

Upgrading and Downgrading Accounts as Indirect Apology Strategies

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Abstract – The article marks such indirect apology strategies as **Upgrading Accounts; Downgrading Accounts; An Offer of Repair; A Promise of Forbearance; swearing; interjections *Oops!*; *oh no!*** Such strategies as **Upgrading (face-threatening for a speaker) and Downgrading (face-saving for a speaker) accounts are analyzed in detail. Using a language corpus, the realizations of the following speech acts are studied: admission of guilt, self-criticism, confession about guilt consciousness (Upgrading Accounts); explanation (Downgrading Accounts). In addition to indirect apology strategies used separately, various combinations of these strategies are identified. Also, hearer’s reaction to indirect apology strategies is studied, which can be: the negation of speaker’s guilt; the acceptance of the apology; the rejection to accept an apology; hearer’s apology (in response to speaker’s apology).**

Keywords – expressive, speech act, speech formula, language corpus, face-threatening strategy, face-saving strategy, speaker, hearer

I. INTRODUCTION

In the framework of speech act theory, two types of speech acts (hereafter – SA) are distinguished: direct and indirect. Whereas a direct SA refers to the situation when a speaker (hereafter – S) means exactly what he says, an indirect SA is a speech action in which one speech act is performed indirectly by means of another one. The phenomenon of indirect speech acts was first researched by Gordon and J. Lakoff [1] whereas the term was introduced later by Heringer [2].

Traditionally, in the field of pragmatics, indirect speech acts are regarded as “more polite”, which goes back to Brown and Levinson’s interpretation of indirectness as a means of avoiding imposition. Brown and Levinson associate direct speech acts with urgency and lack of attention to face [3]. Leech argues that indirectness as a more polite strategy increases the degree of optionality for the hearer (hereafter – H) [4].

At the same time, the approach described above can be characterized as highly culture-specific. Wierzbicka links indirectness in English with the concept of privacy, which she describes as characteristically Anglo-Saxon [5]. In other cultures, indirect speech acts can be viewed as dishonest [6] and waste of time [7], whereas imperative constructions can serve as polite requests [8, 9].

The utterances assigned to apology strategies “vary greatly in their pragmatic forces across contexts and cultures” [10]. Different cultures have their own distinct concepts of apologizing. Ogiermann mentions that “people with an Anglo-Saxon cultural background might be more reluctant to allow

threatening their negative face, more likely to apologise indirectly or avoid the confrontation” [Ibid.]. Hence, another feature of English apologies: a strict preference for formulaic realisations, even in indirect apology strategies.

Ogiermann mentions that “routine formulae can generally be regarded as less face-threatening to both interlocutors than individual expressions as they provide them with pre-patterned conversational turns facilitating smooth communication in accordance with social conventions” [Ibid.]. For example, the English expressions of self-criticism generally consist of “more routinised and less self-humiliating formulations” [in comparison with the Russian and Polish languages] [Ibid.].

II. INDIRECT APOLOGY STRATEGIES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

In addition to traditional apology formulae in English (*sorry, forgive me, I/we apologise, pardon, I regret*), there is a wide range of other formulations to express apology. Olshtain and Cohen suggest the following strategies:

- An Acknowledgement of Responsibility (eg., *I was wrong*);
- An Explanation (eg., *I didn’t mean it*);
- An Offer of Repair (eg., *Let me do something for you*);
- A Promise of Forbearance (eg., *I’ll never do it again*) [11].

In Ogiermann’s classification, an Acknowledgement of Responsibility and Explanation are referred to as Upgrading and Downgrading Accounts. Upgrading Accounts can be characterized as face-threatening to the speaker and include SA of guilt admission (eg., *It is my fault*), self-criticism (eg., *It was stupid*), S’s confession about guilt consciousness (eg., *I feel bad about it*). Downgrading Accounts can be characterized as face-saving to S and denying/minimizing responsibility. Also, Ogiermann suggests Concern for Hearer strategy (eg., *are you OK?*) [10].

