in managing some problematic situations. These statements support my previous claims that offering an explanation can be perceived as denying responsibility for causing the other discomfort, while giving an "apology" accepts the responsibility; thus, if the speaker offers both an "apology" and an explanation, the message sent by an "apology"

("I am responsible for causing you trouble") can be undermined by the other message sent by an explanation ("I am not responsible").

This excerpt further clarifies Ken's view of the specific kind of explanation that is unnecessary. He contrasted actions that are "enough" and "unnecessary" in situations such as turning down an offer or being unable to keep a promise. On the one hand, his assumption was that it is sufficient to offer a phrase of "apology" ("Oh, sorry") and a brief explanation ("I went out because I had something to do"). Offering a detailed explanation ("a lot of excuses," "in great detail"), on the other hand, fell outside of his view of appropriate conduct.

Ken's statements imply his assumption that a brief explanation, such as "I went out because I had something to do," does not actively deny the responsibility claimed by an "apology." In other words, by offering a brief explanation, the speaker can still admit that he or she caused the other discomfort. In Ken's view, therefore, it is possible that the two actions, offering an "apology" and providing a brief explanation, both acknowledge the fact that the speaker gave the other trouble. If one explains what happened "in great detail," however, the message conveyed by the explanation may start to have the character of an active denial of responsibility and hence is viewed as incompatible with an "apology." In this excerpt, Ken uses his view of appropriate conduct to draw a boundary between him and Americans ("they").

Showing Goodwill and Inviting to Share Responsibility by "Apologizing"

The next excerpt illustrates what reaction the Japanese-speaking participants expected when they offered an "apology" and a brief explanation to address a relatively minor problem. By analyzing the expected reaction, I consider the Japanese-speaking participants' assumption regarding an "apology" in dealing with a minor offense. The following episode related by Rie (a second-year graduate student aged 28 who had been in the United States for 2 years) reveals her assumption about how she expected her remedial attempt to be received. This excerpt shows that she expected her "apology" to be at least partially rejected rather than accepted in this situation.

Excerpt 4 Rie:

I: Have you had any other incidents?

R: When I was living with a roommate [who is Chinese-American], things were getting worse between us, though neither of us had said so yet. One day, I scorched her oven mitt by mistake. I held something hot with the mitt on, and I saw a line on it. I thought, "Oh, I did it!" I said to her, "I'm sorry. This gets like this, blah blah blah. Sorry." And she just said, "Oh, that's OK." That was it. Then I said, "But I'll replace it. I'll buy a new one." Then she said, "OK." Well, of course that's OK, but … the mitt could still be used. I'm not making an excuse, but it wasn't totally damaged, like burned to rags. So when I said I'd buy a new one, she could have said, "No, no, that's not necessary." Then this could have been over. But she didn't say so.

I: So, when you apologized to her at the beginning, it was like, "No big damage, but I'll apologize for the moment."

R: Yes, yes. I was using the mitt when I was cooking, and it got kind of scorched. I said, "I'm gonna buy another one or something similar." And after I bought one, she just said, "Thank you." Maybe it was because we'd already been on bad terms with each other.

I: So, it's like you shouldn't have apologized.

R: Yeah, like, "What kind of person is this!"

I: What you expected from her was something like, "Oh, no. That's nothing."

R: Yes, yes. I wanted to hear that.

The problematic event that Rie faced was that she scorched her roommate's oven mitt by mistake though she perceived the damage to be not significant, as evidenced by her saying, "it got kind of scorched" and "it wasn't totally damaged." She dealt with this event by engaging in the actions that she saw as appropriate, but the way it unfolded turned out to be dissatisfying to her.

Rie offered an "apology" ("I'm sorry," "Sorry") and an explanation ("This gets like this, blah blah blah."). The roommate offered what seems to be an acceptance of the apology and forgiveness ("Oh, that's OK."). This reaction, however, did not satisfy Rie ("she just said," "That was it"). Instead, Rie wanted to hear something like "Oh, no. That's nothing." In other words, she expected her "apology" to be rejected rather than accepted in this situation.

