Effectiveness of EXCUSES in Japanese Business Context: Accounts as Conflict-Management Strategies

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of excuses implemented in a Japanese organization setting and reveals the kind of situations where excuses are perceived negatively. Excuses are one type of remedial strategies called accounts, which play a significant role in managing conflict. In excuses, a speaker explains a failure to mitigate the hearer’s judgment of the speaker’s causal responsibility. Although previous studies find both positive and negative effects, excuses are generally identified as mitigating accounts, and little research has explored what factors figure in contradictory outcomes. The goal of this study is to investigate in what kinds of Japanese business situations excuses are effective mitigating strategies, from the perspective of an account-receiver, and what factors contribute to the negative perception of excuses. In doing so, it examines the cultural norms of a Japanese organization regarding account-giving. This study focuses on the account-giving context when the harm that has resulted from a failure is perceived as mild and when accounts are given by a subordinate person to a superior person.

Interviews and role-plays were conducted in this study. Data were collected from two separate sets of participants, twenty participants in interviews and six participants in role-plays. All of the participants were native speakers of Japanese and had working experience in a Japanese company. Participants read conflict scenarios and were asked to
imagine that they were an account-receiver in the scenario in interviews and that they were an account-giver in role-plays. Previous studies have identified CONCESSIONS to be the most mitigating form of account. However, the present study finds that the effectiveness of EXCUSES differs depending on the characterizations of a failure, that is, when an account-receiver is not able to identify how a failure happened, an account-receiver prefers hearing EXCUSES to CONCESSIONS. In this context, an account-receiver is likely to perceive EXCUSES positively. However, when an account-receiver judges that a failure was due to the account-giver’s wrongdoing, an account-receiver does not wish to hear EXCUSES. In this context, EXCUSES will likely be perceived negatively. The results demonstrate that EXCUSES can be both mitigating and aggravating accounts, depending on the nature of the failure.

This study also identifies situation types in which CONCESSIONS are ineffective, that is, when utterances of CONCESSIONS are too short. Excessively simplistic accounts tend to lead account-receivers to evaluate account-givers to be lacking sincerity. In order to avoid such a negative evaluation, an account-giver is expected to add to or modify utterances, with such elements as 1) admitting one’s error; 2) identifying briefly what went wrong and explaining how the account-giver will avoid repeating the same blunder; and 3) addressing the failure promptly. The results of this study suggest that there are language-pedagogical opportunities related to account-giving in the context of Japanese organizations. It provides sample practice using performed culture approach.
Dedicated to my family for their love and support
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Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ v
Vita ................................................................................................................................. viii
List of Tables .................................................................................................................. xiii
List of Figures ................................................................................................................ xv
Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................. 1
  1.1 Goals of the Study ................................................................................................. 1
  1.2 Culture, Language, and Performance .................................................................. 4
  1.3 Genres .................................................................................................................... 8
  1.4 Genres and Performed Culture ............................................................................ 12
Chapter 2: Literature Review ....................................................................................... 17
  2.1 Defining Accounts ............................................................................................... 17
  2.2 Weiner’s Attribution Theory ............................................................................... 19
    2.2.1 Three Dimensions of Causality ................................................................... 20
    2.2.2 The Attributional Process ............................................................................ 21
  2.3 The Basic Architecture of Account-giving ......................................................... 24
  2.4 Types of Account ................................................................................................. 28
  2.5 Are EXCUSES Mitigating Accounts? ................................................................ 34
  2.6 Influence of Situational Factors on Accounts ................................................... 38
    2.6.1 The Reproach Phrase .................................................................................... 39
    2.6.2 Perceived Severity of Harm ........................................................................ 40
    2.6.3 Closeness and Relative Social Status of AG and AR ................................ 44
    2.6.4 Perceived Sincerity of Accounts ................................................................ 47
  2.7 Research Questions .............................................................................................. 48
Chapter 3: Data Collection ............................................................................................ 50
  3.1 Hypothetical Conflict Scenarios ......................................................................... 52
Chapter 6: Pedagogical Implications and Conclusions.......................................................... 131

6.1 Performed Culture Approach......................................................................................... 131

6.1.1 Sagas, Cases, and Genre ......................................................................................... 134

6.2 Suggestions from the Research Results.......................................................................... 135

6.3 Sample Practices of Account-Giving............................................................................. 137

6.4 Limitations of the Study ............................................................................................... 141

6.5 Areas for Future Research ........................................................................................... 143

6.5.1 Contrastive Studies ................................................................................................ 143

6.5.2 Studies Analyzing the Effectiveness of Using Multiple Accounts .... 146

6.6 Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 147

Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 150

Appendix A: Background Questionnaire (Japanese)......................................................... 157

Appendix B: Background Questionnaire (English Translation) ........................................ 158

Appendix C: Hypothetical Scenario (Japanese) ................................................................. 159

Appendix D: Hypothetical Scenario (English Translation) ................................................ 161

Appendix E: Interview Question (Japanese) ...................................................................... 163

Appendix F: Interview Questions (English Translation) ..................................................... 164

Appendix G: Role-Play Scenario (Japanese) ...................................................................... 165

Appendix H: Role-Play Scenarios (English Translation) ................................................... 167

Appendix I: Transcription of Role-Plays and English Translation ....................................... 169
List of Tables

Table 2.1 Summary of negative comments about the explanation of how the failure event happened (Yao 2010, p.52-53) ................................................................. 37

Table 2.2 Status influence on account appropriateness when the AR is a superior (Takaku, 2000, p.381 and 383) ............................................................. 46

Table 2.3 Status influence on account appropriateness when the AR is a subordinate (Takaku, 2000, p.381 and 383). ............................................................. 46

Table 3.1 Reacting subjects by age and gender ............................................................... 62

Table 3.2 Reacting subjects by years of services to company(-ies) and gender .......... 62

Table 3.3 Acting subjects’ gender, years of service to company(-ies), and age .......... 66

Table 4.1 Characterization of three scenario’s business blunders from the AR’s perspective using ................................................................. 69

Table 4.2 Responses to interview question 1: ‘Did you think that what the AG said was a valid reason?’ ............................................................... 71

Table 4.3 Categories of reasons that reacting subjects cited for claiming that EXCUSE scripts were invalid ................................................................. 72

Table 4.4 Reasons for associating making excuses ‘iiwake’ directly with the judgement of “invalid” accounts ................................................................. 73

Table 4.5 Results of interview question 2: ‘Are there things that the AG should have left unsaid?’ ............................................................... 77

Table 4.6 Unnecessary utterances in scripts ............................................................... 77

Table 4.7 Reasons why giving an explanation for a failure event is unnecessary .... 78

Table 4.8 Whether or not there are things that the AG should have said ............... 82

Table 4.9 Things that the AG should have included in the given account ............ 83

Table 4.10 Reasons why it would be better to add the explanation for a failure event ... 84

Table 4.11 Whether or not subjects sense the AG’s responsibility toward work ........ 86

Table 4.12 Why the subjects did not feel the AG’s sincerity concerning her work ........ 87

Table 4.13 Items from which the subjects felt the AG’s sincerity regarding her work ... 89

Table 4.14 Responses to interview question 5: Does your impression of a given account change if the AG has made the same blunder before? ................. 91

xiii
Table 4.15 Number of subjects who responded that the account is valid in interview question 1 but that their impression became worse in question 5 ............................. 91
Table 4.16 How the impression of an account changes when the blunder happens for the second time.................................................................................. 93
Table 4.17 The AR’s preferred account, EXCUSE or CONCESSION ................................. 94
Table 4.18 The reasons for the preferred account ........................................................................ 95
Table 5.1 Number of subjects who offered EXCUSES in role-plays ......................................... 111
Table 5.2 Utterances that explain blunders in role-plays and the type of locus ......................... 112
Table 5.3 Reasons why acting subjects explained or did not explain blunders ................. 113
List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Sequence of an attributional process by Weiner (2005; 2000) ......................... 23
Figure 2.2 Basic sequence involving in account-giving adapted from Tata (2000b) .......... 24
Figure 2.3 Types of accounts on the mitigation-aggravation continuum, as proposed by McLaughlin et al. (1983, p. 212) ................................................. 34
Figure 4.1 Summary of responses to IQs ................................................................. 101
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Goals of the Study

In business settings, mistakes raise questions of strategy: How should a subordinate explain a blunder to a supervisor? How detailed should the account be when perceived harm or offense is mild? Will the explanation for a blunder be perceived as making excuses or as a legitimate explanation? This study investigates effective remedial strategies called *accounts* in the setting of a Japanese business organization. It sheds light on one type of accounts, *EXCUSES*, and examines the effectiveness of explaining how a failure happened or why one behaved in a specific way in the setting of a Japanese business setting.

When conflict occurs, communication plays an important role in recovering from a conflict (Putnam & Poole, 1987). *Accounts* are conversational strategies for managing conflict. Goffman (1971) identifies accounts as remedial strategies. He argues that “the nature of accounts has been considered somewhat by students of law in connection with the issue of defenses, pleas, the mitigation of offenses and the defeasibility of claims” (p.109). Scott and Lyman (1968) define accounts as responses to a blunder; they are statements made by transgressors to explain the failure in question. Individuals implement *account-giving* when a transgressor attempts to address potential or real damage resulting from a failure. Bies and Sitkin (1992, p. 184) argue that explanation for a failure directly influences a victim’s assessment of (1) the responsibility assigned to the
transgressor, (2) the transgressor’s intentions, and (3) the way that the conflict can be handled. Successful account-giving can create a beneficial interpersonal relationship and can protect one’s reputation.

Bies and Sitkin (1992) discuss the varied situations that make us feel defensive and prompt us to give accounts in organizational settings:

In organizations, people often disappoint, frustrate, or even anger others with whom they work. For example, a boss gives a lower-than expected performance rating to a subordinate; a boss informs top management that sales figures continue to decline; top management informs the organization of layoffs and budget cuts in a restructuring of the organizations.... (p.183)

A failure to recover after a conflict may not only result in losing trust and creating an undesirable public image, but it may also lead to layoffs, salary cuts, and delays in promotion. It is critical to be able to restore conflict smoothly in order to avoid undesirable consequences when giving an account to a superior person who has authority to determine punishment for a blunder.

Previous research on accounts has focused on developing a typology of different types of accounts and investigating their effectiveness in interpersonal situations (e.g., Hamilton & Hagiwara, 1992; McLaughlin et al., 1983; Schönbach, 1980). McLaughlin et al. (1983) claim that CONCESSIONS, one type of accounts that involves an account-giver (hereafter AG) admitting association with a failure and taking responsibility for it, is the most mitigating type. Empirical studies (e.g., Takaku, 2000; Tata, 2000a; Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994; Ohbuchi et al., 1989) support McLaughlin et al.’s proposal that CONCESSIONS offer the most effective mitigations, especially when the harm resulting from a failure is severe. Those studies also conclude that EXCUSES, another type of account in which the AG admits association with a failure but cites reasons for limited
responsibility, are useful in mitigating a conflict. Itoi et al. (1996) find that an AG prefers EXCUSES when he or she desires to improve a certain impression and to avoid punishment. Moreover, Cheng and Johnstone (2002) explain that speakers provide a reason to be polite and to be informative, and by so doing, they attempt to build rapport.

However, Schlenker et al. (2001) claim that the disadvantages of EXCUSES have been neglected; for instance, they may create the perception of an AG as unreliable or incapable of expected tasks. Moreover, even when an AG explains the reason for a failure in factual terms, an account-receiver (hereafter AR) may perceive the explanation as making excuses. In other words, an AR does not perceive the story as a statement of what really happened or does not recognize it as the actual cause of a failure. In short, the AR may view the given explanation for a failure as invalid and judge the explanation negatively.

EXCUSES do have disadvantages, even if past research identifies them as mitigating accounts. Moreover, studies on account preference and the effectiveness of accounts typically examine accounts from the perspective of AG, and only a few researchers (such as Fukuno & Ohbuchi, 1998) have examined the preference of accounts from the viewpoint of the AR.

The goal of the present study is to investigate in what kinds of situations EXCUSES are effective as remedial strategies in account-giving implemented in the setting of a Japanese organization. In other words, in what kind of circumstances will a Japanese AR perceive EXCUSES positively. This study examines the effectiveness of EXCUSES from the perspective of AR; moreover, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of account-giving, this study reveals what behavior is expected and why certain behavior is
important with respect to Japanese account-giving; namely, it investigates shared cultural knowledge regarding account-giving in Japanese organizations.

Account-giving happens in varied situations, and contextual elements affect the effectiveness of accounts. This study focuses on account-giving that is implemented by a subordinate (AG) to a superior (AR) in a Japanese business setting, specifically when the harm caused by a failure is perceived as mild by an AR.

In order to investigate these issues, interviews and role-plays were conducted with Japanese individuals who live in Japan and have working experiences at Japanese businesses. For the analysis of situations, the present study adapts Weiner’s (2006, 2000) attribution theory that reveals the psychological process of an AG’s selection of accounts. To explain the relation between specific language use and cultural knowledge of a certain communicative group, genres are employed as a theoretical framework in this study. Genres provide a structure for understanding specific linguistic features as well as their co-variation with the social contexts, cultural ideologies, and practices of a community.

1.2 Culture, Language, and Performance

This study adapts Walker and Noda’s (2010) notion of culture as situated knowledge. This section describes how culture frames our behavior and how shared cultural knowledge enables speakers to communicate their own intentions effectively and interpret messages from others as intended.

For the purposes of foreign language pedagogy, Hammerly (1982) classifies culture into three types: (a) achievement culture, (b) informational culture, and (c) behavioral culture. Achievement culture is “the hallmarks of a civilization” (Walker, 2010 p.13), for instance, classical music, the writing system, the Chinese zodiac, and
traditional food. Informational culture provides information that a society values, for instance, knowledge of the political system, school system, public transportation system, welfare system, and geography. Behavioral culture is the knowledge that allows a person to navigate within a culture: what to do and say when and where, as well as to whom, with whom, and of whom. Some concrete examples of behavioral culture are manners, how to express gratitude or apologies, how to refuse an invitation politely, and how to show respect to others.

Behavioral culture governs the most useful information on how to act and speak in a culturally appropriate manner. Even if one possesses full knowledge of linguistic features, such as grammatical rules and vocabulary, a lack of behavioral cultural knowledge can cause miscommunication. An anecdote of my own experience with failure is illustrative.

Soon after I started living in the U.S., I was invited to a party at the home of a professor. At the party, there were many different dishes, and the hostess was walking around and offering small pies to the guests. The pie looked delicious, and I wanted to try it. When she offered it to me, I said, “No, I’m OK,” and the hostess responded “OK” and went somewhere to offer the pie to other people. As soon as I saw her turning around, I thought, “Shoot! I wanted to eat it.” Some may wonder why I did not accept the offer even though I wanted to eat the pie. I did so because I was not acting based on American behavioral culture but rather had applied the norm for such situations from Japanese behavioral culture. The polite, initial refusal of an offer is a common procedure in Japan. The Japanese accept a polite offer after the offer is repeated, sometimes multiple times. This behavior, showing reservation, is considered polite. The surface meaning of “No,
I’m OK” is refusal, but the intention is to be polite, and in Japan readily recognized as such. It is one of the steps toward accepting an offer. If one repeatedly accepts offers without initial refusal or showing reservation, that person may appear impolite or imprudent in Japan. We are more likely to practice this behavior when a setting is formal and the interpersonal relationship is not close. Since the party was somewhat formal and I did not know the hostess at all, I said “No,” while expecting to receive another offer. However, since this is not how one accepts an offer in the U.S., the hostess interpreted my intention based on American culture. She simply thought that I did not want any pie. As she turned around, I immediately realized that I delivered a message that I did not intend and regretted that I had applied Japanese behavioral culture to an English interaction. This simple example indicates that knowledge of linguistic features, without an understanding of how culture frames behavior, is a good recipe for miss-communication.

Culture provides a speaker the information needed to achieve communicative goals—starting with what goals a person might reasonably entertain, in this or that local context. As Walker and Noda (2010) write, “Culture is what we do […] and, also how we know what we have done. In other words, culture frames our behaviors and gives us the means to recognize the completion of events and artifacts in our world” (p.24). In other words, culture is “situated knowledge” (p.24).

All interactions in everyday life occur within a context. Walker and Noda argue that “the flow of social life occurs in a sequence of performances” (p. 24). They define performance as situated events; performance is defined by five elements: (1) a specific time, (2) a specific place, (3) specific roles, (4) appropriate script, and (5) an audience.
Walker (2010) proposes that culture, situated knowledge, can be presented as performance. Culture is a tool to understand performance in a certain domain. This understanding of culture is reflected in my anecdote of a failure experience. The specific time was a party and mealtime; the place was a professor’s house in the US; and I played the role of a guest as well as a student of the hostess’s husband, and American, and the other person was hostess and a wife of my professor, both Americans. The script begins with the hostess asking, “Would you like some pies?” and I replied, “No, I’m OK”; moreover, there was an audience, namely the other guests. Japanese culture frames this performance as reservation and as a component behavior for accepting pies while American culture frames it as a refusal. The knowledge of language can be identified in the performance of the culture. Moreover, knowledge of social activities can be explained via the culture.

Miscommunication is more likely to happen in cross-cultural interactions due to differences in behavioral culture norms. Although my failure in adapting the language behavior of American culture caused miscommunication, the damage caused from the miscommunication was minimal. However, harm can also result from a faulty performance, and leave one appearing offensive or rude. Therefore, in language teaching, it is essential to teach language in the context of culture. As Walker (2010) claims, when teaching language, we do not merely teach linguistic features, but we teach what to do and how to do it with a target language. As Austin (1955) also argued in his discussion of speech act theory, we do things with words: we request, apologize, offer, and complement others with words.
Walker and Noda (2010) propose a performed culture approach for foreign language learning. This approach starts with intentions and treats linguistic features as a toolkit for accessing intentions. Walker explains that intentions derives from cultural context and context is defined by a culture as it is lived. This approach helps learners to gain skills to form and communicate intentions in the foreign language and the ability to behave in a culturally appropriate manner. It is further discussed in Chapter 6.

Walker and Noda’s notion of culture provides a profound understanding of the relation of culture and language, and how culture frames our social practices. Additionally, performance provides vital contextual information to define an account-giving context. Genres also provide information of the specific language use, as well as specific themes and cultural knowledge of a speech community. Chistensen and Warnick (2006) argue that genres describe types of performance. The following sections discuss the usefulness of genres in analyzing language/utterances and cultural knowledge, and in relating each to the other.

1.3 Genres

In this study, genres provide a framework for analyzing account-giving utterances that happens in the context of Japanese business organizations. Genre analysis is useful to reveal the typical form of language behavior that is implemented in a specific community and to examine the community’s shared cultural information.

Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) view genres as socially situated phenomena related to the rhetorical actions of a community. Swales (1998) takes the same view as Berkenkotter and Huckin; he explains that genres involve not only the study of specific linguistic features but also the analysis of a form of social knowledge including the social
context, the culture, the ideology and organization of the discourse community, and the conventions of this community.

The analysis of genres identifies typical forms of discourse, both spoken and written, of a community. For instance, a business organization is one type of community, and it both entails and is partly constituted by expected ways of communicating and completing of certain tasks. A number of genre studies examine textual features of business writings, such as in e-mail messages and professional letters (e.g., Berkenkotter et al., 1997; Freedman, 1996; Paltridge, 1996). They examine the structures of the writing and identify the specific theme’s typical form of business writing. Yotsukura (1997) examines Japanese business transactional telephone conversations and investigates the use of specific expression to attain the communicative objectives (e.g., offering assistance). In contrast to studying the textual analysis of genres, another line of genre analysis is to study language use from a social perspective. This approach of genre studies focuses on examining a discourse community and how the cultural norms and ideology of the communities are reflected in the rhetorical actions of the genres. Luzón (2005, p. 287) argues that “genre analysis has evolved to include not only the study of specific linguistic features but also the analysis of the social context, the culture, the ideology and organization of the discourse community, and the practices of this community.” This study aims to analyze how the cultural norms, expectations, and context inform the utterances of account-giving in a Japanese business setting.