In our opinion, more strategies can be included in this list since some swearwords as well as some interjections (eg. *Oops!; oh no!*) can have an apology function, so the authors suggest the following classification:

- Upgrading Accounts;
- Downgrading Accounts;
- An Offer of Repair;
- A Promise of Forbearance;
- Swearing (eg., *Damn!*);
- Interjections *Oops!; oh no!*

Concern for Hearer is not included because there are a small number of situations where it can be used. Therefore the authors do not regard it as one of the main strategies.

A necessary component of indirect apology speech acts distinguishing them from other speech acts not related to apology, is an offense or a negative event as a result of which S is supposed to be guilty and owing the addressee an apology. However, in contrast to a direct apology, S doesn't use the conventional speech formulae.

Although indirect speech acts are undoubtedly more difficult to study than direct speech acts because of their diversity and identification problem, the tendency for using routinised expressions in the English language gives an opportunity for analyzing these strategies through language corpora, by querying "standard" indirect apology expressions. In other words, indirect apology strategies are possible to study in the same way as the conventional apology speech formulae.

Despite the fact that there are numerous works devoted to ISA ([12–14], etc.), still there is no detailed description of indirect apology speech act realizations in the English language on the basis of language corpus material.

The size of this work does not allow fully considering all the strategies mentioned above. The aim of this paper is to give a general analysis of such indirect apology strategies as Upgrading and Downgrading Accounts. Although these strategies are considered to be opposite, they can go together as well as be combined with other strategies depending on the context.

With the help of Corpus of Contemporary American English, the authors studied about 250 realizations of the following speech acts:

Upgrading Accounts:

- Admission of Guilt;
- Self-criticism;
- S's confession about guilt consciousness.

Downgrading Accounts:

- Explanation.

To distinguish indirect apology speech acts from those not related to the apology (For example: the utterance *My family is imploding, and it's my fault* cannot be regarded as an apology), the method of context analysis was used.

III. ANALYSIS

1. Upgrading Accounts

A. Admission of Guilt

An Admission of Guilt is directly related to an Acknowledgement of Responsibility, which is an important component of an apology. Nevertheless, expressions with an Admission of Guilt do not refer to the conventional apology formulae in the English language.

An Admission of Guilt can be either S's initiative or a response to an accusation. In cases when it is not stimulated by an accusation, S usually finds it necessary to give some commentaries:

Negative action (hereafter – NA) + [admission of guilt + clarification]

"I think he's a bit tipsy. " " Jesus. " Christine rolled her eyes. " Hey, " Keith said. "It's my fault,I make a stiff one. " " That's what all the boys say, " Christine whispered and poked Keith's shoulder. He laughed politely, but really, there was no need to talk like that. [15]

S declares himself to be responsible for making a colleague drunk.

NA + [admission of guilt + self-criticism + clarification]

"You poor thing, "he said with a sigh. "It's my fault, isn't it? I should have remembered the fragile nature of the female mind. I've been working you too hard. You'd be far happier with a less demanding employer." [Ibid.]

In this extract, S reproaches himself for his employee's bad nervous condition.

In cases when S's admission of guilt is preceded by an accusation, there is often no need in S's additional clarification of the guilt.

NA – [accusation] – [admission of guilt]

(CROSSTALK) BECKEL# First of all, can I explain to the audience? I want to explain to the audience, you asked for this, you guys asked for it, now you're going to get it. That selectively edited piece that you saw, the first part of that is, traffic and bridges -- roads and bridges. That you didn't build. Those business people did not build them. BOLLING# All right. It's my fault. [Ibid.]

In this extract, S considers himself responsible for not keeping promises. However, he doesn't find it necessary to give any commentaries since his guilt has been already described.

However, S's admission of guilt in response to an accusation can be accompanied with other indirect apology strategies.

NA – [accusation] – [admission of guilt + self-criticism]

"I have to get back, but I wanted to show you one more thing," he said. "Which is why I was hoping you'd have gotten here a little early?" "It's my fault., "Edie said. " I'm hopeless, really. " [Ibid.]

In this extract, S emphasizes his guilt for being late by means of self-criticism.