I would like to consider why Rie viewed her roommate's reaction as inappropriate. Being consistent with the meaning of the Japanese "apology," Rie's "I'm sorry" in this episode can be interpreted as her acknowledging the offense ("Oh, I did it!") and taking some responsibility for causing the other discomfort but not taking full responsibility for causing serious damage. Her "apology" seems to have stemmed from a desire to show good intentions and build rapport with her roommate. She may have viewed this minor offense as an opportunity to rebuild the relationship that had been "getting worse." Offering an "apology" to this small offense could have been her effort to start addressing the more serious relational problem that neither she nor her roommate alone is responsible. Rie's desire would have been realized if her "apology" had been rejected. If her roommate had said, "Oh, no. That's nothing," the responsibility would have been diffused, and it could have been the beginning of showing goodwill to each other. But when the roommate said, "Oh, that's OK," which suggests acceptance and forgiveness, it looked as if Rie was the party who caused damage and her roommate was the one who suffered. The responsibility was clearly placed on Rie; as a result, Rie was dissatisfied ("What kind of person is this!").

In an effort to give her roommate another chance to share responsibility, Rie offered restitution ("But I'll replace it. I'll buy a new one."). If her roommate had refused Rie's offer ("No, no, that's not necessary"), then Rie would have felt satisfied ("Then this could have been over.") because her own responsibility would have been partially denied. However, the roommate did not respond as Rie would have desired. Although the roommate expressed appreciation after Rie's restitution, her response did not meet Rie's expectation ("she just said, 'Thank you'").

Rie's initial "apology" and explanation in addressing this minor offense can then be interpreted as an invitation to share responsibility and as a sign of goodwill directed toward making both parties feel good. In her assumption, the one who received such a sign can return goodwill by rejecting the "apology" and the offer of restitution because doing so enables the locus of responsibility to be diffused and rapport to be built in this situation. Rie's assumption that her "apology" was to be rejected rather than accepted is in clear contrast to Scott's episode below (Excerpt 5), in which he expected clear forgiveness from his friend.

American English Speakers' views

I now describe the English-speaking participants' assumptions about appropriate remedial actions. Essentially, these participants viewed an explanation as a way of shifting the

interpretation of the event and of maintaining relationships directed toward obtaining forgiveness.

Importance of Listening to Explanations and Offering Forgiveness

The first three excerpts related by Scott (a junior aged 20 who has visited Japan) demonstrate his assumptions that the offended party is expected to listen to the explanations given by the offender, show understanding, and offer forgiveness in the end. For him, offering and listening to explanations is a way for both parties to show that they care about the relationship.

In preparation for the interview, Scott wrote brief descriptions of some episodes in which he faced problematic situations with Japanese speakers. The following excerpt is one of the written descriptions that he read during the interview:

Excerpt 5(a) Scott:

S: Recently, I had an experience where I was to meet a [female Japanese] friend in New York City at Times Square. I ended up oversleeping and showing up very late. She had waited the whole time, and I felt very bad. However, she didn't seem to dwell on the issue at all, and after saying "*nani yattenno* [what are you doing?]," it was like it didn't happen. After that was over, whether she actually forgave me I don't know, but it seems like it is forgotten.

When I asked Scott to provide the details of what happened when he finally met his friend, he explained as follows:

Excerpt 5(b) Scott:

S: She walked over and that's all she said to me. It was like, "*Doshitano* [What happened]?" "What were you doing?" Of course I said, "I'm really sorry. I ended up oversleeping." I explained a little bit. And I said, "I actually left some messages. Did you hear them?" And she said, "Oh, well. I just thought … like ten minutes ago and listened to the messages." And then I said, "Well, I kind of thought that you would listen to the messages so you know what happened, because as soon as I woke up I called and left a message." … And then I guess we talked about it for about two or three minutes, and then she was like, "What do you want to do?" …

I: But that conversation ended in two or three minutes?

S: Not very long. And then a few times during the day, I said, "You know, I feel really bad." But she said, "Well, no, it's OK."

The problematic event that Scott experienced was that he was "very late" in meeting his female friend, and he "felt very bad" about it. This event could be offensive to her and could be interpreted as not caring about the relationship. To deny this possible interpretation, he made an effort to remedy the situation, but the way things unfolded turned out to be disappointing to him.

Scott engaged in the actions that he believed to be appropriate: he initially offered an apology ("I'm really sorry") and a brief explanation for why he was late ("'I ended up oversleeping.' I explained a little bit"); he then offered an explanation of what he had done to try to reach her ("I actually left some messages …"). In doing so, he admitted the wrongful nature of the act, accepted responsibility for it, and claimed that he did not mean to offend her because the act was not intentional.