Bakhtin (1986, p.86) describes genres as “the typical forms of utterances” that reflect shared experiences and consciousness. His notion of utterances considers a unit of
exchanges in interactions that is constructed by not only one speaker but also participants in the interaction:

Any utterance—from a short (single-word) rejoinder in everyday dialogue to the large novel or scientific treatise—has, so to speak, an absolute beginning and an absolute end: its beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others… The speaker ends his utterance in order to relinquish the floor to the other or to make room for the other’s active responsive understanding. The utterance is not a conversational unit, but a real unit, clearly delimited by the change of speaking subjects which ends by relinquishing the floor to the other (p.71).

He believes that “utterances are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another” (p. 91). In other words, each utterance not only responds to the utterances that precede it, but also anticipates those that follow (Yotsukura, 1997). This idea is important in this study because AG anticipates AR’s reaction to the account about to be delivered while also considering the AR’s feelings expressed in the AR’s behavior when the AG is about to give an account. When an AR is angry, an AG is more likely to apologize for a failure, but when an AR is not angry, an AG may say something that limits his or her (the AG’s) responsibility. Since an AG changes conflict strategies depending on how s/he perceives the AR’s attitude toward the failure, the whole interaction should be examined to investigate conflict strategies more comprehensively.

Genres consist of a typical form of: mutually associated utterances with associated particular themes, styles, and situations. Genres are developed by members of a discourse community over time. Bakhtin (1986, p.65) points out that “Utterances and their types, that is, speech genres, are the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language.” Morson and Emerson (1990, p.290) also state that “Genre are the residue of past behavior, and an accretion that shapes, guides and contains future behavior.” Although genres consist of a typical form, they are not fixed forms. They
change over time according to a community’s needs; however, they are not not established instantly, but evolve over time.

Novice members of a community, for instance individuals who are new to the community, or people who are not members of the community, encounter challenges to communicate their intentions due to a lack of shared cultural norms and expectations of a community. Bakhtin also addresses this issue:

Many people who have an excellent command of a language often feel quite helpless in certain spheres of communication precisely because they do not have a practical command of the generic forms used in the given spheres. (1986, p. 80)

Therefore, business schools, communication classes, and writing centers often offer courses that teach professional communication tactics as a part of training for a successful business career. It is also common at a Japanese enterprise to offer a series of seminars for new employees who just graduated a university and to teach business manners since it is a completely new genre to them. My sister works at the HR division in a Japanese corporation, and she also offers training for newly hired employees. She sometimes complains about new employees especially those who just graduated university and have no prior business experiences. She says that those new employees still behave like college students; hence, she has to remind them about how they should present themselves professionally and how they should behave in specific situations. It is probably not the case that those new employees intend to behave unprofessionally, but they simply do not know the norms of the company and do not understand how to demonstrate professionalism in that specific community. Since failure to follow norms and expectations may cause unpleasant outcomes, such as appearing unreliable or even
losing one’s job, it is important to learn norms and develop strategies even before one starts working.

Learning a new genre expands “one’s awareness of and potential for what can be done in and with that language” (Quinn, 2003, p.53). The familiarity with the repertoire of genres of a community is necessary to participate in social and communicative activities; moreover, developing familiarity helps a participant to become a true member of that community. Luzon (2005, p.288) argues that “knowing the genre repertoire of a community involves being aware of community members’ shared norms and expectations about communication and of the social context from which these norms and expectations derive.” Orlikowski and Yates (1994, p.1) describe a genre repertoire as “a powerful social template for shaping how, why and with what effect members of a community interact to get their work done.” The ability to command genre repertoires is necessary for smooth communication (Bakhtin, 1986). The more knowledge of genre repertoire you have, the easier it is to deliver intended messages and to comprehend verbal communication and social activities in a community. In sum, an analysis of a genre helps us investigate shared norms and expectations about account-giving in Japanese business organizations and how account-giving utterances reflect those norms and expectations.

1.4 Genres and Performed Culture

Different communities use different means to accomplish their purposes, and the use of rhetorical practices reinforce community member’s identities and legitimate communicative practices (Kain & Wardle, 2005). Business communication demands one type of macro-genre, and research has studied business texts and verbal interactions using genre analysis (Berkenkotter, 2001; Spinuzzi, 2000; Yotsukura, 1997; Freedman &
Adam (1996; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995). Since genre provides not only rhetorical skills but also underlying shared cultural knowledge of the community, many researchers have explored how the concept of genre can be used in the teaching of professional communication as well as language learning as a tool to help students become expert members of a community.

Since, like genres, language is also established in social and historical practices, it demonstrates not only the mere meaning of words or sentences, but also what participants can presuppose within the specific culture and context. In foreign language learning, cultural knowledge is vital if one were to command a target language and communicate one’s intention effectively. However, different cultures have different norms and practices. Learning a foreign language is not simply a matter of learning the structural rules and the meaning of words, but it is more like expanding comprehension of the cultural knowledge that a target language is rooted in, and building an ability to participate in communicative practices to fulfill one’s objectives in a culturally coherent manner.

The recognition and use of specific cultural knowledge is referred to as “cultural fluency” (Oyserman, 2011), and the development of cultural fluency is crucial for successful cross-cultural communication. Bhataria (1995, 2017) states that genres help learners to develop the ability to understand the link between social activity and cultural knowledge, and to participate in new and recurring genres. Quinn (2003) also discusses the usefulness of genres for the L2 pedagogy of Japanese. He stresses the importance of teaching the target culture’s recognized social activities to learners. At the same time, he argues that genres provide instructors with proper models of social practices for learners.
as well as socially authentic parameters to guide learners to practice as they expand on those models.

However, Kain and Wardle (2005) bring up a problem that constrains classroom instruction; they state that while instructors draw students’ attention to the contextual nature of genres, students find it difficult to transfer what they learn in school to workplace settings. This application-enabling skill is often discussed in the field of psychology and business, and referred to as the “contextual intelligence.” Contextual intelligence involves practical application of knowledge to real-world situations. Khanna (2014, p.60) describes it as “the ability to understand the limits of our knowledge and to adapt that knowledge to an environment different from the one in which it was developed.” Contextual intelligence also deals with knowing the culture and the specific context in which the communicative activity happens but also knowing how to apply the knowledge to succeed in achieving objectives.

Perkins and Salomon (1999, 1992) examine the context in which learners gain knowledge and/or skills and the context in which they use what they have learned. Their research finds that “near transfer,” which “occurs when knowledge or skill gets used in situations very like the initial context of learning,” happens more commonly compared to “far transfer,” which occurs “when people make connections to contexts that intuitively seem vastly different from the context of learning” (1999, p.2). Their research suggests that language instructors should provide learners with knowledge and skills that learners are likely to use in a target culture, and such knowledge and skills are presented in contexts that learners are likely to encounter in future. Walker’s (2000) concept of performed culture approach to language learning assumes that culture frames our
behavior and allows us to recognize the meaning of behavior, including linguistic codes. His notion of *performance*—situated events defined by the specified place, specified roles, appropriate scripts, and audience—provides a lens for capturing the complexities of contexts and help instructors to teach authentic language use within a specific context. Not only can teachers benefit from an understanding of performed culture and performance, but also performed culture can be taught to students to help them develop the contextual intelligence for transferring analytical skills from academic settings to real-world settings. Walker and Noda (2010) state:

> By analyzing behavior (including linguistic elements) in specified situations in the culture our students are studying, we can prepare the “performance” for our students that will most benefit their future needs… Language teachers prepare their students to negotiate a new culture successfully, developing a memory that can be effectively drawn upon in the rapid flow of interactions or transactions with members of that cultures. (p.26)

Genres offer not only shared conventions, but also specific types of social practices of a community including linguistic behavior. Genres are a useful tool for outsiders and novice members of a community in building the readiness needed to respond properly to a message (Quinn, 2003). Engaging in contextualized and authentic practices helps learners become more familiar with a genre, as Quinn puts it, to “grow” that genre in their memory; importantly, those successful memories help them apply what they learn in the classroom to real-world situations.

Performed culture approach provides the framework for us to capture and analyze each instance of account-giving as performances, i.e., situated event defined in terms of the specified time, place, roles, audience and script. This research will utilize that perspective as it offers clarification on account-giving and, more specifically, the effectiveness of EXCUSES in the Japanese business context by examining reactions of
native speakers as ARs and behaviors of native speakers as AGs when the harm is mild.

The next chapter examines existing research to highlight the theoretical considerations on the attributional process (see Ch. 2) and understand what we know about EXCUSES as an account-giving performance.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Account-giving is a ubiquitous human behavior. Research on accounts includes the issues of defense, mitigation of offenses, improving interpersonal relationships, and maintaining positive self-image. These issues have been studied in many fields such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, political science, law, and business. This chapter surveys previous studies with the hope of streamlining terminology and articulating research questions.

2.1 Defining Accounts

In the present study, accounts refer to conversational strategies speakers use to remediate the potential or real damage resulting from a failure. An account entails a recognition of a failure. Account-giving refers to the implementation of accounts.

Goffman (1971) defines accounts as remedial strategies in which AGs attempt to protect themselves from attacks on their social identity. Read (1992) also argues that speakers construct accounts to manage their impressions when they are accused of a social failure, such as harming someone or violating important social rules. In addition to the improving one’s social identity, accounts are also useful in alleviating the affected party’s anger and to avoid punishment (Itoi, et al., 1996). Speakers implement accounts to attempt to influence the victim’s perception of the problem and to avoid further aggravation of conflict or to maintain the relationship with the affected party. Mills
(1940) describes an AG’s attempts to influence an AR’s (account-receiver’s) perception of himself or herself as follows. “When an agent vocalizes or imputes motives, he is not trying to describe his experienced social action. He is not merely stating ‘reasons.’ He is influencing others—and himself” (p. 904). Sitkin and Bies (1992) argue that accounts have impacts on AR’s perception of 1) the responsibility assigned to the offender, 2) the AG’s intention, and 3) the way that the conflict could have been handled. The AG implements accounts to fill the gap between expectations and events that contradict norms.

Accounts are useful and common verbal tactics in conflict situations (Schoenbach 1980). When giving accounts, the AG not only provides information related to the event, but also simultaneously presents information to mitigate any ill-feelings that the AG fears might have resulted from the event, to prevent a potential conflict. Some scholars (e.g., Read, 1992; Miller & Read, 1991) view accounts as stories or narratives that explain a failure event or inappropriate behavior. Weber, Haevey, and Orbuch (1992, p. 263) also consider accounts as narratives:

We define account-making as the process of constructing a story-like explanation of events and experiences. The account typically includes explanations, descriptions, predictions about relevant future events, recollections, justifications and emotions. Accounts are likely to be formulated or resurrected when individuals are troubled by stressors or surprises, especially unpleasant ones.

Accounts often involve multiple sentences rather than a single sentence. As Bakhtin (1986) explains in his discussion of genre, utterances are the boundaries where control of the conversation changes from one speaker to another and speakers relinquish and reestablish his or her floor. Account-giving strategies can be also modified in the middle of account-giving interactions. The AR’s reaction to some initial utterances can motivate
changes in AG’s strategies. For instance, when the AR expresses anger, the AG may admit one’s fault and causal responsibility; but later when AR shows understanding toward AG’s situation, AG could explain a situation that can reduce AG’s responsibility.

Speakers tend to influence each other through social-linguistic behavior in general. However, what is peculiar about account-giving is that the perceived harm generated from inappropriate behavior (or lack of appropriate behavior) drives interlocutors to account-giving. For the purpose of discussion, consider two interlocutors: an account-giver (AG) and an account-receiver (AR). First, AG assumes that AR believes that AG has been involved in the event that caused harm. AG further assumes that AR senses that AG is responsible for the harm. AG then develops a sense of crisis that AR is forming a negative impression of AG that AG does not wish to represent. In such a context, the potential harm that AG perceives of not restoring AG’s favored persona is more critical to AG than in other instances, and AG therefore uses accounts as a remedial strategy. By invoking accounts, AG can hope to restore or mitigate unfavorable situations, such as lowering self-esteem, harming a personal relationship with victims and/or the AR, or, in more extreme cases, being punished or prosecuted.

2.2 Weiner’s Attribution Theory

*Attribution theory* explains the process by which people explain the causes of events and their behavior. Fiske and Taylor (1991) explain that attribution theory is concerned with how the individual applies information in causal explanations for the failure and examines what information is considered and combined to form a causal judgment. Weiner (2000; 2005) proposes a three-dimensional model, which provides some theoretical background in the examination of the effectiveness of EXCUSES in this
study. This section describes the three dimensions of causality that Weiner proposes along with the attributional process.

2.2.1 Three Dimensions of Causality

Attribution theory is closely related to studies of accounts. Account researchers (e.g., Yao, 2009; Orbuch, 1997) adapt this theory to investigate the AG’s interpretation of their behavior and his/her selection of an account. Weiner (2000; 2005) analyzes the attributional process through initial affective responses to the potential psychological consequences of success or failure. He proposes that an actor’s psychological consequences are influenced by three dimensions of causal properties—locus, stability, and controllability. These three dimensions of causality form the central concept of analyzing factors that contribute to the AR’s perception of negatively judged excuses in this study.

Locus refers to the location of a cause: whether the cause happened due to the actor (i.e., an internal cause) or not (i.e., an external cause). For example, Weiner (2000) explains that ability and effort are considered as internal causes of success, whereas the intervention of others, such as help from others, or being busy, or the use of public transportation are all considered external causes of success. Stability refers to “generality of causal explanation over time” (Weiner 2005, p. 10); causal stability is whether or not the cause is always present in a specific condition or whether it happens by chance. For instance, when cause is ability or intelligence, it would be considered to be stable, whereas luck or being sick is considered to be unstable. Another example is when a cause is the unusual delay of public transportation; in that case, the causal property would be unstable. Finally, controllability is “volitional alternation” (2005, p.4), whether the cause
was intentional or not. For instance, lack of effort is considered as controllable, whereas ability is uncontrollable. Controllability can be considered as internal. However, Weiner emphasizes that locus and controllability are two independent dimensions, because a cause may be internal but still be uncontrollable. For instance, he argues that a cause that happened due to ability should be considered as internal, uncontrollable, and stable, while a cause that happened due to effort is internal, controllable, and unstable. Weiner (2005) states that the dimensions of three causal properties may vary from person to person; however, they provide insights into understanding AG’s choice of the types of accounts. In addition to the understanding of AG’s attributional process, this theory also provides for identifying how people (including the AG and AR) generally perceive a failure. The AR also considers causal properties when evaluating a failure and accounts that are implemented by the AG. Thus, this theory is also useful for analyzing the AR’s perception of a failure.

The following section describes Weiner’s (2005; 2000) attributional process, namely how people who need to do so come to choose a certain type of account.

2.2.2 The Attributional Process

Weiner’s (2000; 2005) attributional process starts with an event that has been completed successfully or unsuccessfully, and at the end of process there is a behavioral reaction. In account-giving, the event is unsuccessful (a failure); the behavioral reaction entails choosing and delivering an account or a set of accounts.

In order to explain the event, an actor first examines the antecedent conditions that the event to the failure. Antecedent conditions include the given context under which the event happened, such as the relationship between the AG and the AR, and the
perceived severity of the situation (e.g., breaking a vase that costs only five dollars or one that costs ten thousand dollars). The tone of reproach, such as AR more understanding or being angry, and perceived severity of harm are also evaluated in antecedent conditions. Once the antecedent conditions are analyzed, the actor makes causal inferences about why the event has occurred; for example, lack of hard work, lack of ability, bad luck or poor personality may be considered to answer the “why” questions, such as “Why did this happen?” and “What caused this outcome?” Weiner argues that causal inferences are complex and the answer to these questions are affected by multiple factors, including cultural and social norms, evidence, the past history of success and failure, and reaction to the outcome. After making the causal inferences, the actor identifies the causal property of the event in terms of locus, stability, and controllability, followed by the anticipation of psychological consequences based on the identification of the three dimensions of causal property. Expected consequences include responsibility, punishment to be assigned to the actor, and evaluative reactions from the other party, such as anger. Weiner explains that locus influences psychological consequences of pride in accomplishment and self-esteem, and causal stability influences psychological consequences of hopefuleness and hopelessness of subjective likelihood of future success, and finally controllability in co-occurrence with locus (i.e. internal/external) impacts psychological consequences of guilt, shame, or anger. The actor, finally, decides what to do. In account-giving, AG finally decides what type of account to invoke. Figure 2.1 schematically represents the sequence attributional process that Weiner describes.
In assignment of punishment, when the cause of a failure event is a controllable causality (e.g., lack of effort), high punishments are likely to be expected. In contrast, when the cause of a failure is an uncontrollable causality (e.g., lack of ability), low or no punishments are likely to be expected. In evaluative reaction from the other party, when a failure is attributed to controllable causality, the actor may receive an unfavorable evaluation from others, while when it is an uncontrollable causality, the actor is likely not to receive negative reactions.
Weiner’s attributional model provides understanding of AG’s psychological process in choosing a certain type of account as well as what factors affect the process. There are additional communicative steps in the sequence of account-giving. The next section describes those additional steps to capture the whole process of account-giving.

2.3 The Basic Architecture of Account-giving

Account-giving involves a failure, initiation, selection of accounts, delivery, and evaluation; furthermore, contextual and motivational factors influence the selection of accounts. See Figure 2.2 for the basic sequence that involves in account-giving. The figure is adapted from Tata (2000b, p.158).

Figure 2.2 Basic sequence involving in account-giving adapted from Tata (2000b)
An account is provoked by a failure for which the speaker feels an account must be given (Tata 2000; Schönbach 1990; Cody & McLaughlin 1985, 1988). The failure may lead to a reproach or a request for repair and/or an account because the failure often violates normative expectations (Tata 2000; Cody & McLaughlin 1985). In this case, the reproacher (the AR) initiates the conversation with a perception or belief that the AG is responsible for the failure (Cody & Braaten 1992). Although prior empirical studies (McLaughlin, Cody, & O’Hair 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983) show that reproaches are commonly involved in an account process, Cody and Braaten (1992) argue that reproach is not always necessary; an AG can initiate an account phrase without a reproach. They present three motivations of an AG for providing an account without reproaches:

(An AG) (a) felt responsible for an action or at least perceived they would at some time be held responsible for an action, (b) believed that explanation was expected, and (c) believed that failing to provide an explanation was itself a “failure event” that could require further explanation. (p.228)

An AR’s reproaches affect the AG’s selection of account. For instance, when an AR appears very angry, the AG is likely to implement the most mitigating account. Section 2.6.1 in this chapter further discusses the impact of reproach phrases on account selection.

In addition to contextual factors, AG’s motivation for account-giving also has impacts on the selection of accounts. The motivation for account-giving varies, from aiming to avoid punishment, to reduce responsibility, to improve AG’s public identity, to lessen AR’s anger, or to simply maintain interpersonal relationships (Schlenker, Ontari, & Christopher, 2001).
Although the influence of culture is not illustrated in Tata’s (2000b) basic architecture of account-giving (Figure 2.2), culture plays a significant role in every step of the process—reproach, selection, delivery, and evaluation—because culture shapes shared meanings, values, and norms. To put it in a way more specific to account-giving, culture is where the expectations that are violated are established and maintained. For instance, after a failure event, an AG determines how to manage conflict based on cultural knowledge.