NA – [accusation] – [admission of guilt + promise for forbearance]

ROSSEN One morning, one school zone, so many speeders. A wake up call for all of us. WOMAN-#2# I know It's my fault.. I did it and for sure that is not going to happen again.[Ibid.]

What is interesting, in some cases accusation can be followed by an Admission of Guilt coupled with Explanation, which is a guilt-minimizing strategy.

NA – [accusation] – [admission of guilt + self-criticism + explanation + intensifier (hereafter – Magn.)]

Instead of Joe Biden -- and I said this earlier, he has to man up and say, I made a mistake. I shouldn't have used that reference. It's a bad reference. Look, I didn't mean it. Clearly, I didn't mean it. [Ibid.]

In this hypothetical situation, S admits his responsibility and criticizes himself for an offense, but, at the same time, he assures the addressee that he didn't have bad intentions.

B. Confession about guilt consciousness

Confession about guilt consciousness is another way to express apology indirectly. It is related to an expression of regret, which is also an important component of apology.

NA + [confession about guilt consciousness]

The helper recalled what W. F. had let slip the week before, when people had hurled themselves at him, wrenching blankets out of his arms. And how he chased them away. # " I'm ashamed of myself, " he had said. [Ibid.]

In this extract, S expresses remorse because of his destructive actions.

+ Magn.

Bucher apologized to police and his neighbors at the Fox Run RV Park, 9000 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, during a hearing before Multnomah County Circuit Court Eric Bloch. # " I just want to say I'm ashamed of myself of my actions, very ashamed of my actions, " Bucher said. "... I want to thank Jesus Christ for not letting me get killed that day. " [Ibid.]

S emphasizes his apology by repeating the words of remorse and using the adverb "very".

NA + [confession about guilt consciousness + clarification]

" I'm ashamed that I have to revive dark memories and reopen old wounds, " said South Korea's former ruler Chun Doo Hwan, finally breaking the silence that followed his retirement in early 1988. [Ibid.]

In this extract, S emphasizes his apology by explicit description of the guilt.

Confession about guilt consciousness can also go together with self-criticism:

NA + [confession about guilt consciousness + self-criticism + clarification]

Texas Democrat Jim Wright, who supported the bill as House majority leader, now calls it a " grotesque error " and says of the scandal: " I'm ashamed. I wish I had seen it coming and organized to stop it from happening. But I didn't. [Ibid.]

Also, confession about guilt consciousness can be followed by an Explanation:

NA + [confession about guilt consciousness + explanation]

GOLDEN# I've seen a video a couple of times. And it's not me in the video. You know, it's not me. It was hard to watch. I'm ashamed of myself. And what's taken me so long to talk to anybody is because I've been scared. I lost my job. I don't have

a lot of resources behind me, you know. So I was trying -- I didn't know what to do. [Ibid.]

S expresses remorse because of his destructive actions, but at the same time he tries to explain the reasons of his misbehavior.

C. Self-Criticism

"Although expressions of self-criticism do not explicitly acknowledge responsibility, they are considered to be highly face-threatening", Ogiermann says [10].

NA + [self-criticism]

LONG# Yeah. I'm not playing a seventies porn star like you assumed, which is insulting to seventies porn stars, NATALIE-MORALES# That's right. WILLIE-GEIST# It is. JUSTIN-LONG# I shouldn't have said that. [15]

In this extract, S reproaches himself for an incorrect statement.

NA + [self-criticism + clarification]

she'd get a good old-fashioned electric shock treatment and then she'd be fine to come home and cook cook cook for everybody. " " Whatever it takes, I guess. " " I shouldn't have said that, about your mom. I mean, what do I know? " Tim kept silent. She said, " That doesn't necessarily mean it was wrong. " [Ibid.]

In addition to reproaching herself, S finds it necessary to explain why she considers herself to be wrong.

NA + [self-criticism + explanation]

Drop it, Kendra. " # She stiffened. " I'm not a cat, and I'm uneasy about the idea that my being curious about what you're doing now could cause me to be killed. " # " Of course it couldn't. I shouldn't have used that term. " His smile was full of charm. " I was merely trying to shift you away from interrogating me. You always were persistent. It's really much better for you that we don't discuss it" [Ibid.]