His assumptions about how these actions were to be received were that his friend would care about his reasons, listen to his explanations, and forgive him in the end. These expectations, however, were not met. His statement, "that's all she said to me," implies that his

friend's reaction violated his expectation by not caring enough about his explanation. Furthermore, his statement, "whether she actually forgave me I don't know," indicates that he expected her to forgive him; however, "she didn't seem to dwell on the issue at all," "it was like it didn't happen" and "it seems like it is forgotten." These comments suggest that Scott expected her to at least talk about forgiveness, or maybe yell at him, so that he knew what was occurring.[3] Scott's offering further apologies "a few times during the day" appears to have been an effort for him to search for a clue regarding where the relationship stood by discussing the problem. However, her response was disappointing to Scott apparently because he remained uncertain about the relationship.

In the following excerpt, Scott further describes his interpretation of his friend's reaction:

Excerpt 5(c) Scott:

S: Most people don't [offer and listen to an explanation], I mean Japanese, I don't think they do. It's not important for them. It's like, "It's your life. You are late. It doesn't matter." That's how it seems for Japanese people. Like her, it didn't seem like she cares much why.

For Scott, his friend's reaction suggested that she was indifferent to what happened to him, and he was hurt. His statements reveal his assumption that the acts of offering and receiving explanations are not only appropriate but also essential in rebuilding the relationship with the other person because these actions can send the message "I care." Furthermore, these statements suggest that he found this assumption to be not applicable to "Japanese people." In other words, he was using this assumption in this excerpt as a resource to draw a boundary between him and her (who is "Japanese").

Shifting Interpretation from Offensive to Forgivable: The Meaning of Explanations

Like Scott, other English-speaking participants also suggested that they assumed offering explanations to be an appropriate action in most problematic situations. They regarded this action as a way of shifting the interpretation of the event from offensive to forgivable. This meaning of giving explanations for the participants is consistent with the literature on the function of accounts (Buttny, 1993; Scott & Lyman, 1968) and of remedial work (Goffman, 1971).[4]

In the following two excerpts, Heather (a senior aged 21 who had visited Japan) and Laura (a junior who had never visited Japan) expressed their opinions about explanations in contexts in which someone is late. These excerpts provide English speakers' perspectives of what Satoshi stated in Excerpt 2 regarding how Americans prefer to explain reasons.

Excerpt 6 Heather:

H: I think when somebody is late, the obvious next question might be … "Why were you late?" So … say, "Oh, I was late, I had to do …" Say why you were late before they even get a chance to …. If the person's really angry because you're late, you don't want them to be angry, so you try to hurry up with an excuse. You can explain yourself before they have time to say, "Why were you late?" …. If I were waiting for someone and if they were late and they just said, "Sorry," I would feel like, "Why were you late?" I would expect somebody to … give me an explanation.

Excerpt 7 Laura:

L: It's very normal for Americans to say, "I was late because there was frost on my car" or something and that's it. This way, it comes across as "I wasn't trying to disrespect you."

Both Heather and Laura considered it appropriate to give an explanation (it is an "obvious" next step, and "It's very normal") in dealing with the problematic event of being late. Their statements further reveal their view of the purpose of offering an explanation. Heather's comment that she does not want the other person to become "really angry" and Laura's statement that one can send a message that "I wasn't trying to disrespect you" by offering an explanation imply that being late could be an offensive and disrespectful act. By offering an explanation (e.g. "I was late because there was frost on my car"), however, one can shift the locus of responsibility from oneself to other things, such as the weather. In so doing, one can deny the intentionality of the event and show respect to the other party despite the apparent disrespectful nature of the act. The potentially offensive act of being late, then, carries a new interpretation – it was unavoidable. If the act is unavoidable, it is no longer offensive.

The following excerpt from Jessica (a junior aged 21 who had visited Japan) further clarifies the purpose of giving explanations.

Excerpt 8 Jessica:

I: How about the way people explain something? Like someone did something wrong, one way to deal with that is to apologize, just apologize. The other way is to explain why they did it, what the consequence was. Or you can do both.

J: I do both. If I do something wrong, I explain every single reason why I did it, that I'm sincerely sorry, and I will work on it …. So … I explain and I apologize ….

I: Do you expect other people to do the same?