We can observe the critical impacts of culture on delivery through two account-giving events given to the public by Sarah Casanova, the CEO of McDonald’s Co. (Japan), following a widely-publicized food contamination scandal (Sato, 2015). The first press conference, held in July of 2014, immensely damaged her reputation and the company’s image; however, their public image was markedly improved after the second press conference in February 2015. Casanova had been appointed CEO of McDonald’s Co. (Japan) two years prior to the food contamination incident. At the first press conference, she was criticized by the public and the media for postponing the press conference for more than 10 days; instead of addressing the media promptly, she waited until the day of the company’s end-of-term financial statement. This delay indicated to the already angry public that giving accounts on the reported food contamination was only secondary to the regularly-scheduled financial report. Additionally, in the press conference, she claimed that McDonald’s Co. (Japan) was deceived by another company that had sold expired meat to them, but the public perceived that account as blaming others and being irresponsible about food safety. A substantial deficit in public impression followed, indicating loss of trust from the public and significant harm to the
image of McDonald’s. Casanova and the company seemed to take the results seriously and shifted their strategy dramatically. In the second press conference, Casanova changed her appearance so that she looked more serious and professional to the Japanese eye; for instance, she tied her hair in the back and wore a dark gray suit (Japanese often wear such an ensemble for job interviews). This appearance was a marked contrast from the first press conference, for which she wore her hair down, her bangs almost covering her eyes. Although she spoke in English, she adopted Japanese mannerisms, such as bowing multiple times. She also offered apologies and expressed regret that they had disappointed family and friends who enjoyed eating at McDonald’s. The orchestrated changes in the second press conference led to positive effects. Casanova followed Japanese norms in terms of the manner of account-giving and account selection. At the first press conference, she selected an account that blamed others, in order to reduce the company’s responsibility. In contrast, she invoked a different type of account at the second press conference, which admitted an association with the failure and expressed regret. In sum, this incident and its aftermath illustrate how culture—specifically a set of socially established expectations—determines what elements constitute an acceptable account. In order to perform appropriately, one must possess cultural knowledge, and one’s behavior must follow a given culture’s norms and expectations. Especially in account-giving, disregard for cultural norms and expectations not only causes failure in resolving conflicts but also potentially aggravates the conflict. Therefore, it is critical to for an AG to choose an effective account based on cultural knowledge. The next section introduces the types of accounts identified in prior research.
2.4 Types of Account

Schönbach (1980) proposes four fundamental modes of response to a failure: CONCESSIONS, EXCUSES, JUSTIFICATIONS, and REFUSALS. Since the present research primarily examines the use of EXCUSES, it adopts Schönbach’s four-part categorization. This section describes these accounts in order of REFUSALS, JUSTIFICATIONS, CONCESSIONS, and EXCUSES.

**REFUSALS**

REFUSALS, which are also referred to as DENIALS, reject the personal association with the failure event and the negative action; these accounts deny guilt and responsibility for the failure. An AG may also attribute the cause of the failure event to others. REFUSALS are considered to be more defensive compared to other types of accounts.

For example, if a refusal were to be used in a context in which both an AR and an AG are in charge of teaching of a series of casual study sessions for new employees, and the AR reproaches the AG for not coming to the last session, the AG would probably say something like “I was not assigned to teach on that date. Nobody told me I had to be there for the session. You should have let me know in advance if you wanted me to teach.” The AG denies personal involvement with his or her absence from the session and denies responsibility for the event by claiming that he or she was not informed about the necessity of teaching in the session, and blames an AR for not telling him/her (the potential AG) ahead of time to be at the session. The AG tries to avoid punishment, to reduce AG’s responsibility for a failure, and to improve AG’s public identity.
JUSTIFICATIONS

With JUSTIFICATIONS, “the actor accepts causal responsibility for the event in question, but asserts that it was legitimate or at least permissible under the given circumstances” (Schönbach, 1990, p. 80). An AG acknowledges his or her association with a failure and admits causal responsibility, but denies that the behavior in question is wrong and thereby justifies his or her action. AG claims that it was for a good purpose, that it was in fact a good action, or that there were no negative consequences from the action or that negative consequences, if present, were minimal. Tata (2000a) explains that “justifications are aimed at altering people’s interpretations of untoward actions either by minimizing the importance of the standards that were violated or by appealing to alternate standards that might transform the action” (p. 439).

Speakers who use JUSTIFICATIONS often assert that their behavior fulfills a superordinate purpose. The following is an example of JUSTIFICATION as presented by Scott and Lyman (1968): A soldier could claim that killing in a war is for a superordinate goal, fighting for liberty. Therefore, although the soldier admits responsibility for killing, he or she does not think the conduct is inappropriate because killing in a war is necessary for achieving the goal of freedom.

In the example used earlier, an account after being absence from a study session, if the AG were to justify this action by claiming it had a good purpose and was a good action, s/he would probably say something like a) “I’m sorry for being absent from the session. You are really good at teaching, but I am not. It seems that I sometimes confuse attendees, so I thought that it would have been better for attendees if you taught it.” The AG first concedes that the behavior is not appropriate; but goes on to justify it by
claiming there is a good reason (i.e., it is good for attendees that the account-giver did not teach the session) for the behavior. By explaining the reasoning behind the behavior, as a better judgement on AG’s part, AG attempts to mitigate AR’s judgment and to improve AG’s public image.

**CONCESSIONS**

In CONCESSIONS, AG admits the causal link between the event and its harmfulness, and also admits the inappropriateness of the behavior as well as AG’s full or partial causal responsibility for the negative repercussions of the event. CONCESSIONS often involve acceptance of responsibility for a failure, apologies, offering of restitution, and regret (Hamilton & Hagiwara, 1992; Greenberg, 1990; Goffman, 1971).

For instance, CONCESSIONS, in the above context, might take the following form: “I am sorry for being absent from the meeting on Saturday. I feel sorry for putting all the work onto you. Maybe I can lead the next session by myself so you can have some time to do your work.” In this CONCESSION, the AG admits the inappropriateness of the behavior and harmfulness in question and offers compensation. Offering to do something to amend the situation is an attempt to reduce conflict and harmfulness (i.e. an AR’s anger and burden) and to maintain a good relationship with the AR.

CONCESSIONS are sometimes referred to as “apologies” in the literature (e.g., Takaku, 2000; Fukuno & Ohbuchi, 1998; Itoi et al., 1996). The English phrase, “I’m sorry,”—and its equivalent in other languages, including sumimasen in Japanese—are often included in an account. However, not all accounts that include this expression are CONCESSIONS, because its sentiment varies depending on the situation. It can express not only regret or acknowledgement of responsibility for a failure, but also can show
sympathy to others. Verbalizing it may also be considered simply as a polite and moral action. Therefore, an AG who justifies his or her action may also say, “I’m sorry” simply because it is the morally right thing to do. When categorizing an account phrase, we need to analyze the apparent overall intention of the AG, rather than looking simply at the surface meaning of words and phrases. This provides an example of how different speech acts are intertwined with each other and are not mutually exclusive. The speech act of account-giving is likely to appear in the speech act of apology because of the account’s remedial function. Conversely, an apology may appear as part of account-giving.

**EXCUSES**

EXCUSES are the central topic for the investigation of this study. Two types of EXCUSES, EXTERNAL and INTERNAL EXCUSES, are introduced—both follow Schönbach’s (1990) definition of EXCUSES—and then two different perception of EXCUSES, positively judged EXCUSES and negatively judged EXCUSES, are addressed.

Schönbach (1990) defines EXCUSES as “any account which admits the occurrence of a failure event and some involvement of the actor in it, but pleads for mitigation in judgement on the basis of various arguments and hence causal responsibility” (p. 79). AGs attempt to reduce responsibility for their actions by demonstrating that the causes of action were uncontrollable, unintentional, and/or external. Hagiwara and Hamilton (1992) distinguish between EXCUSES external to the AG, EXTERNAL EXCUSES, and those internal to the AG, INTERNAL EXCUSES, in recognition of their different impacts on outcomes. They suggest that, EXTERNAL EXCUSES and INTERNAL EXCUSES and state that EXTERNAL EXCUSES are relatively more effective in conflict management.
Hagiwara and Hamilton define **EXTERNAL EXCUSES** as explanations that include a broad range of circumstances that are outside the person that caused the failure, such as natural causes, a delayed train, or another car running a stop sign. For example, consider how **EXTERNAL EXCUSES** are used in the following example: “I am sorry for being absent from the meeting on Saturday. The traffic was jammed because of a major accident on the highway. I got stuck there for an hour.” In this case, the AG acknowledges that the behavior (i.e., not showing up to the meeting) was not appropriate and admits his association with a failure. At the same time, the AG cites external force (i.e. a major traffic jam) to mitigate AR’s judgement. By implementing **EXTERNAL EXCUSES**, the AG attempts to reduce causal responsibility and to maintain a positive image.

**INTERNAL EXCUSES** refer to “something inside the person that caused the outcome, whether or not it was controllable by that person” (p. 164). Hamilton and Hagiwara explain that **INTERNAL EXCUSES** involve a mistake, inattention, drunkenness, and psychological factors (i.e., sadness, feeling overwhelmed, or mental illness). If, for instance, **INTERNAL EXCUSES** were to be used in the above context, an account-giver would say, “I’m sorry for being absent from the meeting. Meetings usually start at 10 a.m., so I thought that the meeting would start at the regular time.” The AG acknowledges that the behavior (i.e., being absent from the meeting) was not appropriate, and frames an account internal to him or herself (i.e., I thought that the meeting would start at the regular time). However, the AG cites a circumstance that led him or her to make a mistake (i.e., the meeting usually starts at 10 a.m.).

The present study makes a distinction between **EXCUSES** based on two different perceptions: positively judged **EXCUSES** and negatively judged **EXCUSES**. These
distinctions are important because the effects of these two EXCUSES are different; positively judged EXCUSES generate a favorable outcome, whereas negatively judged EXCUSES are likely to complicate a conflict. In positively judged EXCUSES, people perceive EXCUSES as a valid explanation for a failure; people often believe that the given EXCUSES convey a true story. In contrast, in negatively judged EXCUSES, people perceive EXCUSES as invalid explanations for a failure. They do not believe that the explanation is the direct cause of the failure; instead they recognize that the cause of the failure owes to the AG’s wrongdoing. When EXCUSES are perceived negatively, people think that the AG is making excuses, “iiwake” (to use the Japanese expression). The technical term “EXCUSES” does not necessarily reflect this idea, which is that the explanation for a failure is invalid. The iiwake version of making excuses expresses the factors that are involved in the EXCUSES (i.e., an AG admits involvement in the failure but tries to reduce responsibility by citing circumstances that may mitigate AR’s judgment).

One of the primal goals of this study is to investigate what factors contribute to these different perceptions of the same type of account, EXCUSES. Is there a circumstance in which the AR would prefer hearing EXCUSES to CONCESSIONS? Do EXTERNAL and INTERNAL EXCUSES have impact on the perception of EXCUSES? The present study aims to answer these questions. The next section discusses in further detail the effect of those four types accounts (i.e., REFUSALS, JUSTIFICATIONS, CONCESSIONS and EXCUSES) and examines evidence to determine whether EXCUSES are mitigating or aggravating.
2.5 **Are EXCUSES Mitigating Accounts?**

McLaughlin, O’Hair, and Cody (1983) advance the study of the effect of accounts by placing them along a mitigation-aggravation continuum, as shown in. Figure 2.3 illustrates this continuum.

![Figure 2.3 Types of accounts on the mitigation-aggravation continuum, as proposed by McLaughlin et al. (1983, p. 212)](image)

McLaughlin et al. refer to Brown and Levinson’s (1978) theory of face-threatening acts, which posits, among other things, that the actor’s assessment of the risk of loss of the hearer’s reputation (face) influences the strategies selected when performing a face-threatening act. McLaughlin et al. argue that the AR perceives CONCESSIONS and EXCUSES as more mitigating in terms of maintaining AR’s face, in other words as more “polite,” than JUSTIFICATIONS and REFUSALS. CONCESSIONS are the least threatening to a hearer’s (an AR’s) needs and EXCUSES are the next most mitigating type of accounts, whereas REFUSALS are the most threatening to his/her face and JUSTIFICATIONS are the next most aggravating.

Tata (2000a) places four accounts along a mitigation-aggravation continuum identical with the one that McLaughlin et al. present; however, unlike McLaughlin et al., she addresses not only the hearer’s reputation but also the saving of the actor’s face:
Mitigating accounts (concessions) are deferential, express support for other’s face, and attempt to minimize face threats. In contrast, aggravating accounts (refusals) protect the account-giver’s own face needs, question the listener’s right to criticize, and denote less respect for other’s face needs. (...) Accounts in the middle of continuum (excuses and justifications) provide some support for other’s face needs, at the same time protecting the account-giver’s own face needs. (p.161)

The reference to saving the AG’s face indicates the motivation for the AG’s delivery of aggravating accounts; the AG uses aggravating accounts such as refusals when an imminent threat of his/her own negative face is the greatest concern. Schönbach (1990) analyzes the use of aggravating accounts in terms of defensiveness; the more the AG feels defensive, the more likely that AG will invoke aggravating accounts. McLaughlin et al.’s (1983) study supports Schönbach’s claim; they also find that aggravating accounts are more likely to be invoked in contexts such as highly intimate situations or when reproachers use an aggravating reproach.

Excuses are recognized as mitigating accounts by some researchers (Fukuno & Ohbuch, 1998; Itoi et al., 1996; Takaku, 2000). Yet, participants in Yao’s (2010) study clearly showed negative impressions of excuses in Japanese. Investigating the impact of the absence of apologetic expressions in account-giving, Yao (2010) asked participants to read six conflict scenarios that included account-giving utterances and then to evaluate a particular utterance after reading each scenario. In five out of six conflict scenarios, more than half of the participants formed a negative impression of a given account when apologetic expressions were missing. However, in one scenario, seven out of nine participants showed more annoyance toward an explanation about how the failure happened than they did in the missing apologies. Citing an explanation for a failure is one component of excuses; three participants expressed their annoyance toward excuses.
using the word “iïwake” (which translates as “an (unjustifiable) excuse”) or “iïwake gamashii” (“defensive”). Participants in Yao’s (2011) study formed negative impressions of the AG and account utterances because they sensed that the AG is attempting to justify poor performance; they also think that the given account makes for a poor explanation. In this context, EXCUSES are clearly not mitigating. See Table 2.1 for the participants’ comments about the explanation. The scenario involves two people, an assistant (a role of AG) and a superior (a role of AR), and the AG explains why he or she has not completed a requested task, making copies; AG explained that other people were using the copier.
Table 2.1 *Summary of negative comments about the explanation of how the failure event happened (Yao 2010, p.52-53)*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Comments about the given account.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Japanese Transcription</strong></td>
<td><strong>English Gloss</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 自らの不手際を他人のせいにしている。言い訳がましく聞こえる。</td>
<td>The Assistant is blaming others for his bungled handling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 自身の事前準備不足を他人がコピー機を使っているせいにしている印象を受ける。</td>
<td>I got the impression that the assistant is blaming others who are using the copier for his poor preparation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 言い訳無用です。</td>
<td>It is unnecessary to make an excuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 最初の一文が言い訳がましく聞こえる。处理しようという意図が感じられない。</td>
<td>The first sentence sounds defensive / like making an excuse. I do not get the impression that the assistant is willing to complete his work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 仕事をしようという努力の説明がなく、何 も努力をしなかったことしか印象にならない。</td>
<td>There is no explanation for the assistant’s effort, and I only get the impression that he did not put in any effort at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 ポイントがずれている。いつできるか、間 に合うか言っていない。</td>
<td>The explanation misses the point. The assistant did not say when he will complete his work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 コピーが出来ていない説明になっていない。</td>
<td>AG did not explained well why he has not made the copies yet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The emphasis was added by the author.*

Previous studies (Bies, Shapiro, & Cummings, 1998; Sitkin, 1989) have researched the classification of different types of *excuses* in organizations: for instance, rule-oriented excuses (i.e., claiming law, traditions, and authoritative instruction), ethics-oriented excuses (i.e., stating that the behavior follows moral principles), political- and situational-oriented excuses (i.e., stating that the given circumstances do not allow an AG

---

1 The following is the script in Japanese: 佐藤：「コピーしようとしているんですですが、加藤さんがずっとコピー機を使用していて、他のコピー機も使用中で、まだコピー出来ていないんです。あと数 分くだされば、今作ってきます。」
to behave in a way that does not create conflict, such as lack of financial stability and mechanical troubles, and EXCUSES citing someone else’s fault. However, there are few discussions about the effects of those EXCUSES. Schlenker, Pontari, and Christopher (2001) also claim that the disadvantages of EXCUSES have been relatively neglected.

Cheng and Johnstone (2002) find that AG provides an explanation to be politer to the AR: they state that “they feel [the need] to act polite and informative in the way they would in more rapport-building, egalitarian kinds of conversation” (p. 417). However, contrary to AG’s motivation (being polite), EXCUSES may result in undesirable negative effects. Therefore, the investigation of what contributes to the perception of EXCUSES as positive or negative is important to managing the conflict properly.

This dissertation examines the AR’s take on explanations for failure events and, in particular, factors that trigger the perception of negatively judged EXCUSES. More specifically, it investigates the mechanism through which EXCUSES mitigate the potential damage of failures in Japanese business settings. Preliminary to the question of whether EXCUSES are mitigating is the question of the factors that motivate AGs to deploy EXCUSES as the account and the factors that influence the AR’s evaluation of accounts thus deployed. We turn to that question in the following section.

2.6 Influence of Situational Factors on Accounts

In addition to the cultural influence on the account, previous studies examine the impact of situational factors, such as contextual and social factors. Researchers have identified the following factors: the reproach phrase, harm severity, gender influence, social status, solidarity, and perceived sincerity. Each of these is examined closely below.
2.6.1 The Reproach Phrase

Reproach is generally expressed in two ways: behavioral cues (the reproacher’s non-verbal behavior, such as looking at the AG or giving a knowable sign), and verbal strategies (eliciting account-giving verbally) (McLaughlin, O’Hair, and Cody 1983). Schönbach and Kleibaumbuter (1990) investigate the influence of severely phrased reproaches on the defensiveness of accounts. They propose their reactance theory, which hypothesizes that threats to the AG’s freedom and/or self-esteem by aggressive reproaches contribute to eliciting a defensive reaction. They identify three types of verbal reproaches (p.234): 1. Neutral Questions (asking for an explanation with a neutral tone), 2. Derogation of Self-Esteem (attacking someone’s self-worth), and 3. Derogation of Sense of Control (attacking someone’s control competence). In their study, 92 male and 93 female participants were asked to imagine being a babysitter and were given scenarios in which “the child in their care had sneakied into the kitchen and drunk from a bottle containing cleaning fluid,” and, as a result, had to be sent to the hospital. The subjects were then asked to write what they would say after receiving reproach from the parents. Parents’ utterances were distinguished using the three types of reproaches: the parents simply asked for an explanation (Neutral Questions), the parents said things like, “How could that have happened? Apparently, you were too occupied with yourself!” (Derogation of Self-Esteem), or they said things like, “Why weren’t you able to prevent this? We wouldn’t have thought that you would lose track of our child so easily!”) (Derogation of Sense of Control) (p.234). The results support their reactance theory. They find that Neutral Questions tend to elicit a less defensive account than Derogation of Self-Esteem and Derogation of Sense of Control.
McLaughlin, et al. (1983) identify four types of verbal reproaches: 1) *projected concessions*, 2) *projected excuses*, 3) *projected justifications*, and 4) *projected refusals*. An AR reproaches by saying something that elicits an account that they desire to hear or that they assume that an AG would say. The researchers examine the impact of these types of reproach phrases on AG’s selection of an account. 278 American subjects who participated in this study were asked to recall and describe situations in which they felt obligated to give an account, including what was said to them and how they responded. The researchers found that CONCESSIONS and REFUSALS were used when reproachers used an aggressive reproach phrase. They also found that EXCUSES were used across all contexts.

According to their results, it is not always true that a projected account phrase elicits the corresponding account, but it at least seems to do so with greater likelihood than other types of reproaches. Cody and Braaten (1992, p.230) argue that:

> Generally speaking, polite or mitigating forms of reproaches allow the account-giver the freedom to communicate any account s/he desires...However, when an aggravating reproach form was used, the aggravating reproach form functioned as an interactional constraint that interfered with the account-giver’s freedom to communicate an intended or preferred form of an account.

When an AG hears an aggravating reproach, AG is more likely to feel defensive, which contributes to his or her likelihood of giving a defensive account such as a refusal. Both studies by Schönbach and Kleibaumhuter (1990) and McLaughlin et al. (1983) support the claim that the choice of reproach phrase has some impact on account selection.

### 2.6.2 Perceived Severity of Harm

Every account-giving involves a failure as well as damage emerging from the failure. Harm severity is the degree of damage occurring from a failure event. “Damage”
can include things such as bodily harm, lowered self-esteem, and loss of money or trust. For instance, when a manager tells employees their bonus has been reduced, the failure is the decision to reduce the bonus, and the harm is that employees will receive a lower amount of money. Another example is an employee giving a poor presentation. The failure is giving a poor performance in the presentation. Harm can be varied in this situation but may include such effects as receiving a poor evaluation from a manager, lowered self-esteem, or losing a job opportunity.