To minimize the guilt, S combines Self-Criticism with Explanation, which can help him to save his face.

NA + [self-criticism + promise for forbearance + explanation]

" Lucy, " he said hoarsely, desperate to connect with her again on this one thing. He took a step toward her and squatted. " Baby, we can fix this, " he reasoned. The irony was that there was nothing repairable about any of this. " I know you're scared, and I don't blame you. I shouldn't have hit you, but - " Ed reminded himself that he hadn't meant to hurt Lucy. " It won't happen again, " he promised. It felt as empty as it sounded. " There's a lot that you don't know or understand. I've been under a great deal of pressure lately". [Ibid.]

After hitting his girlfriend, S first blames himself, but then he tries to minimize his guilt by explaining the circumstances.

2. Downgrading Accounts

A. Explanation

The strategy of explanation can be defined as “self-justification by explaining the source of the offence as caused by external factors over which the speaker has no control” [10]. However, in many situations S cannot completely deny their responsibility but try to minimize it by saying that there was no intention to offend H (*I didn't mean it*).

NA + [explanation]

"Speaking of kids, will you be allowed seeing Emma? " She winced at her tone. David didn't deserve her anger, though he seemed to be trying to irritate her. "I didn't mean it like that. [3]

S apologizes indirectly for a negative speech action saying that she didn't want to sound rude.

Explanation is often preceded by an accusation.

NA – [Accusation] – [Explanation]

Now when you scramblin' out on the street in da January winter and the hawk is talkin' to you with NO money and NO prospects of money anytime soon, now that there is some pressure. DELACROIX I didn't mean itto sound like that. [Ibid.]

+ Magn.

" Sorry, I I didn't mean it. " " Well, I didn't mean itthat way, " she says. " Really I didn't. " I should tell her how often I have gone to the phone in recent years to call my father for the missing answer, only to remember halfway through dialing that he is no longer there. [Ibid.]

S intensifies the utterance by means of doubling her words.

NA – [Accusation] – [Explanation + Clarification]

" You know there are a ton of women who board, right? " # Heat rose to my cheeks. " Yeah. I know. I didn't mean itlike that. I just meant that we might draw in some new female readership because most of the Ridge Rangers are men that's all. [Ibid.]

In this extract, S clarifies that words that are regarded by H as offensive.

[accusation] – [explanation + self-criticism]

PETRA: Are you defending her? So you two are an item now, huh? Remember what you called her? Naive? Not the sharpest knife...? # KRISTINE: Did you? # MORTEN: No... well, once, maybe, before I got to know you. I didn't mean it. It was stupid. [Ibid.]

In this extract, Downgrading and Upgrading strategies are combined: first, S affirms H that he didn't mean what he said but then criticizes himself.

Also, Explanation can go with an Offer of Repair.

[accusation] – [explanation + offer of repair]

I look at the bubbles rising in the pitcher so I won't see the teacher's face. " That way of making unsophisticated people out to be freaks. " # " Oh, come on, I didn't mean it that way, " she says, looking honestly contrite. " Anyway, I'll return you to your program. The town.Its isolation and stuff. "[Ibid.]

In addition to his explanation, S offers to make amends.

[accusation] – [explanation + clarification + promise of forbearance]

Hector realizes he has broken something precious and in their circumstances infinitely fragile and irretrievable. He feels like an oaf. He calls after the Boy. # # HECTOR # Come back... I didn't mean it... it was a joke... you come back... she's still here... I won't say anything... [Ibid.]

Although S tries to excuse himself, he also promises that he will change his behavior.

Also, cases where the offender accuses the victim were identified:

[accusation] – [explanation + accusation]

He was crying, couldn't stop. He'd tell Irene to make the call. Wouldn't tell her who it was he'd hit. Then he'd drive back to Jody, Hey you know I didn't mean it why the hell didn't you get out of the way I was just kidding around then the ice, why the hell didn't you get out of the way goddamn you you did it on purpose didn't you... [Ibid.]