J: I do. I like it when it happens. And even if they don't explain, I kind of try to figure out why. That makes it easy for me to forgive them if I understand where they are coming from. If I understand why they did what they did, it makes it easy for me to say, "OK. It's fine." It's probably why it's easier for me to hear them explain why they did what they did. Makes it more understandable, makes it easier to forgive.

Jessica's statements reveal that the purpose of offering an explanation for her is to obtain forgiveness from the other person. She stated that she would offer both an apology ("I'm sincerely sorry, and I will work on it") and a detailed explanation ("I explain every single reason") in a problematic situation. An apology is an act of claiming that one was wrong, but by offering an explanation, one can claim that he or she did not intend to commit the offense. By apologizing and explaining, one can claim that the act might have been wrongful but that it was not intentional. If the act is unintentional, it can be interpreted as unavoidable and can thus be forgivable.

Offering an explanation, however, does not guarantee a shift of interpretation. For example, the next excerpt from Mark (a junior aged 21 who had visited Japan) demonstrates a participant's idea about the kind of situation in which an explanation can effectively change how the problematic event is interpreted.

Excerpt 9 Mark:

I: How about explanations? Explaining why you were late or why you couldn't accomplish what you say [you would]. Do you always give explanations when you are sorry?

M: Not always …. The more formal the situation, the less likely that I'm [going to] give an explanation because, this is my personal view, I wonder "Are they thinking, 'He is just making an excuse. Maybe that's not true.'" With someone I'm close with, I feel more comfortable … giving them reason or explanation or excuse … because they are more likely to believe [me]. They know me more.

Table 2. Tentative Formulations of the Two Codes.

Components	Japanese speakers	English speakers
Situations	Attempting to remedy relatively minor offenses in problematic interpersonal situations (e.g. being late, scorching a roommate's oven mitt by mistake)	Attempting to remedy problematic interpersonal situations (e.g. being late for meeting a friend)
Appropriate actions of the offender	Offering an "apology" (an expression of regret, "I'm sorry"); A brief explanation may accompany, but offering a detailed explanation may be considered unnecessary	Explaining how and why the problem occurred and expressing his or her view of the event, hoping that the other believes the explanations
Meanings of the remedial actions	By offering an "apology," one shows concern for the other party who has been suffering and shows a sign of goodwill; Offering a detailed explanation can mean denying causing the other discomfort, and thus can contradict the message sent by an "apology" (admitting causing the other discomfort); Clarifying and pursuing the reasons in detail would not be the parties' central concern	By offering an explanation, one can deny the intentionality of the offense and, by doing so, shift the interpretation of the event from offensive to unavoidable; It is one's attempt to lessen the anger of the other party by implying, "I wasn't trying to disrespect you"; (An apology means admitting responsibility for committing the offense)
Expected reactions of the one who receives the remedy	In minor situations, rejecting the "apology" at least partially to diffuse responsibility and show goodwill in return; Accepting the "apology" and offering explicit forgiveness may be inappropriate because it can mean imposing the burden of responsibility on the other	Caring about how and why the offense occurred; Listening to the explanations, understanding the reasons and circumstances of the event; And, by doing so, being able to more easily forgive the offender
Goals	Showing goodwill; Sharing responsibility; Both parties feeling good	Obtaining understanding and forgiveness; Showing that one cares about the relationships
Factors that can influence appropriate actions	How serious the offense is; How formal the situation is; Nature of the relationship	

Notes: The components, such as situations and goals, emerged in the final stage of the analysis when I was attempting to summarize the results of this study. I did not have these categories when I created the interview questions, during the interviews, or in the analysis. They came out of the inductive process.

According to Mark, offering an explanation involves the risk that others may interpret it as "just making an excuse" and may think "maybe … not true." The strategy for succeeding in the intricate work of explanation, he indicated, is to give an explanation that is likely to be believed by the other person. Mark is comfortable giving reasons to those to whom he is close and those who are likely to believe him but not to those with whom he is not close and who thus may not believe him.

Taking into account this observation, it is safe to claim that for the English-speaking participants, offering an explanation is a way of shifting the interpretation of the event from intentional to unavoidable and thus forgivable. For this function to work, however, the explanation needs to be believable to the other party. Otherwise, it will be regarded as "just" an "excuse."

Conclusions

I have described some of the Japanese- and English-speaking participants' assumptions regarding how to remedy problematic situations by analyzing retellings of episodes from their real lives. Because the amount of data analyzed here is limited and the assumptions may be sensitive to the relational and social context in which each episode took place, these descriptions should be treated as observations based on particular cases. However, because other participants also shared some of these assumptions, I propose these as the two speech communities' speech codes that should be explored further.[5] See Table 2 for the tentative formulations of the two codes.