The degree of harm varies depending on the degree of damage. For instance, harm severity would be milder in the case of a 1% bonus reduction than in the case of a 50% bonus reduction. In the example of giving a poor presentation for a job talk, the harm would be minimal if the presenter is merely rehearsing for the presentation without an audience. However, the damage could be severe at a real job talk in front of potential employers; the AG would risk not only losing face but also the loss of financial stability and reduced career development opportunities.

Harm severity is evaluated not only based on the actual damage emerging from the failure but also on the contextual harm. For instance, if an AG makes the same error repeatedly, such as breaking a five-dollar vase that can be purchased online easily, even though the harm severity is not severe (because of the low cost and ease of obtaining a replacement), since the harm has been accumulated over time, it would result in an increase of perceived harm severity.

Previous research has revealed the significant influence of harm severity on accounts. Itoi, Ohbuchi, and Fukuno (1996) conducted an empirical study of cultural differences in account preference between Americans and Japanese and the influence of
relationship closeness and harm severity. They asked 174 American (88 males and 86 females) and 169 Japanese (85 males and 84 females) participants to read four scenarios that described a conflict situation in which an actor unintentionally harmed someone. After reading each scenario, participants were asked to rate how likely it would for them to employ each of six different types of accounts (CONCESSIONS, EXCUSES, JUSTIFICATION 1, JUSTIFICATION 2, REFUSALS, and AVOIDANCE2), on a scale of 0 to 10. They checked the effects of the harm severity by having participants also rate the severity on a scale of 0 to 10.

In both the American and the Japanese groups, when the perceived harm is severe, an AG is most likely to choose CONCESSIONS and AG is least likely to use REFUSALS. They conclude that when harm is severe, an AG is more likely to avoid aggravating accounts (JUSTIFICATIONS and REFUSALS) and prefer mitigating accounts (CONCESSIONS and EXCUSES). However, though they classify EXCUSES as mitigating accounts, the results for EXCUSES are almost the same as those for JUSTIFICATIONS, and the gap between EXCUSES and CONCESSIONS is greater than between EXCUSES and REFUSALS. Even in a context where harm is mild, CONCESSIONS are the most likely to be used, followed by JUSTIFICATION 2 and EXCUSES. Therefore, EXCUSES may be considered as aggravating accounts when perceived harm is severe.

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2 Itoi, Ohbuchi, and Fukuno (1996) use the terms “apology” and “denial,” instead of CONCESSIONS, and REFUSAL respectively. With AVOIDANCE, AG avoids talking about a failure account. The researchers divide JUSTIFICATIONS into two types based on the content of reducing responsibility. JUSTIFICATION 1 is an account-giver attempting to deny responsibility by emphasizing his or her good intentions: “There was a small child, and it looked like we were about to run into each other, so I avoided the child” (p.920). In JUSTIFICATION 2, an account-giver claims that the negative consequences were minimal: “I haven’t spilled much” (p. 920).
Itoi, Ohbuchi, and Fukuno (1996) examine the impact of harm severity on the motives of account-giving. They present three kinds of motives: 1) alleviating AR’s emotional, 2) impression improvement, and 3) avoidance of punishment.

The study finds that when perceived harm is severe for both the American and Japanese participants, AGs are motivated to perform account-giving in order to alleviate AR’s negative emotions and to avoid punishment; however, emotional alleviation is considered more strongly than avoidance of punishment for Japanese participants and vice versa for American participants, which suggests that mitigating AR’s emotion is more important or is an expected action for Japanese AGs than avoiding punishment. They also find that Japanese AGs are more likely to use CONCESSIONS and JUSTIFICATION when the harm is severe, whereas Americans are more likely to use AVOIDANCE in addition to CONCESSIONS and JUSTIFICATIONS. For Japanese participants, the use of EXCUSES is motivated by impression improvement and avoidance of punishment. Emotional alleviation is somewhat less of a motivation to invoke EXCUSES.

Itoi et al. also find that the more severe the harm is the more negatively AR evaluates the account given regardless of the type. Conversely, when the harm is mild, accounts would be evaluated more favorably. Furthermore, the research conducted by Ohbuchi et al. (1989) finds that the AR is more likely to expect to hear mitigating accounts when the harm is severe, which suggests that when the harm is mild, AR would less expect to hear mitigating accounts than when the harm is severe.

It has been found that when perceived harm is severe, CONCESSIONS are the most appropriate to invoke, but when perceived harm is mild, the AR is more tolerant of other types of accounts. However, there are few discussions about whether or not EXCUSES are
effective when perceived harm is mild. The present study aims to remedy this gap by investigating the effectiveness of excuses when perceived harm is mild.

2.6.3 Closeness and Relative Social Status of AG and AR

The influence of relationship closeness on account-giving is often discussed along with theories of cultural values regarding collectivism and individualism. Researchers hypothesize that the collectivist has a higher sensitivity toward maintenance of good relationships in in-group situations, which suggests the collectivist’s strong preference for mitigating accounts as an appropriate and effective strategy in these situations.

Fukuno and Ohbuchi (1996) have researched the impact of relationship closeness on the effectiveness of accounts. Their results show that mitigating accounts are more effective in terms of improving the AR’s impression of the AG in a close relationship than when the relationship is not close. However, a significant difference is shown only in refusals; when receiving refusals from a person who is close, an AR forms a stronger negative impression of an AG than when the AG is not close.

Itoi et al. (1998) obtained results similar to those of Fukuno and Ohbuchi’s study. They examined the influence of solidarity in the appropriateness of accounts from an AG’s perspective. Although Itoi et al. also did not find direct evidence, they concluded that there is indirect evidence of mitigating accounts being generally perceived as more appropriate to use in both close and distant relationships. However, they find that Japanese people are more likely to use aggravating accounts, such as refusals or avoidance (an AG avoids talking about a failure), with a stranger, while Americans are less affected by relationship closeness. Itoi et al. explain that refusals and avoidance are more passive in terms of creating a good relationship, and Japanese people’s fear of
conflict motivates avoidance of interaction with people from the out-group, whereas Americans’ preference of account strategies is not affected by the closeness of the relationship because their goal is focused on fulfilling personal interests rather than relational ones.

The preference of accounts is also affected by relative social status of AG and AR. Takaku (2000) conducted an empirical study of the influence of status and culture on the appropriateness of accounts, in addition to differences in account preferences between Americans and Japanese. 52 Japanese (28 males and 24 females) and 52 Americans (16 males and 36 females) participated in this study. They were asked to read scenarios that describe a conflict situation at work and then read four different account types offered in response to that situation: CONCESSIONS, EXCUSES, JUSTIFICATIONS, and AVOIDANCE. Afterward, they were asked to rate the appropriateness of each account on a scale of 0 to 7. The study was conducted in each participant’s native language. Refer to Table 2.2 and Table 2.3 for a summary of Takaku’s findings (ANOVA was conducted), the higher the Mean, the more likely the account type is chosen when the AR is a superior to AG (Table 2.2) and when the AR is a subordinate to AG (Table 2.3), respectively.

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3 Takaku (2000) used the term “apology” in place of CONCESSIONS.
Table 2.2 Status influence on account appropriateness when the AR is a superior (Takaku, 2000, p.381 and 383)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The AR is superior</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CONCESSIONS (M=5.64, SD=1.11)</td>
<td>EXCUSES (M=5.28, SD=1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>EXCUSES (M=4.79, SD=1.39)</td>
<td>CONCESSIONS (M=4.78, SD=1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>JUSTIFICATIONS (M=3.32, SD=1.32)</td>
<td>JUSTIFICATIONS (M=4.71, SD=1.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AVOIDANCE (M=1.67, SD=1.08)</td>
<td>AVOIDANCE (M=2.08, SD=1.17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: M and SD refer to mean and standard deviation respectively.

Table 2.3 Status influence on account appropriateness when the AR is a subordinate (Takaku, 2000, p.381 and 383)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The AR is subordinate</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>EXCUSES (M=4.97, SD=1.19)</td>
<td>EXCUSES (M=5.30, SD=1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CONCESSIONS (M=4.52, SD=1.44)</td>
<td>JUSTIFICATIONS (M=4.84, SD=1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>JUSTIFICATIONS (M=4.00, SD=1.33)</td>
<td>CONCESSIONS (M=3.97, SD=1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AVOIDANCE (M=1.78, SD=1.27)</td>
<td>AVOIDANCE (M=2.52, SD=1.54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Japanese, when the status of the AR is higher than that of the AG, CONCESSIONS are considered as the most appropriate followed in the order by EXCUSES, JUSTIFICATIONS, and AVOIDANCE. When the AR’s status is lower, EXCUSES were recognized as the most appropriate accounts, followed by CONCESSIONS and JUSTIFICATIONS also being perceived as appropriate strategies by Japanese participants.

Takaku (2000) suggests that when the AG’s status is higher, an AG is more likely to aim to maintain a good relationship with an AR, rather than to lessen charges of responsibility. Thus, CONCESSIONS were chosen as the most appropriate when AR is a superior person. However, EXCUSES appear to function as mitigation as well.
Takaku examines the AG’s perception of account preference, but not the AR’s. How do ARs evaluate EXCUSES? Would they form a positive impression of EXCUSES as shown in Takaku’s study? In order to examine these questions, the present study examines these account strategies from the AR’s point of view.

2.6.4 Perceived Sincerity of Accounts

Bies and Sitkin (1992) claim that perception of sincerity and honesty is one of the most important factors in using EXCUSES as an effective strategy. Bies, Shapiro, and Cummings (1988) inquired into subordinates’ reactions to budget request refusals. They conclude that (p. 192):

...while a boss’ excuse for refusing a budget request can mitigate negative responses by subordinates, the subordinates’ reactions were influenced most by the adequacy of the reasoning in the excuses and the boss’ sincerity in communicating the excuse. Specifically, the perceived adequacy and sincerity of a boss’ excuse for refusing a budget request was negatively associated with subordinates’ feelings of anger, procedural injustice, and disapproval of the boss, and sincerity alone was negatively associated with complaints to higher-ups....

Their results show that the boss’ sincerity in making excuses has an impact on subordinates’ impressions of the boss as well as the alleviation of anger.

Bies and Sitkin also reference a study by Rubin et al. (1980) that unexpectedly found a negative effect of insincerity on making excuses (as cited in Bies and Sitkin, 1992). The study illustrates that an account of EXCUSES was not perceived as an effective strategy because the AG may not have appeared sincere when giving the explanation. Yao (2010) also found the negative impact of insincerity. Even though the AG apologizes, some participants formed a negative impression of the AG because the AG did not sound sincere. These studies suggest that even if effective account strategies are used, if the AR could not perceive the AG’s sincerity, it is unlikely that the AG might be able to mitigate
the unfavorable situation. Therefore, when conducting research, it is critical that the researchers produce materials that participants will interpret in the way that the researcher intended if meaningful results are to be produced.

2.7 Research Questions

Much research has found positive effects for CONCESSIONS, but questions still remain regarding the effectiveness of EXCUSES. Some scholars have argued for the positive impacts of EXCUSES and identify them as mitigating accounts, while a few scholars have found negative impacts related to EXCUSES.

The present study investigates the effectiveness of EXCUSES from the AR’s perspective in a situation when EXCUSES are more likely to accepted, such as when the perceived harm is mild. It also examines accounts delivered by a subordinate (AG) to a superior (AR). The following research questions are proposed for the present study:

RQ 1 When the perceived severity of harm is mild and an AR in a Japanese organization contexts negatively judges EXCUSES, what factors contribute to the negative perception?

RQ2: What account strategies do people use in a Japanese organization context?

In the course of answering to these research questions, this research examines the when EXCUSES are effective, whether CONCESSIONS are more effective in any given situation, and what factors influence the AR’s perception of EXCUSES.

By attempting to answer these questions, we hope to reveal more comprehensively the functions of EXCUSES and take a further step toward suggesting impression-improvement strategies in the context of Japanese culture. Since the determination process of account-giving and account evaluation is affected by many complex contextual and social factors, in order to regularize the data, it is crucial to
systematically manipulate variables. In this study, the following context is employed to investigate account-giving strategies, focusing on EXCUSES:

**Time**: Right after a failure or right after the AR’s reproach

**Place**: Japanese company

**Roles**: The AG is a subordinate and the AR is a superior (an AR has a higher status)

**Script**: Includes either CONCESSIONS or EXCUSES, and both the AG and the AR use a formal speech style

**Audience**: None

**Harm severity**: Damage is mild and the reproach phrase is neutral
Chapter 3: Data Collection

Data were collected in order to accomplish the following two major goals: 1) to determine the effectiveness of excuses (i.e., giving a reason or an explanation of how a blunder happened) in a Japanese enterprise setting; and 2) to find Japanese people’s language behavior of account-giving in a Japanese business organization setting. In particular, the data collection intended to determine whether or not giving a reason or an explanation is perceived as negatively judged excuses (as defined in Chapter 2) as well as under what condition, if any, Japanese people preferred to receive accounts with an explanation, that is, when excuses are perceived to be positively judged excuses.

In order to achieve these goals, two different techniques were used: interviews and role-plays. Since this research used two different kinds of techniques and there are two different groups of subjects, subjects who participated in the interviews are called “reacting subject,” while those who participated in the role-play study are referred to as the “acting subjects.” Interviews were used to investigate the effectiveness of excuses in a Japanese enterprise setting from the perspective of account receivers (ARs). They involve hypothetical conflict scenarios, which contain a business blunder and account-giving utterances that were given by a subordinate account giver (AG) to a superior-ranked AR. The reacting subjects were asked to assume that they were taking the role of a superior person (AR) and listened to the subordinate (AG’s) utterances. In the individualized interview that followed each listening of an account, the reacting subjects
were asked to describe verbally their reaction toward each AG’s utterances as well the impression they would form about the AG.

To investigate the second major goal, investigating Japanese account-giving strategies focusing on EXCUSES in an organization setting, role-plays were conducted. Role-plays involve the same three conflict scenarios as those used in the interviews. A superior person is the AR and a subordinate person is the AG in the role-plays as well. However, the acting subjects of the role-play study were asked to play the role of the AG in every scenario. The primarily objective of the role-play was to see whether the acting subjects provide a reason or an explanation of the given business blunder. The findings thus allowed the researcher to examine correspondences between the findings from interviews and ones from role-plays. In addition, by utilizing the role plays, the researcher hoped to gather data on the implementation of accounts through observation of AG behavior in the specified contexts of business blunders. If an explanation is given, how is it given? What might be said before and/or after the explanation? If an explanation is avoided, what type of account-giving strategy is used instead?

In sum, both interviews and role-plays involve three conflict scenarios where an AR is superior and an AG is subordinate within the business organization. The scenarios are the same in both interviews and role-plays except for the roles that subjects assumed or played. Reacting subjects in interviews assumed the role of a superior (also AR) and gave their reactions to the accounts, whereas acting subjects in the role-play study played the role of a subordinate (AG) and played out their account-giving behavior. Other contextual elements are the same in interviews and role-plays, such as time, place, the relative ranks between the AG and the AR, and the nature of the business blunder.
committed. As ARs, the reacting subjects listened to a female voice giving accounts and discussed their reactions. The acting subjects acted as AG when they heard the same female voice, who acted as a supervisor prompting an account.

Qualitative methods were employed to analyze the descriptive interview responses and role-play behaviors. The method was used in part due to the relatively small number of subjects, but it would still be useful to discuss numbers for the purpose of comparison. This study was approved by the Ohio State University Institutional Review Board in June, 2013. All data were collected during the summer of 2013.

Both reacting and acting subjects were also asked to fill out a short questionnaire before they started to read the scenarios. The main purpose of this questionnaire was to collect demographic information about the subjects specifically to confirm that they had experience working for a Japanese company since every scenario in this study is limited to a Japanese organization setting. The background questionnaire asked subjects about age, gender, hometown, and their international and domestic employment experience(s). See Appendix A for the background questionnaire used and Appendix B for its English equivalent.

### 3.1 Hypothetical Conflict Scenarios

The same three hypothetical scenarios were used in both interviews and role-plays. Hypothetical conflict scenarios were created to systematically manipulate variables of interest and to eliminate the impact of possible unrelated variables on this study (Martin 2006), and to help participants focus on the variables intended by the researcher (Converse and Presser, 1986). Observation of naturally-occurring instances could be a longer-term project entailing tracking or shadowing a single person to see in what
situations that person actually proceeds with account-giving or not. While extremely useful, naturally-occurring cases could have other variables that might detract from the focus of the study. The hypothetical scenarios allow the researcher to collect data using pre-determined parameters in the settings (business) and roles (hierarchical relationships in a business context). It would be a longer-term project to collect naturally-occurring interactions that satisfy these parameters.

Hypothetical conflict scenarios allow us to control the settings (i.e., perceived harm severity, hierarchical relations, and genres) to examine the effects of excuses used in a business setting, specifically explaining a business blunder to a superior person when perceived harm is mild. By presenting in hypothetical scenarios that participants may actually encounter, the researcher is able to produce the expectations and reasons that participants would have in similar social circumstances (Gerber, 1994).

The three scenarios created for the study met the following three criteria. First, a workplace in Japan was used as the general setting for all of the scenarios in order to generate data relevant to Japanese business settings. Second, two people perform in every scenario the AR, and the AG. AR is the role that reacting subjects in the interviews assumed, and has a higher status in the business context. The AG, the role that acting subjects in the role-play took, is an assistant or subordinate to the AR. Third, the scenarios were created with low to moderate levels of severity of offence. To ensure that the analysis would include only those instances that the ARs themselves perceived to be involving low to moderate levels of offence, reacting subjects were asked during the interviews to rate the severity of offence on the 1 to 10 scale. Only instances involving
the offenses rated 5 or below were to be analyzed. In fact, the participants rated all of the scenarios 5 or below on the severity of offence scale.

Each scenario includes a written description of the context, i.e., the setting; the relative positions of the people involved; and the timing, including the social blunder committed, for example, being late to a meeting. See Appendix C for hypothetical interpersonal conflict scenarios and D for its English equivalent.

Only in interviews, two different types of account scripts are attached to each scenario to produce the account-giving script; one of which is EXCUSES, a longer account that contains sincere apologies and a reason why the blunder happened; the other of which is a shot CONCESSION (fully admit his or her association of the given blunder and take his/her responsibility). Those accounts are pre-recorded utterances. Reacting subjects listened to six different account scripts in total, reacting in the interview immediately following each utterance. The following three sections present the description of each scenario and attached account scripts used in interviews.

3.1.1 Bus Scenario: Being late to Work due to a Delay of Public Transportation

In this scenario, referred to as the “Bus” scenario, an assistant was late for a meeting with a senior colleague by 10 minutes, and gives the account upon arriving in the office. The severity of offence was controlled by the number of minutes that the assistant was late for meeting.

The scripts below are the account script used in interviews. The explanation for the blunder is an EXTERNAL EXCUSE, where the location of cause of the blunder is external.

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4 Each scenario received on the ratings below; Bus scenario: Average 3.78; Range 4; Median 4; and Mode 5 Room scenario: Average 3.73; Range 4; Median 4; and Mode 4 Document scenario; Average 3.73; Range 3; Median 4; and Mode 5.
to AG. This script was created to investigate the impact of **EXTERNAL EXCUSES** in an AR’s perception of **EXCUSES**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Bus Scenario</strong></th>
<th>Japanese Account Utterances</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXCUSE Script</strong></td>
<td>「遅くなって、すみません。いつも乗っているバスを使ったのですが、今日道が混んでいて遅れてしまいました。これからはもっと早く出るようにします。すみませんでした。」</td>
<td>“I’m sorry for being late. I took the bus that I always use, but the roads were jammed. From now on, I will leave home much earlier. I’m very sorry.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCESSION Script</strong></td>
<td>「遅くなってしまい、すみませんでした。」</td>
<td>“I’m sorry for being late.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.1.2 Room Scenario: Booking a Wrong Room for a Meeting due to AG’s Carelessness in Reading a Message

In this scenario, referred to as the “Room” scenario, a meeting attendees asked an assistant to book a conference room on the second floor via e-mail, and received a booking confirmation from her right away; however, since the assistant booked the wrong conference room, (the one on the first floor), meeting attendees drew her attention to the error. The severity of the offense was controlled by remaining the dates of the conference; there are still two weeks to fix this issue before the meeting.