In this extract, a young man who accidentally hit a girl by his car first declares that he didn't have such intention, but then he accuses her saying that she purposely let him hit her.

Reaction

H's reaction to an indirect apology can be different, but in general, it should be noted that Upgrading Accounts strategies are accepted more positively.

Although in a big number of cases an Admission of Guilt is stimulated by an accusation, there are cases when S's admission of guilt, on the contrary, is argued:

NA + [admission of guilt] – [negation] – [self-criticism] – [admission of guilt]

Zamba cheeped at her, but she turned her back and began to run alongside Pap through the crops toward home. # It's my fault " she said. "No," Pap said. "I should have let you take him to the wild" "Do you think you could have stopped me if I had decided to do it? I am the one to blame, for being too soft-hearted. I never wanted you to get hurt, mija. I knew losing Zamba would hurt you. But sometimes you must hurt those you love to save them from a greater pain. "[Ibid.]

In this extract, S considers herself to be responsible for an accident, which can be perceived as an equivalent of an apology. However, the addressee does not agree with S's admission of guilt, and when she continues to insist on her responsibility, the addressee finally declares himself to be guilty.

NA – [accusation] – [admission of guilt + promise of forbearance] – [acceptance]

ROSSEN# One morning, one school zone, so many speeders. A wake up call for all of us. WOMAN-#2# I know it's my fault. I did it and for sure that is not going to happen again. JEFF-ROSSEN#Lesson learned. WOMAN-#2# Yes. [Ibid.]

In this extract, H (policeman) accepts S's apologies for breaking the rules.

It is not rare when an Explanation as an indirect apology strategy is followed by a refusal to accept S's apologies.

NA + [explanation] – [rejection]

"Speaking of kids, will you be allowed seeing Emma?" She winced at her tone. David didn't deserve her anger, though he seemed to be trying to irritate her. "I didn't mean it like that. " # " Yes, you did, " David said.[Ibid.]

H disagrees with S's statement that she didn't had the intention to offend him, thus, H refuses to accept S's apologies.

NA – [accusation] – [explanation] – [rejection]

Now when you scramblin' out on the street in da January winter and the hawk is talkin' to you with NO money and NO prospects of money anytime soon, now that there is some pressure. DELACROIX I didn't mean it to sound like that. 41. MANTAN That's the way it came out.[Ibid.]

In this extract, H rejects S's attempt to minimize his guilt.

Nevertheless, there are cases when an explanation is accepted in a positive way.

[accusation] – [explanation] – [acceptance]

" Unfortunately the rumor is spreading around the school. It would be very bad if news of this incident reached the news media. " " I didn't mean it, " I said. # " Of course not, " Mr. Dalton said. " But that won't matter.[Ibid.]

S apologizes for provoking rumor which can spoil the reputation of the school where he works while the principal trusts that S didn't have bad intentions.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. In the English language, there is a strong preference for formulaic realizations, which also concerns indirect speech acts. This tendency makes it possible to study indirect apology speech acts by means of language corpuses.

2. The following indirect apology strategies can be marked: Upgrading Accounts; Downgrading Accounts; an Offer of Repair; a Promise of Forbearance; swearing; interjections **Oops!**; **oh no!**

3. Upgrading and Downgrading Accounts strategies can be combined with other strategies as well as go together. In a significant number of cases, several indirect apology strategies are used as an equivalent to a direct apology speech act. Also, they can be accompanied by a clarification or an intensifier.

4. In addition to indirect apology strategies used separately, the following schemes referring to Upgrading and Downgrading Accounts have been identified: [admission of guilt + self-criticism]; [admission of guilt + promise for forbearance]; [admission of guilt + self-criticism + explanation]; [confession about guilt consciousness + self-criticism]; [confession about guilt consciousness + explanation]; [self-criticism + explanation]; [self-criticism + promise for forbearance + explanation]; [explanation + self-criticism]; explanation + offer of repair]; [explanation + accusation].

5. The following reactions to indirect apology strategies were identified: negation of S's guilt; acceptance of the apology; rejection to accept an apology; H's apology (in response to S's apology).

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