Apology and Forgiveness in Korean EFL School Texts
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Since the ability to use language to mend relationships is part of communicative competence, a complete language teaching curriculum ought to include the functions of apology and forgiveness. Several studies have indicated that classroom instruction in apologies can lead to improved pragmatic performance (Rose 2005).

What needs to be taught

Several contextual factors may affect the type of language that is appropriate for an apology: the social distance between speakers, the power relationship between speakers, and the severity of the offense (Davila 2004). Social distance between speakers has to do with how well speakers know one another. If speakers are co-workers, there is more social distance than if they are family members, but less social distance than if they are strangers. The power relationship concerns which speaker has more power. An upward apology (*student to teacher, employee to boss*) will be different from a downward apology (*teacher to student, boss to employee*) or from an apology among equals (*siblings, classmates, coworkers*).

Of course, some offenses are more severe than others. At times, speakers apologize when they have not personally done anything wrong ("I'm sorry. You seem to have the wrong number.") Some offenses are mild ("I'm sorry. I'm not very good with names") and others are more severe ("I owe you an apology. I lost the book you lent me.")

If these contextual factors are not taken into consideration, then the apologizer risks being misinterpreted. Over-apologizing for minor offenses ("I'm so sorry. It's all my fault.") might come off as insincere. Conversely, under-apologizing for a serious offense ("You broke my cellphone!" "Oh. Sorry about that.") may appear rude. Since pragmatic errors of this type could undermine the reconciliation process, it is important that students learn to associate apology forms with appropriate contexts.

Response to the apology

Of course, an apology alone is not enough to mend a relationship. Successful reconciliation involves both the apologizer and the injured party. The injured party should also express a desire for reconciliation. Although apology is frequently covered in language courses, Smith and Carvill (2000) suggest that some textbooks may lack expressions for forgiveness.

On the other hand, identifying expressions for forgiveness is not always straightforward. Unlike accusation or apology, forgiveness is not a *speech act*: Where an apology is realized in the expression "I'm sorry", forgiveness is not accomplished by making a declaration such as "I forgive you." Someone could say the words "I forgive you" without internally forgiving the other person. In fact the expression "I forgive you" could aggravate tension in the relationship by implying that the speaker is a judge over the other person.

Nevertheless, people do respond to apologies, and their responses may indicate either continued hostility or a desire to mend the relationship. Appropriate responses to apology are also worthwhile targets for language students.

The power of the textbook in South Korea

South Korea is well-known for its exam driven culture. Because of the immense pressure to teach to the test, Korean public school teachers tend to adhere to the content of their textbooks, and generally speaking, if it isn't in the text, it isn't taught. Despite the limitations on supplementing, I believe it is possible for teachers to use the opportunities present in the curriculum to teach the language of conflict resolution.

To see what opportunities are in public school textbooks, I looked at 20 Korean middle and high school EFL textbooks. My research questions included:

(1) Are apology and forgiveness included at different levels of the Korean public school English curriculum?

(2) Do these situations reflect differing levels of offense severity, power, and distance?

Method

For each instance of apology in the textbook (or tapescript), I rated the severity of the offense, the social distance and the power relationships of the speakers, and the type of response to the apology, if any. I distinguished four levels of offense severity:

- none (when there is no harm done, or the apologizer is not at fault)
- minor (when the injured party is unlikely to be angry)
- moderate (when the injured party is likely to be somewhat angry)
- severe (when the injured party is likely to be angry.)

Wherever possible, I identified the following three levels of social distance:

- Close (friends, family)
- Familiar (co-workers, classmates)
- Strangers (waiter-customer, people on a street

I also recorded three types of power relationships:

Up   (student to teacher, child to parent)

Equal   (friend to friend, sister to brother, customer to receptionist)

Down   (teacher to student, boss to employee, parent to child)

There was not always enough contextual information to determine offense severity, social distance or power relationships. Sometimes text illustrations provided some additional context. In other places, phrases for apology or response were provided in a list rather than a dialog.

In addition to the context surrounding each apology, I looked at the response to the apology. A large number of dialogs ended with the apology and omitted the response. Other dialogs included one of the following types of apology:

- <u>Topic change:</u>   the injured party changes the subject after the apology
- <u>Minimization:</u>   the injured party says there's no problem (*It's okay. Don't worry about it.*)
- <u>Forgiveness:</u>   the injured party directly says "I forgive you."
- <u>Acceptance of offer:</u>   if the apologizer offers to make reparations, then the injured party accepts the offer.
- <u>Affirmation:</u>   the injured party affirms the relationship or expresses a desire for continued contact
- <u>Rejection of the apology:</u>   the injured party indicates continued anger or a desire to discontinue the relationship.