The scripts below are the account scripts that are used in interviews. The explanation for a blunder in this scenario is an **INTERNAL EXCUSE**, where the location of cause is internal to the AG. This script was created to examine the influence of **INTERNAL EXCUSES** in an AR’s perception of giving an explanation.
### Room scenario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japanese Account Utterances</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>「あ、２階なんですか。すみません。いつも1階の会議室なので、今回も1階だと思っていました。これからもっと気をつけます。今すぐ訂正します。」</td>
<td>“Oh, is it on the second floor? I’m sorry, it’s always held on the first floor, so I thought that it would be on the first floor this time too. I will read my e-mails more carefully next time. I will make this correction right away.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| CONCESSION Script | 「あ、すみません。今すぐ訂正します。」 | “Oh, I’m so sorry. I will correct this right away.” |

#### 3.1.3 Document Scenario: Bringing an Unrelated File for a Meeting due to Assistant’s Wrongdoing

In the third scenario, referred to as the “Document” scenario, a junior colleague distributes to a meeting attendee, a senior colleague, a document that is irrelevant to the meeting topic during a meeting.

The scripts below are the account script used in interviews. This script was created to examine the influence of external excuses in an AR’s perception of giving an explanation. Although the reasons in both this and the Bus scenario are external excuses, the types of the external cause are slightly different. In the Bus scenario, the blunder is due to public transportation, thus AG does not have any direct association to the cause of the delay, whereas in this document scenario, the blunder happens due to the mistake of the AG’s assistant. Business people oftentimes assume that an assistant’s poor performance can be attributed to his/her superior’s substandard advising. Therefore, it may be considered that while the direct cause of the blunder is due to AG’s assistant, the
AG may also be considered to be responsible for the blunder. The document scenario was created to examine the effect and impact of this kind of EXTERNAL EXCUSES.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document scenario</th>
<th>Japanese Account Utterances</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXCUSE Script</td>
<td>「あ、すみません。すぐに正しいものを印刷してきます。」</td>
<td>“Oh, I’m sorry. I will bring the right one now.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(戻って来て)</td>
<td>(She returns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>「お待たせして、すみませんでした。アシスタントに書類の印刷を頼んでいたんですけれど、間違えてしまったみたいですね。でも私も確認すべきでした。すみませんでした。」</td>
<td>“I’m sorry for making you wait. I asked the assistant to print out the document, but it seems she printed the wrong one. But I should have checked it when she gave it back to me. I’m sorry.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCESSION Script</td>
<td>「あ、すみません。すぐに正しいものを印刷してきます。」</td>
<td>“Oh, I’m sorry, I will bring the right one right away. “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(戻って来て)</td>
<td>(She returns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>「お待たせしてすみませんでした。こちらです。」</td>
<td>“I’m sorry for making you wait. This is the right one”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Interviews

Each one-on-one interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and was conducted entirely in Japanese. All interviews were conducted in the Kanto area (Tokyo, Kanagawa, and Saitama) of Japan and were audio-recorded. Interviews were held at various locations in the Kanto area, such as at a coffee shop, a public community center, a

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5 The researcher’s laptop was used to record all the interactions during interviews.
and a participant’s friend’s house. The exact interview locations accommodated the interview participant’s work location and schedule. The researcher first informed the participants of the purpose of the study and the procedures for the interview and asked them to sign a consent form before they participated in the study. All individuals recruited agreed to participate. After the signed consent form was collected, the participant’s demographic information was collected, followed by the distribution of the first scenario.

The procedure of conducting the interviews involved a set of six sequential steps, each set being repeated three times; 1) reacting subjects read a scenario; 2) they listened to one of the recorded accounts; 3) they were asked Interview Question (IQ) 1 to 5; 4) they listened to the other recorded account; and 5) they were asked the same five interview questions as asked in step 3; and finally, 6) the last question, IQ 6 was asked. After going through the six steps with the Bus scenario, the same six steps were repeated for the Room scenario, and again, for the Document scenario.

3.2.1 Account Scripts and Audio Recordings

The reacting subjects listened to six account script performances. While three of them were EXCUSES and the other three were CONCESSIONS, the six scripts shared two features, one having to do with the inclusion of certain tactics, and another having to do with the way they were rendered in the recorded voice.

The six audio-recorded account scripts were designed based on Yao’s (2011) study. Audio recordings were employed so that participants were able to obtain more vivid images of account-giving performance. Yao (2011) studied the effectiveness of an apology in Japanese account-giving, and she had participants evaluate account stories using a written form. She had participants read conflict scenarios and account scripts.
Some of the participants in the study commented that the impression and the interpretation of a given script would change depending on the tones and intonation (prosody) of the speaker, and, therefore, it was difficult to evaluate the utterances based only on the written scripts. In the present study, in order to provide participants a more vivid and comprehensive context, audio recordings of the account scripts were given to the reacting subjects to listen to. While still less realistic than having a face-to-face interaction with the AG, the use of audio recording was thought to give a tighter control in the study by eliminating the potential variables that would have arisen if reacting subject had been asked to imagine AG’s speech from the written script. All audio-recordings were done by the same speaker, a Japanese woman in her 40s who was living in the US Midwest at the time of recording. Several recordings were made for each script until the desired tone feature was attained.

In order to avoid negative effects generated by contextual elements other than EXCUSES, if any, all audio account utterances used in the interviews included two features. First, apologetic expressions and an expression of future improvement were included in account utterances. In Yao’s study (2011), it is found receiving apologies from AG eases AR’s feelings because it can express and that the statement of AG’s effort to prevent a future recurrence of the same blunder helps AG show responsibility for AG’s work. While apologies were included in both types of scripts, EXCUSES and CONCESSION, because the absence of a statement of the intent to avoid such behavior does not necessarily generate negative effects, it was included only in EXCUSES scripts.

The second feature of the recorded accounts was that the AG (the subordinate person) sounded sincere and serious in her speech, as opposed to nonchalant
orunintersted. In addition to re-recording multiples times as needed to generate the desired effect, each recording was evaluated by three Japanese people who live in Japan to confirm the perceivability of the seriousness of the speaker (AG). All recordings that were actually used in the interviews were approved to be sincere and serious-sounding by all of the audio evaluators.

3.2.2 Interview Questions

Immediately after a reacting subject listened to each account, the researcher asked a set of questions through an interview. The interviews were audio recorded, using the researcher’s laptop computer. An interview was used because it allowed the researcher to pursue in-depth information about the topic. For instance, it enabled the researcher to qualitatively look into the underlying reasons for their impressions of accounts, and discuss the respondents’ experiences. Additionally, interviews are also useful to clarify any potential confusion or misunderstandings of hypothetical conflict scenarios and questions (McMillan 2012).

Interview questions consisted of a structured question and a few semi-structured questions. After listening to each account, reacting subjects were asked a set of five questions, and after listening to the second script of each scenario, they were asked one more question, which asked respondent’s preference for the type of account, a short account (CONCESSION) or a long account (EXCUSE).

See Appendix E for interview questions, and F for their English equivalents. Question 1 (Did you think that what she said was a valid reason?), question 2 (Is there any parts that the speaker should not have said?), and question 3 (From what the speaker said, did you feel that the speaker is aware of her responsibilities toward the job?) were
asked to find the effectiveness of reason-giving (i.e., EXCUSES). When respondents answered “No” to questions 1 or 2, they were further asked to talk about their underlying reasons. Question 4 (On a scale of one to ten, please rate the level of severity of the situation.) was added to confirm the low to mid level of severity of offense. Question 5 (If the speaker did the same or similar things a couple of times before, does your impression of the response change? Does the response still sound like a valid reason?) is included to examine the impact of recurrence of the same blunder in reason-giving. Finally, question 6 (Which of the two responses gives you a better impression of the person? Why?) seeks to compare the effectiveness of short CONCESSIONS and EXCUSES vis à vis the three scenario settings.

3.2.3 Interview Participants: Reacting Subjects

Twenty native Japanese people, 13 females and 7 males, with working experience in a Japanese organization in Japan participated in the interviews. Their age ranged between the 20’s and 60’s: 6 participants in their 20’s; 10 in their 30’s; one each in 40’s and 50’s; and two in their 60’s. Table 3.1 summarizes the age and gender of the 20 reacting subjects.
Table 3.1 *Reacting subjects by age and gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of the reacting subjects had any working experience in a foreign country. Their work experience in Japanese domestic business organizations ranged in duration from 6 months to 35 years, with a mean of 8.7 years and a mode of 8 years, and the midrange of 12 years. Table 3.2 summarizes the distribution of durations of services to company (-ies) and gender.

Table 3.2 *Reacting subjects by years of services to company(-ies) and gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of service to company(-ies)</th>
<th>Number of subjects</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Role-Plays

In addition to the interviews, which elicited native speakers’ reactions to AG utterances, this research also utilized role-plays. The role-plays elicited from native speakers with working experience in Japanese business the account-giving strategies from the AG’s perspective. The researcher primarily examined the use of a reason or an explanation of how a business blunder happened. Open-ended oral role-plays were employed because they provide a richer data source than data that could be generated from discourse completion tasks, and they allow the researcher to examine utterances in their full discourse context (Kasper and Dahl 1991). Kasper and Dahl (p.27) state that “(role-plays) allow a researcher to observe how speech act performance is sequentially organized (e.g. in terms of strategy choice and politeness investment), what kinds of interlocutor responses are elicited by specific strategic choices...” Given this reason, role-plays were determined to be useful for this study.

The same three scenarios used in the interviews were used for the role-plays. See Appendix G for the three scenarios for role-playing and H for their English equivalents. Using the same set of scenarios in both studies allowed the researcher to examine whether or not data from the interview study and data from the role-plays study would correspond to each other, as well as examine any different points of view between AG’s
and an AR’s perspective. Acting subjects were told to imagine that they were the subordinate person (AG) and I was the superior (AR), and then asked to read a scenario. The situation was further clarified when they had a question. After reading the first scenario, the Bus scenario, a role-play was conducted. The same flow was followed in Room scenario and Document scenario.

Immediately after the three role-plays, a retrospective interview was employed to shed light on their perceptions of the preceding performances. Retrospective interview also increase the accuracy of the researcher’s analysis by consulting the respondents’ own perceptions of their interlocutors’ contributions (Kasper and Dahl 1991). The researcher aimed to examine through retrospective interviews details about the participants’ internal points of view and underlying reasons as to why they did or did not provide a reason for or an explanation for the blunder. When acting subjects, for instance, explained the blunder in one scenario, but not other scenarios, they were asked to discuss what motivated them to choose differently. The responses gained from retrospective interviews helped to contextualize their actions with psychological factors (such as face issues) that impacted their decisions.

The retrospective interview was also audio-recorded. The acting subjects were asked questions with the regards to 1) the reason they provided an explanation (EXCUSES); 2) a reason they did not give an explanation; and, in some cases, 3) why they gave a reason in one scenario, but not in another.

All role-plays were conducted in Japan by the researcher and were held individually. Each role play session, including three scenarios and a retrospective interview, lasted approximately twenty minutes. All the procedures were conducted
entirely in Japanese and they were audio recorded after participants’ agreement to audio-recording⁶. Role-plays were held at various places in the Kanto area, such as a coffee shop, a public community center, participant’s office and participant’s house. The exact role-play locations accommodated the role-play participant’s work location and schedule.

The researcher first informed the participants of the purpose and the procedure of the study and asked them to sign a consent form before they participated in the study. All individuals that the researcher contacted agreed to participate. After the signed consent form were collected, they were asked to fill out a demographic information sheet. After completing the demographic information sheet, the acting subject was then asked to read the first scenario for role play.

3.3.1 Role-play Participants: Acting Subjects

Six participants, 3 males and 3 females, all with working experience in a Japanese business organization in Japan, participated in the role-plays as acting subjects. All of them were recruited in Japan. Their ages ranged between their 20’s and 60’s. Two participants were in their 20’s, and 3 participants were in their 30’s, and there was one participant who was in her 60’s. Every participant was working in a Japanese office when the data were collected. The years of service to company(-ies) ranged from 6 months to 17 years with a mean of 7.8 years. Table 3.3 summarizes the age, gender, and duration of company services of the six acting subjects.

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⁶ Researcher’s laptop was used to record all the interactions during the role-plays and retrospective interviews.
Table 3.3. *Acting subjects’ gender, years of service to company(-ies), and age*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acting subject 1</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of service to company (-ies)</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acting subject 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>60’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting subject 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>20’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting subject 4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>30’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting subject 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>30’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting subject 6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>30’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next two chapters present the data obtained from the interviews and role-plays and their analysis.
Chapter 4: Interview Results and Discussion

This study aims to discover the effectiveness of EXCUSES and the framework of cultural expectations that shape interactions when employing account-giving strategies in the context of a Japanese organization. In order to accomplish this purpose, interviews and role-plays were conducted. Interviews were designed to answer Research Questions (RQ) 1, while role-plays were employed to answer RQ 2. This chapter addresses RQs 1, and the next chapter addresses RQ 2. The two research questions are repeated below.

RQ 1 When the perceived severity of harm is mild and an AR in a Japanese organization contexts negatively judges EXCUSES, what factors contribute to the negative perception?

RQ 2: What account strategies do people use in a Japanese organization context?

This chapter reports on the results from the Interview study and discuss findings related to RQ 1. Chapter 5 reports on the role play study results, addressing RQ 2.

Interviews gathered 20 native speakers’ reactions to different scenarios. This chapter presents data collected from interviews of twenty reacting subjects and address factors that contributes to the negative perception of EXCUSES through examining AR’s preference in accounts, the effectiveness of EXCUSES in demonstrating sincerity of one’s job, and the impact of perceived severity-of-harm on the perception of EXCUSES.

Interviews involved listening to six audio-recorded utterances of a female AG (a subordinate) based on three different scenarios of a situation that includes a business blunder. The subjects assumed that they were the senior colleague receiving the account.
In one scenario, the ‘**Bus scenario,**’ the AG was late for a meeting with a senior colleague (the AR) due to delay in the bus, a commonly-used and usually reliable means of public transportation. In another scenario, the ‘**Room scenario,**’ the AG was asked to book a room for a meeting in two weeks by a senior colleague, but the AG booked the wrong meeting room. In the third scenario, the ‘**Document scenario,**’ the AG’s assistant gave AG an irrelevant document for a meeting with a senior colleague, and AG brought the document to the meeting without realizing that the document was irrelevant.

Each scenario includes two different types of account utterances: **EXCUSES** (which include an explanation for the blunder) and **CONCESSIONS** (which do not), for a total of six account-giving utterances across the three scenarios. The account-giving scripts will be referred to by combining the key word of the scenario with the utterance type, for example “**bus-EXCUSE**” or “**document-CONCESSION.**” One important point about the scripts for the **CONCESSION** is that the account is short and simple; the AG only expresses an acknowledgment of his/her association with a failure event and accepts responsibility by apologizing.⁷

The following section addresses the characteristics of cause and explains characteristics of a failure in each scenario using Weiner’s three dimensions of causal property.

### 4.1 The Characteristics of Cause According to Weiner’s theory

The characteristics of cause of failure influence language use. Weiner (2000; 2005) proposes three dimensions of causality of failure and success—i.e., **locus,** **satiability,** and **controllability**—to explain the psychological effects on actor’s behavior.

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⁷ See Appendix C for conflict scenarios and scripts, and D for their English equivalents.
Locus identifies the location of a cause; whether the cause happened due to the actor (i.e., internal cause) or not (i.e., external cause). Stability deals with whether or not the cause is always present in a specific condition or it happens by chance. Controllability refers to whether the cause was intentional (controllable) or not (uncontrollable).

The intended characteristics of causality are similar in Room- and Document scenario, whereas the characteristic of cause in Bus scenario are different in locus and controllability. In the case of both Room- and Document scenarios, locus is internal and controllability is controllable, but in the case of Bus scenario, locus is external and controllability is uncontrollable. Document scenario is prominent in the involvement of two people (i.e., AG and her assistant) in the cause of the blunder. AG mentions about assistant’s error in its excuse script. See Table 4.1 for the characterization of Bus-, Room-, and Document scenario’s business blunders, that are characterized from the AR’s perspective.

Table 4.1 Characterization of three scenario’s business blunders from the AR’s perspective using

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Locus</th>
<th>Satiability</th>
<th>Controllability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bus</td>
<td>external</td>
<td>unstable</td>
<td>uncontrollable (controllable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>room</td>
<td>internal</td>
<td>unstable</td>
<td>controllable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>document</td>
<td>internal (external)</td>
<td>unstable</td>
<td>controllable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two cells that have two items, Bus scenario’s controllability and Document scenario’s locus; the one in parentheses represents the less dominant reaction expressed by interview subjects. In Bus scenario, although the Bus delay is an external
force and it is not controllable, four subjects thought that the delay could have been controlled by the AG making an effort to leave home earlier. In Document scenario, a large number of reacting subjects identified that the locus of the blunder as internal because the AG failed to check the document before distributing the copies in the meeting. However, a few people indicated that the blunder happened due to the external force, i.e., the assistant giving the wrong document to the AG. Weiner’s three dimensions of causality provide us with a tool to examine when Japanese AR perceive excuses negatively and when excuses are taken as not a valid explanation, but as making excuses ‘iitake.’

4.2 Results of Interview Questions

The interview consists of six core questions. When necessary, follow-up questions were also asked to investigate why subjects perceived utterances in a particular way. The following sections present the results of Interview Questions (IQ) 1 to 6 except for IQ4 that verifies low-level of harm in all failure types. All reacting subjects verified that the severity of harm in the three scenarios was mild, thus their reactions to the three scenarios were determined to be valid data for the present research.

4.2.1 Validity of the Account (IQ 1)

Table 4.2 summarizes the responses to Interview Question 1. A “No” response to this question indicates a negative perception about the account. Each table cell in the table under “Yes,” “No,” and “Neither” denotes the total number of respondents who selected that particular choice. The total number of respondents is twenty.

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8 See Appendix E for interview questions in Japanese and F for their English equivalents.
Table 4.2 Responses to interview question 1: ‘Did you think that what the AG said was a valid reason?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus-E</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Bus-C</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room-E</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Room-C</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc-E</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Doc-C</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=20) Notes. “Doc” refers to document and E and C refer to EXCUSES and CONCESSIONS, respectively.

Although the majority of reacting subjects indicated that the EXCUSE utterance was valid in reaction to the bus-EXCUSE, in reaction to room-EXCUSE and document-EXCUSE, the reacting subjects were divided evenly over whether the account was valid or invalid.

The CONCESSIONS scripts generated a few different results from the EXCUSES scripts. Only half of the subjects thought that a given concession was valid in the case to bus-CONCESSION, whereas majority of the subjects indicated that the account was valid in the case of the room-CONCESSION and the document-CONCESSION. Bus-CONCESSION gains the lowest number of subjects who thought that the account is valid among CONCESSIONS. The results of the interview question show that EXCUSES are preferred to CONCESSIONS in the Bus scenario. On the other hand, CONCESSIONS are accepted at a higher rate than EXCUSES for the Room- and Document scenarios.

Reacting subjects who felt the EXCUSES were not valid were asked why they thought so. Table 4.3 summarizes the reasons that the reacting subjects cited and the number of subjects who cited these reasons. Six when subjects thought the bus-EXCUSE script was invalid, ten when they judged room-EXCUSE script to be invalid, and ten when they said document-EXCUSE was invalid. The reasons can be divided into five categories:
1) The explanation is an excuse, 2) the explanation sounds like an excuse, 3) although the explanation is believable, since the AG could have put more effort to prevent it, the explanation is not valid, 4) the AG is pushing her responsibility onto other people, 5) the honorific expression of apologies, *mooshiwake gozaimasen*, should have been used instead of *sumimasen*.

Table 4.3 *Categories of reasons that reacting subjects cited for claiming that EXCUSE scripts were invalid*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘The explanation is an excuse.’</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The explanation sounds like an excuse.’ (<em>iiwakeppoi</em>)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The explanation is believable, but since the AG could have put in more effort to prevent it, the explanation is not valid.’</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The AG is pushing her responsibility onto other people.’</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The formal expression of apology, <em>mooshiwake gozaimasen</em>, should have been used instead of <em>sumimasen</em>.’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* “E”=EXCUSE

The first two categories of reasons (“The explanation is an excuse” and “The explanation sounds like an excuse”) refers to the scripts directly as *iiwake* ‘making excuses.’ The vast majority of reacting subjects who negated the validity of the room- and document-EXCUSE scripts but only half of the six subjects who invalidated the bus-EXCUSE gave this direct reference *iiwake*. The other three categories of reasons (the AG could have put in more effort, the AG turned their responsibility onto others, and the AG
did not use a formal apology) indicate that the subject did not perceive the EXCUSE as *iiwake* ‘making excuses,’ but the explanation for the failure still caused a negative impression of the AG.