The differences in the speech codes described here should be treated as very subtle ones discerned by contrasting the salient meanings and assumptions used by English- and Japanese-speaking participants. In particular, the ways in which they attached different meanings to detailed explanations were indeed a matter of degree. Nevertheless, it was true that the participants expressed some degrees of discomfort when they observed the others' communicative acts violating their expectations. It is in such instances that the force of speech codes was felt by the participants. I attempted to capture such instances as a possible manifestation of their uses of speech codes. Future research should continuously investigate speech community members' talk to confirm or modify the speech codes that I proposed here. It would also be fruitful to analyze naturally occurring interactions in which individuals' uses of speech codes can be observed (see Fitch, 2003).

The use of different speech codes described here can be consequential in intercultural encounters. For instance, a Japanese speaker's omission of a detailed explanation or explicit forgiveness can easily be interpreted by his or her English-speaking co-participant as an indication of not caring about the relationship. In fact, in Excerpt 5, Scott was disappointed by his Japanese friend's failure to listen to his explanation and forgive him explicitly. By contrast, an English speaker's provision of a detailed explanation can be interpreted by his or her Japanese co-participant as an attempt to deny responsibility for causing discomfort. In Excerpt 5, for instance, Scott's female Japanese friend may have been disappointed in believing that the detailed explanations offered by Scott indicated his intention to deny that she had been hurt by his offense. Her failure to explicitly honor or reject his explanation may have in turn caused Scott to add even more detailed explanations with the hope of getting the reaction that he expected. However, she may have expected other actions to indicate how much Scott valued his relationship with her. In this way, one's good intention on the basis of his or her uses of the speech codes can be interpreted by the other person as disappointing.

This study has three implications. First, engaging actively in remedial episodes may be appropriate and natural in some speech communities, such as communities of American English speakers, but may be unfamiliar and difficult in others, such as communities of Japanese speakers, if we conceptualize such episodes as requiring verbal negotiations of rules and assumptions. This study suggested that in the speech code that English speakers use, obtaining explicit forgiveness by clarifying the causes and locating responsibility with words may be important, whereas in the speech code that Japanese speakers use, diffusing responsibility and reassuring one another of goodwill may be important without using too many words.

Other ethnographic studies have also documented the speech communities that do not necessarily place high value on using a great deal of verbal expression, such as Native

Americans (Basso, 1970; Carbaugh, 2005; Covarrubias & Windchief, 2009; Wieder & Pratt, 1990), "Teamsterville" (urban working-class Americans) (Philipsen, 1975), and Finns (Carbaugh, 2006). It may be necessary to broaden the notion of remedial episodes to include actions other than the use of words to fit various speech communities' codes for remedying problematic situations. Otherwise, encouraging members to engage in verbal remedial episodes as a way to better deal with problematic intercultural situations would place some people at a disadvantage. In addition, the ideas described in the previous literature, such as the idea that explicit forgiveness is expected and that an account functions to shift the interpretation of an event, may have to be reexamined because they may be culturally specific to speech communities, such as the English speakers in this study.

Second, the use of such concepts as high- and low-context cultures and self- and other-face concerns in previous research may explain some aspects of the remedial strategies in the two speech communities but ignore other important dimensions of members' actual experiences. For instance, the English speakers' views would have previously been explained by noting that they belong to low-context cultures in which meanings are expressed in words and are concerned with protecting self-face, and therefore, they use "aggressive" or "autonomy-preserving" strategies, such as explaining the reasons for the offense. However, a close look at the English-speaking participants' meanings of explanations in this study revealed that they attempted to lessen the anger of the other party and to obtain forgiveness by sending the messages "I wasn't trying to disrespect you" and "I care," which indicate their concerns for others and for the relationship to some degree.

Likewise, the Japanese speakers' views would have previously been explained by stating that they belong to high-context cultures in which meanings are embedded in context, are concerned with other- or mutual-face, use "mitigating" or "obliging" strategies, and therefore consider offering an "apology" and a brief explanation to be appropriate while viewing a detailed explanation as inappropriate. However, the Japanese-speaking participants' meaning of detailed explanations suggested that the reason for their unfamiliarity with this action is not simply their high-context tendency but the belief that the message it sends can contradict the one sent by an "apology." Additionally, their expectation of sharing responsibility and receiving goodwill in return, rather than identifying responsibility and receiving forgiveness, suggests that they are protecting their own face to some degree so that they do not appear entirely responsible. This study suggests the importance of ethnographic studies that describe, from members' viewpoints, subtle nuances that may escape notice in the use of ground concepts.