Analysis

Since phrases for apology are included on the list of sentences that forms the backbone of the national English curriculum, it is no surprise that each textbook series investigated included apology, sometimes devoting an entire unit to the topic. The texts contained on average 11 apologies per book.

Most of the dialogs in both middle and high school textbooks featured conflicts that were not especially severe. At the middle school level, most dialogs either had no offense at all or a minor offense. At the high school level, there were more moderate offenses and even a few severe offenses.

In general, high school textbooks used a more

diverse range of relationships than middle school textbooks. At the middle school level, more than half of the dialogs (53%) were between friends or family members. At the high school level, there were more dialogs among acquaintances such as classmates or coworkers. Both levels primarily showed apology among equals (72% at the middle school level and 63% at the high school level), but the high school textbooks also included a substantial number of upward apologies (10%). Only three dialogs displayed a downward apology by a person in a position of power. Lack of context made it difficult to determine the social distance and power relationships between the speakers in nearly a quarter of the dialogs at both the middle (23%) and high school (24%) levels.

The books frequently omitted a response to the apology. 53% of the apologies at middle school level and 59% at high school level did not include a response. In about half of the dialogs where a response was given, the response minimized the offence with an expression such as "It's okay" or "No problem." Rejection of the apology was signaled in phrases such as "You're always late. Why can't you change?" The injured party often changed the topic after the apology with a phrase like "Let's meet after school." This type of response may indicate the offense was not serious and the speaker wants to mend the relationship.

Potential shortcomings in the textbooks

Although apology was addressed in the textbooks that I investigated, I felt that there were several weaknesses in the presentation. The first weakness was that there was often little or no context provided for an expression. For example, one textbook lists the following expressions:

> *I owe you an apology.*
> *I can't tell you how sorry I am.*
> *I am sorry.*
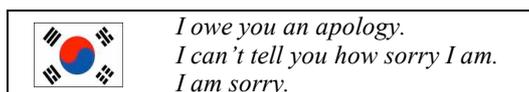
In this excerpt, different forms of apology are listed together as though they are interchangeable, even though some of the apologies are clearly more elaborate than others. Since the phrases appear without any context, the textbook fails to indicate what kind of situation would be appropriate for each expression.

Another problem is that the apologies that are contextualized lack contextual variety. Since most of the offenses were minor, students have few opportunities to see how apology works when serious offense is involved. The books rarely showed apology from a person in a position of power. Since downward apology is uncommon in the Korean language (Kim, H., 2007), showing the possibility of apology to a person with lower status could raise cross-cultural awareness.

A third weakness was that the dialogs sometimes ended with an apology and omitted a response. Not only does this leave the situation dramatically unresolved, it also squanders an opportunity to demonstrate the language that is used for reconciliation.

Enhancing the textbook

When a list of apologies is presented out of context, the teacher might ask students whether apologies would be appropriate in different situations. The teacher may provide examples with varying degrees of social distance: "Could you say this to a stranger? To your best friend?" The teacher may also show examples with different power relationships: "Could you say this to your teacher? What about your younger sister?" Additionally, the contexts could demonstrate different levels of offense severity: "What if you are apologizing because you stepped on someone's foot? Or because you can't come to the party on Friday? Or because you insulted your friend?" This technique helps students appreciate the importance of matching language to the situation.

In any dialog that features apology, the teacher may draw attention to the interpersonal dynamics. Consider this dialog:

Man:	*I wanted my steak medium rare. Look, this is well done.*
Waiter:	*I'm terribly sorry. I'll change it for you.*
Man:	*It's OK. I'll have this. I am so hungry.*

The teacher might ask students whether the man had really forgiven the waiter. Drawing attention to characters' feelings not only has the potential to make dialogs more dramatic and entertaining for students, it also signals that interpersonal relationships are worth thinking about.

The teacher may highlight the interpersonal dynamics in a dialog by suggesting alternative lines. For example, after reading the dialog above, the teacher might ask, "If we changed the man's last line to, 'Thanks, that would be great,' would the waiter feel better or worse?"

If the response to the apology is missing, the teacher might ask the students to predict the next line of the dialog. Students may also predict what happens after the response. This could help them determine whether the response to the apology is successful in bringing about reconciliation.

The national curriculum in Korea provides many opportunities for teachers to address conflict resolution. I hope that teachers will use their materials effectively to draw attention to the process of apology and reconciliation.

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This article is based on a talk by the author at the Korea TESOL 2009 conference in Seoul. For details or to access the data charts for this article, contact:

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