Those subjects who made reference to making excuses *‘iiwake’* were further asked why they thought that the given account was a case of making excuses. Table 4.4 shows their reasons. The number of subjects who made these direct references to making excuses *‘iiwake’* are distributed three, nine, and nine across bus-EXCUSE, room-EXCUSE and document-EXCUSE. Note that some subjects gave multiple reasons in the case of bus-EXCUSE, so the total number of responses is five even though only three individuals responded.

Table 4.4 Reasons for associating making excuses *‘iiwake’* directly with the judgement of “invalid” accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script (EXCUSES)</th>
<th>The number of subjects</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bus-E</strong> (3 subjects)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘The AG can put in more effort to leave her house early.’ <em>(Motto hayaku deru doryoku ga dekiru.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘Being late is not a good example of business etiquette.’ <em>(Shakai-jin to shite okureru koto wa yokunai.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘It sounds like the AG is lying.’ <em>(Uso wo itte iru yoo ni kikoeru)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rm-E</strong> (9 subjects)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>‘“The meeting is always held on the first floor” is not a valid reason.’ <em>(“Itsumo ikkai” to iu no wa ii riyuu ni naranai.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doc-E</strong> (9 subjects)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>‘The AG is blaming others. / The AG is pushing her responsibility to the assistant.’ <em>(Hito no sei ni shite iru / sekinin wo oshitsukete iru.)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In reaction to the bus-EXCUSE, there are three different reasons the subjects gave for perceiving the EXCUSE negatively: 1) the AG could have put in more effort, 2) being late was not good business etiquette, and 3) it sounds like the AG is lying. In contrast to the bus-EXCUSE, which generated multiple different reasons for considering the excuse to be negative, the room-EXCUSE and document-EXCUSE each generated unanimous responses from the nine subjects. There was an agreement among subjects as to why they though room and document-EXCUSES were iiwake. The reasons were more varied for the bus scenario.

In reaction to room-EXCUSE, the nine subjects thought that the account was making excuses ‘iiwake’ because even if “the meeting is always held on the first floor”, this is not a valid reason for this business blunder. See the subjects’ comments below.

Comment 1. ‘Even though I asked her to reserve a room on the second floor instead of the first floor this time, the AG reserved a room on the first floor based on her assumption. I think that is an excuse.’

Comment 2. ‘The AG does not read the e-mail message carefully and does her job based on an assumption, (as she assumes) it will be this way because it is always. It sounds like an excuse rather than a reason.’

Comment 3. ‘The AG does not read the e-mail message carefully, and so I feel that she lacks attention to her work. It sounds like she is making excuses.’

During the interviews, they often used words describing the AG’s assumption (omoikomi), lack of attention (tyuuibusoku), and failure to read a message carefully (seidoku site inai). The explanation in the room-EXCUSE gives an impression of an AG lacking in taking responsibility for her work. An AR consequently is likely to evaluate the

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9 Comment 1. 今回の二階を予約したからです。それも言い訳だと思います。
Comment 2. いつもこうだから、今回もこうだろうという思い込みで仕事をしていて、メールを精読していないです。理由というよりは、言い訳にしか聞こえない。
Comment 3. 注意深くメールを読んでなくて、仕事に対する注意が足りなさそうって思います。
AG’s performance poorly. Additionally, the explanation, “the meeting usually happens in the room on the first floor,” also gives an AR the impression that the AG does not admit her mistake. This causes a negative impression of the account and the AG. See comment 4 below:

**Comment 4.** ‘It sounds like making excuses. The AG seems not to be admitting her mistake, and it sounds casual.’

This subject formed an impression of the AG as not taking her work seriously because she does not admit her mistake. The utterance describing how the AG made a mistake resulted in an aggravating conflict.

In reaction to the document-EXCUSE, every subject who thought that an explanation was making excuses responded that they felt so because they thought that AG was either blaming others or pushing AG’s responsibility onto the assistant. Below are the subjects’ comments about the document-EXCUSE:

**Comment 5.** ‘I feel that the AG is avoiding her responsibility (pushing it onto the assistant).’

**Comment 6.** ‘I feel that she is blaming her assistant and is claiming “because the assistant did it, it is not my fault.” It sounds like making excuses.’

**Comment 7.** ‘Because I think that Ms. Ito (the AG) also has a responsibility to check the document herself, it’s nothing but excuses. [interviewer: she is also saying “I also should have checked,” but (what do you think?).] It sounds like a lie because she said “Assistant (did it)” first.’

---

10 Comment 4. 言い訳に聞こえる。自分のミスをあんまり認めていない感じで、軽く聞こえる。
11 Comment 5. 責任を押し付けている感じがします。
Comment 6. アシスタントのせいにして、アシスタントがしたから自分は悪いくないと言っているような感じがします。言い訳に聞こえます。
Comment 7. 伊藤さんも自分で書類を確認しなくちゃいけない義務が私はあると思うから、言い訳にしか聞こえない。[Interviewer: 「私も確認すべきでした」と言っていますが。]なんか嘘くさい。「アシスタントが」って先に言ったから。
Summarizing the results of interview question 1, including the additional questions, a Japanese AR is likely to perceive excuses negatively in a situation like Room- and Document scenarios whereas AR is likely to accept an explanation favorably in a situation like a Bus scenario. The explanation as to how the AG came to make the error, such as “because it has always been this way” or “because an assistant did it,” is likely to be recognized as an invalid explanation, and the majority of ARs are likely to perceive the account as making excuses ‘iiwake.’ Moreover, it is also found that in a Japanese organization, being late for a meeting due to a public transportation delay may be recognized as bad business etiquette, and some people think that the failure is controllable. Consequently, there may be an occasion that being late due to a public transportation delay is perceived as making excuses.

4.2.2 Things that Should Have been Unsaid (IQ 2)

Table 4.5 shows the summary of responses to interview question 2, whether there was anything that the AG should have left unsaid. A “Yes” response indicates the negative perception due to excess in the account; a “No” response does not. The “Yes” responses were distributed six, thirteen, and seventeen across the bus-excuse, room-excuse, and document-excuse. Room- and document-excuse were perceived negatively for being excessive by more than half of subjects. In contrast, the three concession scripts generated only few to no “Yes” responses, suggesting that these concessions were generally not considered excessive.
Table 4.5 Results of interview question 2: ‘Are there things that the AG should have left unsaid?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script (EXCUSES)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Script (CONCESSIONS)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus-E</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Bus-C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rm-E</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rm-C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc-E</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Doc-C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=20)

In order to find the source of perceived excess, subjects who responded “Yes” to IQ2 were asked what part of utterances the AG should have left unsaid. Table 4.6 summarizes the responses to this follow-up question. Three different unnecessary utterances were identified: 1) an explanation for a business blunder, 2) promising what an AG will do for future presentation, and 3) an expression “I got the wrong idea (kanchigai simasita).”

Table 4.6 Unnecessary utterances in scripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unnecessary part of utterance</th>
<th>Bus-E (6 subjects)</th>
<th>Rm-E (13 subjects)</th>
<th>Doc-E (17 subjects)</th>
<th>Rm-C (2 subjects)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An explanation for a business blunder</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promising what an AG will do for future prevention</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression “I got the wrong idea (kanchigai simasita)”</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vast majority of subjects who felt the EXCUSE scripts were excessive thought that an explanation for a failure should have been unsaid. Especially in reaction to Room- and Document-EXCUSE, all the subjects who indicated the account to be excessive
(thirteen and seventeen subjects respectively) thought that an explanation for a blunder was unnecessary.

Those subjects who thought that an explanation for blunder should have been unsaid were also asked the reason behind their thinking. Table 4.7 shows their responses. Common responses among the three scripts are colored with the same color in the table.

Table 4.7 Reasons why giving an explanation for a failure event is unnecessary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script</th>
<th>The number of subjects</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bus-E</strong>&lt;br&gt;(4 subjects)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘The explanation is an excuse.’ <em>(Iiwake)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘The explanation sounds making excuses.’ <em>(Iiwakeppoi / iiwake gamashii)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘How the blunder happened is not my business.’ <em>(Setsumei wa jibun niwa kankei ga nai)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rm-E</strong>&lt;br&gt;(13 subjects)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘The explanation is an excuse.’ <em>(Iiwake)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘The explanation sounds making excuses.’ <em>(Iiwake ppoi / iiwake gamashii)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘The blunder happened due to AG’s selfish assumption, and that is not my business.’ <em>(Kattena omoikomi de jibun niwa kankei ga nai)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘All that matters are if the work is completed properly in the end.’ <em>(Kekka-teki ni shigoto ga chanto dekireba ii)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘The AG does not need to tell me things that I already know. I want her to do only things that I want her to do.’ <em>(Nagare o wakatte iru koto wo iwanakute ii. Shite hoshii koto dake wo shite moraitai)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doc-E</strong>&lt;br&gt;(17 subjects)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>‘The explanation is an excuse.’ <em>(Iiwake)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>‘The AG is blaming others.’ <em>(Sekinin tenka)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘The AG does not need to tell me things that I already know. I want her to do only things that I want her to do.’ <em>(Nagare o wakatte iru koto wo iwanakute ii. Shite hoshii koto dake wo shite moraitai)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘The priority is to proceed with the meeting. It is not important how she made the error.’ <em>(Kaigi o susumeru koto ga yuusen. Doushite misushita ka wa juyoujana)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Especially in reaction to bus- and room-EXCUSE, relatively large number of subjects (three out of four subjects and six out of thirteen subjects respectively) thought that an explanation for a failure is unnecessary because the explanation is an excuse ‘iiwake.’

In reaction to the document-EXCUSE, the majority of subjects (twelve out of seventeen) thought that the explanation is unnecessary because an AG is pushing her responsibility to other people. According to the results in reaction to document-EXCUSE, subjects formed negative feelings more because of the act of blaming others than because of making excuses. In the results of interview question 1, too, blaming others or pushing one’s responsibility to others was the primary factor in document-EXCUSE being perceived negatively. Compared to the results of room-EXCUSES, blaming others causes more conflict than explaining how one came to make a particular error. This suggests that mentioning others’ poor performance in account-giving is not an effective tactic.

In room-EXCUSES, a reason "the blunder happened due to account-giver’s selfish assumption (katten omoikomi), and how the blunder happened is not my business," is also given by five out of thirteen subjects. Although subjects responded with the reason, “the cause is not my business,” in both bus-EXCUSE and room-EXCUSES, we distinguish between them by the presence or absence of the expression “selfish (katte na)” to illustrate the subtle difference of emotions. The Japanese expression katte na (selfish) is rather harsh. This word choice by the reacting subjects expresses their strong annoyance or distress regarding the AG’s mistaken assumption in the given context. It, thus, shows that these reacting subjects formed a stronger negative impression of an explanation for the blunder in Room-EXCUSES as compared to Bus-EXCUSE.
Three other reasons ("All that matters are if the work is completed properly in the end," "The AG does not need to tell me things that I already know. I want her to do only things that I want her to do," and "The priority is to proceed with the meeting. It is not important how she made the error") have in common the fact that the subjects have no desire to hear an explanation for a blunder given a task that is perceived to be more pressing and more important. Notably, this type of response occurred only in reaction to room- and Document scenarios; no one gave this kind of response in regard to the bus-EXCUSE. A reason for this phenomenon is because AR assumes that the blunder is caused by the AG’s simple mistake. In other words, AR identifies locus of blunder as internal and controllability as controllable. Additionally, AR is not interested and has little tolerance for a lengthy explanation for the failure because AR thinks that how an AG came to make the mistake has nothing to do with AR’s work.

Comments 8, 9, and 10, which are given when discussing room-EXCUSE and document-EXCUSE, illustrate the reacting subjects’ strong annoyance with hearing an explanation for a blunder; some subjects express it using relatively harsh expressions.

Comment 8. [room-CONCESSION] ‘It is enough for me if she (the AG) reserved the second floor, so I would think “Okay, okay, I got it, I got it” in the situation that I heard first (room-EXCUSES), and I would not be interested in hearing the reason.’

Comment 9. [room-CONCESSION] ‘I think that the reason why one made an error is unnecessary information for the person who wants someone to reserve a meeting room. Also, since I think that the completion of the reservation is the important part, I would think “Just tell me that you can book a room quickly.”’

Comment 10. [document-CONCESSION] ‘The one that I heard first (document-EXCUSE) is long. I thought, “Just go make copies already.”’

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12Comment 8. こっちとしては二階を予約してくれればそれでいいから、最初に聞いたのは(room-EXCUSE)「わかった、わかった」と思って、理由については聞く気がないから。
When a blunder is a simple mistake and an AR can assume that is the AG’s fault, EXCUSES are likely to be judged negatively and they are likely to be aggravating accounts.

On the contrary, a situation where an AR cannot assume the responsibility for a blunder, EXCUSES are likely to be taken as mitigating accounts. For instance, when an AG is delayed, an AR would simply wonder or maybe even worry about what happened to the AG, and that motivates them to want to have the explanation for the delay.

Additionally, when evaluating a given account, an AR examines the blunder’s stability (i.e., whether or not it often happens), controllability (i.e., whether or not AG has a control over the failure), and especially locus (i.e., whether a failure happened due to internal or external force); however, since AR cannot assume the cause of the blunder and consequently does not know the locus, stability and controllability either, AR does not have enough criteria to evaluate. AR, thus, desires to have the explanation for the delay for evaluation of the account. In other words, an explanation for a blunder is likely to be effective when an AR is not able to identify the characteristic of locus. The results of a question if there are things that AG should have said and its reasons demonstrate that AR desires to hear EXCUSES when they are not able to identify the types of causal property.

If a “Yes” response to IQ 2 suggests the perception of excess, a “No” response raises the possibility of perception of insufficiency. Table 4.8 summarizes results of a follow-up question, whether or not there are things that AG didn’t say but should have. A “Yes” response to this follow-up question indicates a negative perception arising from the sense of insufficiency in the account. All 20 of the reacting subjects said “No” to IQ 2
about bus-CONCESSION and the vast majority of them (sixteen) said that there were things AG should have indicated, i.e., that the account was not only non-excessive, but in fact, insufficient. While equally high number of reacting subjects also said “No” about room-CONCESSION and document-CONCESSION, indicating the account was not excessive, much fewer number of them (six and five, respectively) suggested that the CONCESSION was insufficient.

Table 4.8 Whether or not there are things that the AG should have said

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script (EXCUSES)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Script (CONCESSIONS)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bus-E</strong> (14 subjects)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td><strong>Bus-C</strong> (20 subjects)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rm-E</strong> (7 subjects)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Rm-C</strong> (18 subjects)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doc-E</strong> (3 subjects)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Doc-C</strong> (20 subjects)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9 is the list of items that subjects thought that AG should have added in the given account. Note that in reaction to Room-CONCESSION, since one subjects provided two items, the number of subjects and the number of responses do not correspond. There are seven different items that the subjects thought that the AG should have said: 1. a short explanation for the blunder, 2. An expression of intended future improvement ‘I’ll be careful from now on,’ 3. an expression of gratitude for pointing out the error, 4. the formal expression of apology ‘mooshiwake arimasen,’ 5. an expression of admitting the AG’s mistake, 6. things for which the AG apologizes, 7. an apology of not informing for the delay in advance.
“A short explanation for the blunder (Kanso na setsumei)” gained a large number of responses, especially in reaction to Bus-CONCESSION. Twelve out of sixteen subjects in reaction to Bus-CONCESSION thought that the AG should have briefly explained the blunder, which corresponds with the results of IQ 1. In contrast, none of the five subjects who suggested that document-CONCESSION was insufficient indicated the necessity for an explanation.

Those who thought that an explanation should have been given were also asked reasons why they thought so. Table 4.10 summarizes a list of reasons why the subjects thought that the explanation for a blunder should have been added to the account.
Table 4.10 Reasons why it would be better to add the explanation for a failure event

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The number of responses</th>
<th>Reasons why it would be better to add the explanation for a failure event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bus-C</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12 subjects)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>‘Because I was wondering while waiting (for the AG)’ (Dooshita no ka to omotte matte ita kara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>‘Because the impression changes depending on the explanation’ (Riyuu ga nani ka ni yotte inshoo ga kawaru kara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘As etiquette way of being polite, because the AG is making people wait’ (Hito wo matasete iru kara manaa to shite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘To diminish anger’ (Ikari wo osameru tame)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘To be considerate to others’ (Aite e no hairyo no tame)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rm-C</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘To improve behavior and not repeat the same error’ (Jikai onaji misu wo shinai yoo ni kaizen suru tame)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A large number of subjects indicated that an explanation is necessary because they were wondering what happened to the AG while they were waiting. Therefore, giving an explanation for a blunder is viewed to be thoughtful to others, which is a reason given by another subject. A lot of subjects used the term “wondering (dooshite iru no ka),” and a few subjects used “worried (shinpai shite ita).” This idea is also related to another reason, “it is necessary as a matter of etiquette because the AG is making people wait. This result indicates that giving an explanation is beneficial to an AR in Bus scenario.

Four subjects suggested that “the impression changes depending on the explanation (Riyuu ga nani ka ni yotte inshoo ga kawaru kara)” when explaining why they felt that an explanation was missing in the bus-CONCESSION: they wanted the explanation so that they could evaluate the whole situation properly. See their comments below:
Comment 11. ‘I think that it would be better to tell why she was late because the impression would change depending on the reason.’

Comment 12. ‘I think that it would be better to tell the reason for the delay. If all (she says) is, “I was late,” I would not be able to judge if it was really Ms. Suzuki’s (AG) fault or it was an unavoidable situation.’

Those subjects claim that an explanation for the blunder is needed for account evaluation.

This reason also relates to another reason, “to diminish anger,” in that they both reference the need for evaluation. See the comment below:

Comment 13. ‘I would be upset with the delay no matter what, but I would want to know the reason why she was late to diminish that anger.’

This comment indicates that an explanation can reduce AR’s anger because it provides AR adequate information to evaluate the situation and the AG could eliminate their doubt when a blunder is a delay due to public transportation. In reaction to bus-CONCESSION, although there are multiple different reasons why subjects thought that an explanation for the failure event should have been included, they are related to each other.

In sum, the results of IQ 2 indicate that situation like Room- and Document scenarios where AR can assume or know the characteristic of cause and when AR identify controllability as controllable and locus as external, EXCUSES are very likely to be judged negatively and to be perceived as making excuses. Moreover, explaining about failure is likely to aggravates AR’s anger even more because AR has a little tolerance for hearing an explanation in that kind of situation. On contrary, in situation like Bus scenario where AR cannot identify the location of controllability and locus, EXCUSES are

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13Comment 11. どうして遅れたか言った方がいいと思います。その理由が何かによって印象が変わるから。
Comment 12. 遅刻の理由を述べた方がいいなと思います。遅れただけだと、それが本当に鈴木さんの過失なのか、それとも致し方がない状況なのかということが判断できないと思います。
14Comment 13. 遅くなったことに対してはどちらにしても怒るけれども、怒りを収めるためにも遅れた理由を知りたいです。
likely to be received favorably, and when AR identify the location of controllability as uncontrollable, EXCUSES are likely to be judged positively.

4.2.3 Responsibility toward Job (IQ3)

Interview question 3 (‘Do you feel that the speaker has a sense of sincerity/responsibility to the job from what she said?’) was asked to investigate the impact of explaining a failure on an AG’s public image, specifically AG’s responsibility to job. A “No” answer indicates a negative perception about the AG’s character as related to the account-giving performance. Table 4.11 summarizes the responses to interview question 3. Room- and document-EXCUSE received relatively large number of subjects (nine subjects in both scripts) who did not sense the AG’s responsibility toward job, a negative perception of their accounts. The bus-CONCESSION also received a relatively large number of “No” responses (seven subjects), though slightly smaller compared to room-EXCUSE and document-EXCUSE.