Third, participants' talk about intercultural problematic situations in their interpersonal experiences can reveal their use of codes as a resource to draw a boundary between speech communities. Philipsen and Coutu (2005) argued that one can study a boundary of a speech community by attending to specific codes in a given community as "a resource that participants themselves use for defining and constituting dimensions of speech community in the particular case" (p. 369). Research has been conducted to describe instances in which participants used codes to exclude the practices that were not consistent with the codes that they used and, by doing so, reinforced the boundaries of the speech community (see e.g. Ho, 2006). Along this line, this study adds a case that demonstrates how members use codes in their talk about intercultural interactions to draw a boundary between two speech communities.

By offering an ethnographic description of the two codes and a cross-cultural comparison of them, this study hopes to contribute a case to the research in the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory as well as contribute to intercultural communication studies. A great deal of research in the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972, 1974) has been conducted in the field of communication to offer "thick" descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of means and meanings of speaking and their situated uses in given speech communities (for reviews and histories, see Carbaugh, 1995; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; Philipsen, 2002, 2010; Philipsen & Carbaugh, 1986; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005). Furthermore, cross-cultural comparisons of these findings have been made (e.g. Braithwaite, 1990; Carbaugh, 1989, 1990, 2005; Katriel, 1985; Philipsen, 1989, 1992), and implications for intercultural communication have been discussed (e.g. Carbaugh, 1989, 1990, 2005; Griefat & Katriel, 1989). Along this line of research, this paper analyzed participants' talk about their intercultural interactions, described the two codes, and made a cross-cultural comparison of these. Thus, the study hopes to contribute a cross-cultural case in the ethnographic explorations of intercultural communication.

With the increase in contacts between different cultures, members of a speech community naturally experience occasional friction with members of other communities while gaining new awareness and insight from them. To deal with such situations, it is imperative to have a deeper understanding of speech codes regarding how to appropriately remedy problematic events in local contexts in various speech communities. Members' talk about experiences in which their assumptions were violated in problematic intercultural situations is a fruitful site for future research to observe speech codes and how they use such codes as a resource to draw boundaries between speech communities.

Notes

1. The concepts that are related to remedial episodes include "accounts" (Scott & Lyman, 1968), "aligning actions" (Stokes & Hewitt, 1976), "alignment episodes" (Hall, 1991), "alignment talk" (Morris, 1991), "disclaimers" (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975), "motive" talk (Mills, 1940), "quasi-theories" (Hall & Hewitt, 1970; Hewitt & Hall, 1973), "remedial interchanges" (Goffman, 1971), "social accountability" (Buttny, 1993), and "social confrontation episodes" (Newell & Stutman, 1988). I use the concept of remedial episodes broadly to include these features of talk.
2. I use the term "apology" (and "apologizing") with quotation marks in this paper to express the Japanese speakers' meaning of the action so that it can be distinguished from the English speakers' meaning of an apology.
3. This interpretation was suggested by one of the reviewers. I appreciate the anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on other parts of the paper as well.
4. Buttny (1993) explained accounts as "the use of language to interactionally construct preferred meanings for problematic events" so that another person's negative evaluations can be transformed. Goffman (1971) stated that "remedial work" functions "to change the meaning that otherwise might be given to an act, transforming what could be seen as offensive into what can be seen as acceptable" (p. 109).
5. For the formulations of codes in general terms on the basis of particular expressions in the participants' experiences, see Philipsen's (1992) explication of "Teamsterville" and "Nacirema" codes and Carbaugh's (2006) description of Finnish code.

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Notes on Contributor

Mariko Kotani (PhD Temple University) is a specially appointed associate professor in the Graduate School of Intercultural Communication at Rikkyo University. She uses conversation analysis and the ethnography of communication to study how participants in talk-in-interaction deal with problematic situations across cultures. Correspondence to: Mariko Kotani, Graduate School of Intercultural Communication, Rikkyo University, 3-34-1 Nishi-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo 171-8501 Japan. Email: mkotani@rikkyo.ac.jp

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