Table 4.11 Whether or not subjects sense the AG’s responsibility toward work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus-E</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rm-E</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc-E</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A follow-up question was asked of those subjects who responded “No” to IQ 3, i.e., the subjects who perceived the account negatively in terms of its demonstration of AG’s responsibility toward job. Table 4.12 summarizes reasons why the subjects did not feel the AG’s sincerity/responsibility from a given account.
Table 4.12 *Why the subjects did not feel the AG’s sincerity concerning her work*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus-E</td>
<td>• ‘An AG gives an explanation before being asked.’ (1)</td>
<td>Bus-C</td>
<td>• ‘The tone is not serious.’ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>• ‘The tone is not serious.’ (1)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>• ‘There is no explanation.’ (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘It lacks expressions of apology.’ (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘It seems that the AG made a simple mistake.’ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘The AG is only apologizing.’ (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rm-E</td>
<td>• ‘The AG does her task without understanding it fully.’ (4)</td>
<td>Rm-C</td>
<td>• ‘The expressions sound casual’ (Hyoogen ga karui). (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>• ‘It sounds like making excuses.’ (3)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>• ‘It lacks expressions of apology’. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘The AG does not identify future improvements.’ (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘The AG did not apologize first.’ (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc-E</td>
<td>• ‘The AG does her task without understanding it fully.’ (1)</td>
<td>Doc-C</td>
<td>• ‘The AG does not identify future improvements.’ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>• ‘The AG is blaming others.’ (7)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>• ‘The expressions sound casual’ (Hyoogen ga karui). (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘The AG is trying to reduce her responsibility.’ (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘The AG does not use the honorific expression of apology, moooshiwake arimasen.’ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show a tendency that giving an explanation negatively influences an AG’s ability to demonstrate their responsibility toward work, especially in reaction to room-EXCUSE and document-EXCUSE. In reaction to room-EXCUSE, explaining about a failure is the main cause of the negative impact on the projection of AG’s responsibility toward work: ‘the AG does her task without understanding it fully’ (four out of nine subjects) and ‘the account sounds like making excuses’ (three out of nine subjects).

In reaction to document-EXCUSE, too, giving an explanation about a failure causes the negative impacts on the projecting AG’s responsibility toward job. There was a broad
agreement among the nine subjects as to why they did not sense AG’s responsibility:
Eight of them felt that AG was blaming others. An explanation for a failure was more
effective in Bus scenarios.

Although explaining how a blunder happened is not effective in projecting one’s
responsibility towards work in a situation like Room and Document scenarios, an
explanation for a blunder is somewhat effective in a situation like Bus scenario. There are
two subjects in reaction to bus-CONCESSION who did not feel sincerity due to the absence
of an explanation. The number of subjects is not many, but there were three subjects out
of five who answered “neither” to IQ 3 in reaction to bus-CONCESSION. They could not
judge the AG’s sincerity because their feelings were torn between the positive and
negative parts of the received CONCESSIONS: the expression of apology and the absence of
an explanation. See the comments about why subjects answered “neither” below.

Comment 14. ‘The tone of voice is good, but I don’t know what to say because
there is no explanation. But “I am sorry!” sounds genuine, and it does not seem
that the AG is not apologetic.’

Comment 15. ‘If she (had said) she feels ill, by telling a reason (for the delay),
we would have been able to rearrange the time of the meeting, so I think that she
could have (professional) attitude (like this) toward her task.’

In sum, explanation for a failure is likely to give negative impacts on the projection of
one’s responsibility for work in a situation like Room and Document scenarios.

Table 4.13 shows the list of items that has positive impacts on projecting one’s
responsibility; subjects gave them as things from which they felt the AG’s sincerity.

Comment 14. 口調はいいが、理由がないから何とも言えない。でも、「すみませんでした!」って
心がこもっていて、反省していないようなではない。
Comment 15. 例えば具合が悪いなどなら、理由を言ってもらえることによって、いつ会議をする
かっていうことも(決めるから)、仕事に対するスタンスを持っていいのかなと思う。

88
Table 4.13 *Items from which the subjects felt the AG’s sincerity regarding her work*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utterance/action projecting AG’s sincerity</th>
<th>EXCUSES</th>
<th>Short CONCESSIONS</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Prompt action’ (Jinsoku na koudou)</td>
<td>0 5 6 11</td>
<td>0 6 13 19</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Future improvements’ (Kongo no kaizen-ten)</td>
<td>5 3 2 10</td>
<td>1 1 0 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Apologies’ (Syazai)</td>
<td>1 2 1 4</td>
<td>3 2 5 10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Admitting one’s wrongdoing’ (Jibun no hi wo mitomeru)</td>
<td>0 1 1 2</td>
<td>1 2 1 4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘There is an explanation’ (Setsumei wo site iru)</td>
<td>2 0 1 3</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds sorry (Mooshiwake nasasoo ni kikoeru)</td>
<td>2 1 0 3</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘A valid reason’ (Seitoo na riyyu)</td>
<td>3 0 0 3</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Simple account’ (Kanso na setsumei)</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>2 3 4 9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘No excuses’ (Iiwake wo shite inai)</td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>1 0 2 3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results, giving an explanation for a failure event does not have much impact on indexing the AG’s sincerity when compared with other utterances/actions. However, prompt actions and identifying future improvements have more influence on the indexing of one’s responsibility than giving an explanation. Prompt action and giving future improvements are not only influential in EXCUSES, but also in CONCESSIONS. Two other influential items are the expression of apologies and admitting one’s wrongdoing. The expression of apologies also had the third highest number of responses.
In sum, in a situation like the bus scenario, utterances that express future improvements and apologies have more impact on projecting one’s sincerity toward work than giving an explanation for a failure event, but the absence of an explanation can influence negatively one’s ability to show sincerity toward work. The following items are effective in projecting one’s responsibility and sincerity to work in various situations: 1) to tell a simple account, 2) to admit one’s fault, 3) to make a prompt action and 4) to express future improvement.

It is also worth pointing out the effectiveness of simplicity of an account. There are nine subjects in total who thought that they feel the AG’s responsibility toward work through the simplicity of the account.

4.2.4 The Impact of a Repeated Blunder on the Perception of an Account

Interview question 5, a two-part question (If the speaker did the same or a similar business blunder before, does your impression of the response change? Does the response still sound appropriate?), was asked to investigate the influence of harm severity on the AR’s perception of excuses, especially whether an account is likely to be perceived as making excuses rather than a valid explanation for a failure as the harm severity increases. A “Yes” to the first of the set of questions, which triggers a “No” response to the second question of the set, indicates the negative impact of increased harm severity.

Table 4.14 summarizes the responses to IQ 5. In both excuse and concession scripts, a large number of subjects thought that their impression of the account would be different (more negative) if this was a repetition of the same blunder. Those who thought that their impression would not change already had a negative impression from the account they first heard. See Table 4.15 for a summary of the number of subjects who
changed their minds in the negative direction. The results show that even those subjects who thought that a given account was a valid response and had a favorable impression of the account could form a negative impression of the account when the same blunder was a repetition of similar previous blunders.

Table 4.14 Responses to interview question 5: Does your impression of a given account change if the AG has made the same blunder before?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script (EXCUSES)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus-E</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rm-E</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc-E</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Script (CONCESSIONS)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus-C</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rm-C</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc-C</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15 Number of subjects who responded that the account is valid in interview question 1 but that their impression became worse in question 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Q1 a valid reason</th>
<th>Q5 worse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus-E</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rm-E</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc-E</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the same blunder happens again, an AR is likely to be irritated with the fact that it happened again as well as likely to wonder why an AG could not improve the situation. Refer to the comments below (emphasis added):

Comment 16. [Room-E] ‘I would think, “You did not check (the message) again?”’

Comment 17. [Room-E] ‘I would think, “Again?”’
Comment 18. [Room-E] ‘I would wonder why (that happened again), even though (the AG) made the same mistake before.’

Comment 19. [Bus-E] ‘I think that (the AG) should learn (from past experience).’

Comment 20. [Doc-E] ‘Because (their AG) could not improve (their behavior), my impression (of the AG) would worsen.’

These comments indicate that an AR expects an AG to learn from their wrongdoing and attempt to not make the same error again.

When the same mistake was made repeatedly, the AR loses not only trust in an AG but also the desire to work together. One subject commented that s/he might not be able to repair the relationship with the AG. See the comment below.

Comment 21. ‘There is a possibility that I would not be able to rebuild the relationship. Since the AG cannot do her job, I would think, “I am done with this person,” no matter what the AG says.’

Subjects who said their impressions of the account would change were also asked how their impressions would change and whether they would consider the account still to be valid. Their responses are categorized into three types: 1) making excuses ‘iiwake,’ 2) not a valid response, but not excuses ‘iiwake’, and 3) a valid explanation for a failure.

Refer to the Table 4.16 for the summary of the responses to this additional question.
Table 4.16 How the impression of an account changes when the blunder happens for the second time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impression of accounts</th>
<th>Bus-E (11)</th>
<th>Rm-E (6)</th>
<th>Doc-E (10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making excuses ‘iiwake’</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The explanation is not valid, but not excuses ‘iiwake’</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A valid explanation for a failure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reaction to bus-EXCUSE, relatively large number of subjects changed their perception of EXCUSES from a valid explanation to making. However, the results show that the increase of perceived harm severity does not have as significant an influence in the perception of EXCUSES from a valid explanation to making excuses in Room- and Document scenarios.

These results suggest that when the same blunder happens a second time, an AR views the characteristic of the blunder in controllability as controllable even if it was uncontrollable the first time. This change of perception consequently results in the change of the AR’s perception of EXCUSES from a valid explanation to making excuses, especially in bus scenario. Therefore, the controllability of a situation like Bus scenario may be viewed as controllable rather than uncontrollable, and more subjects will perceive EXCUSES as making excuses when the same blunder happens again, even though they were likely to be perceived as a valid explanation for the first-time blunder. In a situation like Room- and Document scenarios whose controllability is already controllable for the first-time blunder, repeating the same blunder does not have much effect on the AR’s perception of EXCUSES.
The research finds that the increase of perceived harm severity has an impact on an AR’s characterization of a blunder, especially controllability. When the same blunder is repeated, an AG is likely to identify controllability as controllable, regardless of whether it was perceived as controllable when it was a first-time blunder. If this results in a change of perception, then it is likely to cause an AR’s perception of excuses to change from positive to negative.

4.2.5 Preference between Excuses and Concessions

Table 4.17 summarizes the responses to interview question 6, preference between two types of accounts, excuses and short of concessions. A large number of reacting subjects prefer bus-excuse to bus-concession. On the contrary, the majority of reacting subjects prefer short concessions to excuses in Room- and Document scenarios. Table 4.18 lists the reasons for the choices and the number of subjects who gave each reason.

Table 4.17 The AR’s preferred account, Excuse or Concession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Excuses (with an explanation)</th>
<th>Concessions (no explanation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus scenario</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rm-scenario</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc-scenario</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=20
Varied reasons were given as to why the subjects prefer a particular account, but some commonalities are discernible. Fifteen subjects preferred bus-EXCUSE to bus-CONCESSION and said that the bus-EXCUSE was a better account because there was an explanation for the failure. Some said that they were wondering what happened, some were worried, and some could feel the AG’s sense of regret in the explanation. For the
Bus scenario, an explanation helps to alleviate these concerns that AR experience. Some reacting subjects also said that explaining the delay prevented them from assuming the AG simply overslept or was late for no good reason. Refer to the following comments:

**Comment 22.** ‘I prefer the first one that I heard (bus-EXCUSE). [interviewer: Why is that?] If the delay was due to the bus, it would be not your fault, but if you do not say anything, I would suspect that you just overslept.’

**Comment 23.** ‘Because she says the reason why she was late. Since I was wondering what happened while waiting for ten minutes, I want an answer to that question. If you do not tell a reason (for the delay), I would wonder if you just came late for no reason, and there can be no compensation for you wasting ten minutes of my time.’

Even in the Room scenario and the Document scenario, three subjects (one in the Room scenario and two in the Document scenario) said they preferred EXCUSES to CONCESSIONS. However, the reason for their preference differed from the reasons given in reaction to the bus-EXCUSE. In reaction to room-EXCUSE and document-EXCUSE, the few subjects who favorably accept an explanation for a blunder do so because they think that it amounts to the AG admitting her fault. Those subjects formed a good impression of an explanation not because they wanted to know the cause of the blunder, like in Bus scenario, but rather because they wanted to receive the AG’s acknowledgement of AG’s wrongdoing. This suggests that Japanese AR releases stress through hearing AG’s acknowledgement of wrongdoing. However, it is not recommendable to explain a failure to express one’s wrongdoing because the results show that majority of people perceives EXCUSES negatively in Room and Document scenarios.

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18 Comment 22. 初めに聞いた方がいいです。[interviewer: どうしてですか] バスだと自分のせいで遅れたわけではないんですよ。何も言わないと、ただその人が寝坊しただけなのかなど、思っちゃうから、疑ってしまうかもしれない。Comment 23. 遅くなった理由を言っているから。こちらは10分間どうしたのかと思って待っていたので、それに対しての回答がほしい。遅れた理由を言わないと、単に遅刻したのかなあ、それから10分間のこちらの時間を無駄にして、埋め合わせがちゃんと出来ないから。
It will be acceptable if the AG explains only the core cause of a blunder, such as “I did not read your message carefully” in the Room scenario or “I did not check if I received the right document” in the Document scenario, to connote admitting one’s fault and denotes future improvement. However, explaining what caused AG to make that error, such as “the meeting is always held in the room that I booked” in the Room scenario or “the assistant gave me this document” in the Document scenario is likely to be aggravates conflict.

Another common reason for preferring EXCUSES is that the AG mentioned a future improvement. In interview question 2, subjects also made positive comments about the AG telling of future improvements. This result corresponds with Yao’s (2011) finding. She finds that an AG expects to hear about future improvements from an AG, and that this generates positive effects. The positive effects of identifying future improvements are confirmed with this research.

Among reasons for preferring CONCESSIONS, a reason, the lack of explanation, contributes to subjects’ preference of concessions. They recognized the absence of an explanation as not making excuses. In reaction to bus-CONCESSION, room-CONCESSION, and document-CONCESSION, three out of four, eight out of fourteen, and five out of seventeen subjects, respectively, preferred those accounts due to the absence of EXCUSES. In reaction to document-CONCESSION, the lack of explanation was positively perceived as not blaming others by five subjects.

The absence of an explanation also gives an AR an impression of an account as “simple” or “straightforward.” Japanese expressions like “kanso (simplicity)” and “sottyoku (straightforward)” were used to express positive feelings by a large number of
subjects. A few subjects made a comment that they can feel an AG’s apology more when s/he does not make excuses ‘*iiwake*’ and therefore they do not think that an explanation is necessary.

**Comment 24.** ‘(The account) is simple and the AG’s apology comes through to me.’

**Comment 25.** ‘The AG was not mentioning things that she was not supposed not to say but was telling the necessary parts. [Interviewer: What are the necessary parts?] (The AG) simply said “to correct an error” and that she had the wrong idea.’

Document-CONCESSION has a longer list of reasons than the other accounts, but the first five reasons (as listed in Table 4.13) share the notion of the absence of an explanation. The absence of an explanation results in an account being judged to be simple, and it generates positive effects when used with apologies.

In addition to the simplicity of the account, “making an action right away (*sugu koodoo shite iru*)”, are accepted positively. From the utterance, subjects formed a positive impression of the AG. Especially in the Document scenario, because the account-giving happens in the middle of a meeting, subjects preferred simple accounts and prompt action. See comment 30 below.

**Comment 26.** ‘Since it’s in the middle of a meeting and there is not much time to make excuses, I think that it would be good that an AG apologizes like this at the moment.’

In sum, the combination of simplicity, lack of explanation about a failure, apologies, and prompt actions help an AG to repair conflict situations; these are especially effective in

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19 Comment 24. 簡潔で申し訳ない気持ちが伝わりました。Comment 25. 言わない部分は言っていないし、必要な部分は言っていた。[interviewer: 必要な部分とは？] 訂正すること、勘違いしていたことを簡潔に言っていました。 20 Comment 26. 会議中なのであまり言い訳がましく言っている時間もないから、この場ではこのまま謝るのがいいんじゃないかと思います。
improving an AR’s negative feelings in the context of a Japanese organization when the harm severity is mild.

The results of IQ 6 indicate that whether an AR prefers EXCUSES or a short CONCESSION depends on their certainty about the locus. If an AR can easily assume that the locus is internal, AR is likely to prefer short CONCESSIONS, whereas when AR does not have enough information to identify the type of locus and wonders what happened, AR prefers EXCUSES. For instance, in a situation like Bus scenario (being late), since an AR tends to wonder what happened to the AG, AG desires to hear an explanation for the delay to alleviate AR’s dissatisfied feelings. An AR may also think that providing an explanation is necessary as etiquette and to show consideration for the AR.

On the other hand, when a blunder is simple task error such as the blunder in Room- and Document scenario (booking the wrong room or bringing the wrong document), an AR is likely to strongly believe that the mistake can be attributed to the AG’s wrongdoing, and thus the AR identifies the locus as internal and the controllability as controllable. In a situation like this, an AR’s primary motivation in the interaction of account-giving with an AG is to know whether or not the particular work has been completed so that they can proceed with the present and/or upcoming work promptly and smoothly. An AR, therefore, does not desire to hear an explanation for a failure event. An AR will rather be irritated by an AG telling why AG made that particular error, and it will aggravate the conflict situation. Moreover, from the AR’s point of view, not making excuses indexes that an AG is sorry for what happened, and so the conflict situation will be improved.
4.2.6 Considerations for RQ 1

The type of blunder is the crucial determiner in perceiving excuses negatively. Namely, when the AR is able to assume the location and controllability AND the more the locus of the blunder is assumed to be internal, and the more controllability the AG has about the situation, the more AR is likely to judge excuses negatively and perceive them as making excuses.

This conclusion is supported from multiple angels, as indicated by the reacting subjects’ responses to various interview questions that considered the AR’s reactions about the account scripts from five different angles, as discussed. The responses to these questions are summarized in Figure 4.1 on the next page. In Figure 4.1, the outer portions of the triangles show features that generate negative perceptions, while the features closer to the center are responsible for positive perceptions in an AR.
Both in terms of the validity of the account (IQ1) and the acceptability of EXCUSES (IQ2), room-EXCUSE and document-EXCUSE were considered to be least effective whereas invoking bus-EXCUSE was considered to be effective. Multiple reacting subjects extracted the AG’s to attempt to shift the responsibility for the blunder to her subordinate as the salient feature of their negative perception of document-EXCUSE. The results of IQ 5 (the impact of harm severity) finds that controllability is one of factors that affects the perception of EXCUSES; when controllability is identified as ‘controllable,’ an
AR is more likely to identify the primary cause of a blunder as the AG’s lack of effort, and so that contributes to the negative perception of EXCUSES.

Past studies on taxonomy of accounts focus on identifying different types of accounts, such as CONCESSIONS, EXCUSES, JUSTIFICATIONS, and REFUSALS and the effectiveness of each account. However, what contributes to the different effects of EXCUSES have not been examined much. The results of this research illuminate that it is the AR’s knowledge about the causal property of harm that determines the AR’s judgement of whether an explanation of how a blunder happened is legitimate or is glossing over one’s wrongdoing and also whether or not the explanation is acknowledged as fact. These distinctions are critical to investigating the effect of EXCUSES more comprehensively.

4.3 Other Findings on EXCUSES in Interviews

This section discusses other findings related to EXCUSES. It examines the timing of giving an explanation for a failure, the length of accounts, and blaming others.

4.3.1 Timing and EXCUSES

Some subjects talked about the timing of giving an explanation for a failure. An AG, in all scripts with an explanation created for this research (EXCUSES) delivers an apology at the beginning of an account, followed by an explanation, and a statement of future improvements, concluding it with another apology. Some subjects mentioned, however, that it would be better to explain a failure only after an AR asks for one. See the comments below, given as part of responses to interview question 6 (emphasis added).

Comment 27. [Bus-E] ‘I would think that I do not want to be seen as making excuses, so I would not give a reason. It is important to let them know in advance when you are late. It would be better to give the reason later in the course of small talk of some kind, because then it would be a story instead of excuses.’
Comment 28. [Doc-E] ‘What you should do first is to apologize and make an action (to correct the mistake), and if you were asked, it may be okay to say, “It was such and such reason,” but I think that one should not give a lengthy (explanation) right from the beginning.’

Comment 29. [Doc-E] ‘After all, it’s that it would be better not to give a reason until asked. When you have made an error, you just apologize. It would be better to give a minimal explanation, and then give the full reason for the first time only after being asked, “Why?” Probably. [Interviewer: How about the previous situation (SB)?] Well, it’s same. It’d be better to give the reason after being asked. [Interviewer: How about the case of the bus, the situation of being late?] In a situation of the delay, if it’s not so severe, I feel that it’s okay to say something like “Because of such and such, I was late.” (An account) would maybe sound like an excuse in other (situations).'

They all agree that an explanation for a failure event should be given after being asked for, otherwise the explanation may be perceived negatively. In comment 27, the subject mentioned that an explanation for the blunder would be a story instead of an excuse if an AG mentioned it later during small talk. In comment 29, the subject made that comment after hearing all the scripts used in the interview, and he came to realize why he liked one type of script over another, concluding that an explanation should be given only after being asked in any situation. However, he articulated that if the perceived harm severity is low, giving an explanation before an inquiry does not hurt the situation.

21 Comment 27. 自分でこういう状況を対処するときにもあまり言い訳っぽく思われたくないと思うので、あまり理由を述べない。遅刻してしまう時は、「事前に報告することが大切」。後で雑談の時に理由を言えればいい。それは言い訳ではなく、話になるから。[Comment from bus-CONCESSIONS]
Comment 28. 最初に言うべきことは謝ってすぐ行動することで、後で聞かれたなら「こう言う理由で」と言ってもいいかもしれないですが、初めからだから言うべきことではないかなと思います。[Comment from document-EXCUSE]
Comment 29. やっぱり理由は聞かれるまで言わない方がいいんだ。ミスした場合には謝るだけ。必要最低限のことをして、「なんで」と言われてから初めて理由を言う方がいいんだ、きっと。[Interviewer:それは前のシチュエーション (Rm scenario) でもそうと思いますか。] そうだねえ。一緒だねえ。聞かれてから理由を言った方がいい。[Interviewer:バスの場合、遅刻の場合はどうですか。] 遅刻の時は状況がそんなに深刻じゃなかったら（ぽいんと）、「〇〇のため遅れました」みたいことはいってもいいかな。他のだと言い訳に聞かれるかなあ。[Comment from document-EXCUSE]
Bakhtin (1986) explains in his notion of speech genre that utterances are the boundaries where control of the conversation changes from one speaker to another, and speakers relinquish and reestablish their floor, and thus what AR says has significant impacts on the construction of an account may. Especially in a situation like the Room scenario or the Document scenario, giving an explanation for a blunder after being asked to provide a reason can avoid creating more conflict.

In a situation like Bus scenario, this tactic (giving an explanation in response to an inquiry) will function effectively when an AG was late for an arrangement again, because although an AR desires to hear a reason for the delay, if it is the second time, EXCUSES will be likely to be perceived negatively. Therefore, an AG should wait to give an explanation and carefully judge what helps to lessen the AR’s anger. However, even if one is asked for a reason, it is important to deliver an explanation in such a way that the AR perceives the account positively. As discussed in earlier sections, it will be effective in reducing conflict when an AG says only the core cause of a blunder and does not explain in detail how come AG made the error, especially in a situation like the Room scenario or the Document scenario.

4.3.2 The Length of Accounts and EXCUSES

The length of an account matters. The results of the interview study show that even if an account is a CONCESSION, if the utterance is too short, it is likely to fail to communicate the AG’s apologetic feelings. See the comment below: the subjects mentioned this comment when he was asked whether there was anything that AG should have said.

Comment 30. ‘[Interviewer: Is there anything that the AG should have said?] Yes and no. The utterance may be too short to deliver AG’s sincerity. (The account) is
a little bit insufficient. Whatever, [AG] will end up making excuses after all, it would be better not to say anything, but…”

Although this subject listened to recorded account-giving utterances in the role of an AR, he is conflicted between the perception of an AR and of an AG. As an AR, he desires to hear a reason why the AG was late, but at the same time he is aware that the reason is highly likely to be recognized negatively and have negative consequences. This comment confirms the AR’s desire to hear an explanation for the delay, and additionally it indicates that a short account of CONCESSIONS sufficiently mitigate conflict because the account is so short that an AR does not feel the AG’s sincerity.

Previous studies have found that CONCESSIONS are the most mitigating account, but the results of this study suggest that when the account of CONCESSIONS is too short, it may not be able to mitigate conflict effectively in a Japanese organization setting even when the perceived harm is mild. A more successful AG should use CONCESSIONS along with other effective strategies. Mentioning future improvements can express AG’s sincerity, such as “I will be more careful next time (kongo motto ki o tsukemasu)” or “I will read the message more carefully (motto ki o tsukete meeru yoo ni shimasu).”

In addition to an expression of intending future improvements, other effective tactics have come to light as part of this investigation. They include: 1) to admit one’s fault and apologize, 2) to identify future improvements, 3) to deliver an account concisely, and 4) to show a gesture of prompt action to repair the blunder. These tactics are especially effective in diminishing the AR’s unpleasant feelings, such as reducing

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Comment 30. [interviewer: 何か言った方がよかったことがありますか。] なんとも言えないですね。言葉は短すぎて、誠意が伝わりにくいかもしれません。でも、ちょっと物足りない。でも所詮は言い訳になってしまうから、言わないほうがいいですけどね…。
their anger and improving their evaluation of the AG, but may not be effective in reducing punishment.

An explanation utterances also should not be too long. Some subjects mentioned that when an explanation is long, the account may be seen negatively. One subject made a comment about how people are not forgiven for making excuses in a Japanese organization, and she explained that her senior colleague often coaches her not to make excuses. See her comments below.

Comment 31. ‘I think that there is a tendency for people not to forgive making excuses. I feel that there are quite lot of companies like that among Japanese organizations. I am also often told by my senior colleague “I do not need (/want to hear) ‘but,’ so just tell me whether you can do it.””

This subject shares her experience of often being told by her senior colleague, “Tell only whether you can do it or not,” as an example of an AR becoming annoyed by hearing an explanation. A few subjects also expressed annoyance at a lengthy explanation by using an onomatopoetic word. For instance, in comment 30, the subject describes her feelings about a lengthy excuse using an onomatopoetic word, gudaguda, which also connotes a negative feeling of long length. In an organization context, a lengthy account will not be accepted favorably. Explaining the outcome at an early point in the conversation helps to not aggravate conflict.

Comment 32. ‘It is not good to make lengthy excuses, and (to have others wonder) what the outcome is. I would think, “Tell me the outcome first.”’

23Comment 31. 言い訳をあまり許さない傾向があるんじゃないかと思います。日本の会社は結構そういう会社が多いと思います。先輩にもよく「でも」はいらないから、「できるかどうかだけいう」ってよく言われますよね。
24Comment 32. グダグダ言い訳して、「結果は何だ？」ということは良くない。結果を先に言ってよと思う。
However, lengthiness is determined not only by the physical length of utterances, but also by subjective judgments. Even if an explanation for a failure event is short and concise, an AR is likely to think that an account is lengthy (gudaguda or daradara) when they do not desire to hear an explanation, as was the case in Bus- and Document scenarios. As listed in comments 8, 9, and 10, some subjects expressed their strong annoyance with hearing an explanation; they claimed that since how an AG made that particular blunder is none of their business, they are not interested in hearing an explanation at all. In a situation like room- and Document scenarios, since an AR does not wonder how the blunder happened, they do not desire to hear an explanation for it. Therefore, even if an explanation were short, an AR is likely to judge that the AG is making a lengthy excuse (Guraguda iiwake shiteiru). In sum, when giving an explanation for a blunder, an AG should not only pay attention to the length of the account but also to whether or not an AR wishes to hear an explanation.

4.3.3 Blaming Others

The results of questions 1 and 6 show that subjects form a strong negative impression of accounts that seem to be blaming others. In addition to these two questions, a large number of subjects also formed a negative impression of document-excuse, in which the AG says she was given the wrong document by her assistant, in question 5. There are varied reasons to explain a failure event, but the results suggest that blaming others is likely to be perceived more negatively than other types of explanations, such as a lack of attention or a public transportation delay. Blaming others, especially assistant’s blunder, in an explanation projects not only a sense of pushing AG’s responsibility onto others but also the AG’s negligence in properly coaching the assistant or a lack of
leadership. See the following comment given in response to interview question 5 (the context in which an AG repeats the same mistake).

**Comment 33.** ‘(The impression becomes worse) because even though the AG did the same thing before, she also neglects coaching the assistant.’

No matter how poor that assistant’s general performance is, EXCUSES whose explanation for a blunder includes an assistant’s blunder will not generate positive effects for an AG. Therefore, it is not a good strategy to include an assistant’s blunder in account-giving. If one feels the necessity of informing the AR about the assistant’s poor performance, the conflict is likely to be diminished when it is discussed in a different speech act, such as a consultation. An AG can imply the assistant’s poor performance in utterances of admitting their own fault, such as, “I’m sorry that I neglected my assistant’s coaching (Ashisutanto no shidoo o okotatte orimasita. Mooshiwake arimasen).” However, further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of this strategy. In sum, it will be effective to avoid including an assistant’s poor performance in account-giving.

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25 Comment 33. 前にも同じことをしたのに、アシスタントの指導も怠っているから(印象が悪くな ります)。
Chapter 5: Role-Play Results and Discussion

This chapter presents data collected from the role-plays of six acting subjects. Role-plays were conducted to investigate account-giving tactics from the AG’s perspective and to answer RQ 2 (What account strategies do people use in a Japanese enterprise context?). It pays close attention to the use of explanations for blunders and to the AG’s motivation when invoking a particular account.

The three scenarios used in interviews were also used in scenarios. In the Bus scenario, an AG was ten minutes late for a meeting with a senior colleague due to a bus delay. In the Room scenario, a senior colleague asked the AG to book a room for a meeting in two weeks, but the AG booked the wrong room. In the Document scenario, an AG mistakenly brought an unrelated document to a meeting with a senior colleague; that document was prepared by the AG’s assistant.

Six acting subjects played the roles of AGs; the researcher played the role of senior colleague. After the role playing was complete, they were asked why they explained or did not explain how the blunders happened. (See Appendix I for Japanese transcription and English translation.) Each subject was assigned an ID number from 1 to 6. AS stands for acting subject, and AS1 stands for acting subject 1. Yellow highlighting indicates utterances that explain how the blunder happened (EXCUSES); utterances that do not explain but only imply how the blunder happened are highlighted in gray.
5.1 The Use of EXCUSES in Role-plays

After the role-plays, the researcher counted the number of acting subjects who explained the blunders, analyzed the type of account, and examined how the subjects described the blunders, specifically the locus (the location of cause, internal or external). The results of the role-plays correspond with those of interviews. All six acting subjects offered an account, i.e. EXCUSES, in Bus scenario, but few subjects did so in Room scenario and Document scenario. Six subjects in Bus scenario, two subjects in Room scenario, and one subject in Document scenario used EXCUSES. One note is that Acting subject 2 (AS2) explained the blunder only after being asked by an AR. She likely would not have offered an explanation had she not been asked what happened (refer to Appendix I).

Table 5.1 summarizes the types of accounts that the subjects performed. Each table cell under “EXCUSES” shows the total number of subjects who gave EXCUSES and each cell of each column under “no EXCUSES” lists the total number of subjects who did not. The table also shows the type of EXCUSES (either EXTERNAL EXCUSES or INTERNAL EXCUSES) and the number of subjects who delivered that particular type of EXCUSE. EE and EI stand for EXTERNAL EXCUSE and INTERNAL EXCUSE respectively. Table 5.2 is the list of utterances that subjects used to explain blunders. It also shows the type of locus and the type of account. The type of account is listed in parentheses following the English gloss of the Japanese transcription. Once again, EE and EI stand for EXTERNAL EXCUSES and INTERNAL EXCUSES respectively.
Table 5.1 *Number of subjects who offered EXCUSES in role-plays*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXCUSES</th>
<th>no EXCUSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SB</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE &amp; IE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n=6*

*Note:* EE and IE stand for EXTERNAL EXCUSES and INTERNAL EXCUSES respectively.
Table 5.2 Utterances that explain blunders in role-plays and the type of locus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locus (stability)</th>
<th>Japanese translation</th>
<th>English Gloss (type of account)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>今日はバスがなんか渋滞で遅くなってしまって</td>
<td>The bus was stuck in a traffic jam (EE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>バスが渋滞していたので</td>
<td>Because the bus got caught in a traffic jam (EE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>バスが遅れてまって</td>
<td>The bus was stuck in a traffic jam (EE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>渋滞でバスが遅れてivariate</td>
<td>Because the bus was stuck in a traffic jam (EE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>交通機関が渋滞で遅れててしまったので</td>
<td>The public transportation got stuck in a traffic jam (EE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>いつも通り家を出てしまいま</td>
<td>I left home as usual (IE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>勘違いをしていつも一階だったので</td>
<td>It’s always held on the first floor, so I was confused (IE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>私メールを確認するのをちょっと不足していま</td>
<td>Because I didn’t check my email, and it’s usually (held on) the first floor, I booked the first floor by mistake (IE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>ちょっとうっかり見てないと一階を予約してしまいました</td>
<td>I carelessly brought it (document) without checking. (CONCESSIONS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>私が確認するのを忘れてしまった</td>
<td>I forgot to check it. (CONCESSIONS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>間違えてしまった</td>
<td>(I) made a mistake. (CONCESSIONS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>アシスタントさんに頼んだんですけど、私がよく確認しないでそのまま渡してしまい</td>
<td>I asked my assistant, but I handed it to you without checking it. (EE &amp; IE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: EE and IE stand for EXTERNAL EXCUSES and INTERNAL EXCUSES respectively.*
A majority of acting subjects delivered excuses in Bus scenario when the Japanese AR was likely to express a desire to hear an explanation of blunders in a Japanese organization context. In contrast, few acting subjects explained blunders in Room scenario and Document scenario when an explanation was likely to increase the AR’s annoyance. The reasons why they explained the blunders also correspond with the AR’s desire to know more and the conflict strategies that were discussed by reacting subjects. The following section further examines the explanatory utterances while referring to their motivations to express them in a particular way.

5.1.1 Examination of Excuses: Motives for Explaining Blunders

The reasons why acting subjects explained or did not explain blunders also correspond with AR’s desire to know more about the mistakes. Table 5.3 is the list of reasons why acting subjects explained or did not explain blunders. The column falling under the heading “AS #” shows each acting subject’s assigned ID number, and each table cell under “Reasons” is a list of responses given by that particular acting subject.

Table 5.3 Reasons why acting subjects explained or did not explain blunders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>AS #</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Bus      | 1    | ‘For the sake of an AR’  
(Aite he no hairyo) |
|          | 3    |         |
|          | 4    |         |
|          | 5    |         |
|          | 6    |         |
| Room     | 2    | ‘It was one’s own mistake and they would improve next time.’ |
document

(【Jibun no misu de kongo no tame ni.】)

3
‘To let an AR know that I recognize what caused the blunder.’
(【Jibun de yatte shimatta koto wo ninshiki shiteiru koto wo aite ni tsutaeru tame.】)

Document

3
‘To let an AR know that I recognize what caused the blunder.’
(【Jibun de yatte shimatta koto wo ninshiki shiteiru koto wo aite ni tsutaeru tame.】)

### Summary of reasons why acting subjects did not explain blunders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>AS #</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Room     | 1    | ‘It would sound like making excuses.’
(【Iiwakeppoku naru kara.】) |
|          | 4    | The information about the fixing of the situation is primary.
(【Rikabarii wo tsutaeru koto ga yuusen.】) |
|          | 5    | ‘The blunder was due to a simple mistake and explaining would sound like making excuses.’
(【Tanzyun na misu ga genin de, iiwake ni narukara.】) |
|          | 6    | ‘There is no major negative impact due to the blunder’
(【Ookina warui eikyoo ga nai kara.】) |
| Document | 1    | ‘Assistant’s error is one’s own error.’
(【Asisutanto no misu wa jibun no misu.】) |
|          | 2    | ‘The mistake is not one’s own fault.’
(【Jibun no misu zya nai kara.】) |
|          | 4    | ‘The information about the fixing of the situation is primary.’
(【Rikabarii wo tsutaeru koto ga yuusen.】) |
|          | 5    | ‘Assistant’s error is one’s own error.’
(【Asisutanto no misu wa jibun no misu.】) |
|          | 6    | • ‘The information about the fixing of the situation is primary.’
(【Rikabarii wo tsutaeru koto ga yuusen.】) • ‘I would pity the assistant.’
(【Asisutanto ga kawaiisoo.】) |
The following three sections—5.1.1.1, 5.1.1.2, and 5.1.1.3—discuss the motives for explaining a business blunder in a bus scenario, room scenario and document scenario respectively.

5.1.1.1 Explaining the Blunder and Reasons in Scenario A (Bus Scenario)

In the Bus scenario, five out of six subjects explained the blunder. Although only one out of those five subjects implemented INTERNAL EXCUSES rather than EXTERNAL EXCUSES, all five have the same motive, given for the sake of an AR, for offering an explanation of the blunder. For example, note the following comment from an acting subject (emphasis added):

Comment 34. ‘I think that it will be clarified if I let (an AR) know about the delay as a fact for the AR. I suppose that it is one type of excuse too. But I think it’d be better to explain (the blunder) in this context because the bus can’t be helped.’ (given by AS1)  

AS1 anticipates the possibility that an AR perceives the account, but she decided to explain the blunder because she thinks that the cause is likely to be received favorably as well as it would be beneficial for an AR.

Although subjects could have explained the delay in order to save face, it is notable that the Japanese AG explains the blunder out of consideration for an AR. Yao’s (2011) study also finds the Japanese people’s account-giving behavior motivated by consideration of an AR. Her study investigates that a Japanese AR expects an AG to offer expressions of apologies while account-giving to show the AG’s consideration for them,

26 Comment 34. 遅れたことはやっぱり事実で伝えてあげた方が、なんかスッキリすると思います。それもきっと一つの言い訳ですよね。でも、その時はそういう風に言った方がいいと思います。バスはしょうがないことだから。

115
and doing so mitigates ill feelings. In Japanese culture, certain behaviors are motivated by consideration for others during the interaction. Thus, expression of consideration for others can be an effective strategy in a conflict situation; at the same time, it is highly expected in Japanese account-giving. In Bus scenario, the explanation for the blunder can express consideration in addition to the apologies.

Another prominent point in the explanation for the blunder in the Bus scenario is that one acting subject (AS4) did not mention the delay of the bus, but implemented INTERNAL EXCUSES: “I left home as usual (Istumo doori uchi wo dete shinatta)” (see Table 5.2). AS4 explained that he said so because some people think that if he would have left home earlier, he would not have been late. Thus, the cause of the delay is not due to the bus, but due to him. AS2 also expressed the same logic. AS2 made the comment above when giving reasons why she did not explain the blunder until the AG’s initiation.

Comment 35. ‘Because people usually understand (the situation) if I tell (them) about the traffic jam, I thought that it would be all right not to mention (the cause of blunder). [Interviewer: Would mentioning “traffic jam” be perceived as making excuses?] Traffic Jam, well, it is also the same case in the delay of the train, but even though it is not my fault, there are people who (think that I would not have been late) if I would have left home earlier than usual, and so it cannot be helped even if I am accused, so it is not an excuse. But if I were to do something like that, because the relationship would be aggravated, I thought that it’s the best to apologize unreservedly.’

27 Comment 35. 渋滞っていう話をしたら大抵相手は分かってくれたりするので、言わなくてもいいかなと思っていました。[Interviewer: 渋滞っていうのは言い訳になってしまいますが。] 渋滞は、そうですねえ。電車の遅延もそうなんですねけど、自分のミスにならないにしても、いつも通りよりちょっと早めに出ればいう方をいらっしゃるので、自分が責められてもしょうがないかなっていうのはあって、何か言い訳じゃないですけど、そういうのをしないと関係が悪化してしまうので、本当に素直に謝罪するっていうのが、一番いいのかなと思いました。
The comment above illustrates two Japanese AGs’ concerns in account-giving in Bus scenario and the psychological process of account selection. One concern is that there is a possibility that the delay of the public transportation can be perceived as one’s fault in a Japanese organization setting. The other concern is that there is a chance that mentioning the delay of the bus may aggravate a personal relationship in the given context. Therefore, AS2 did not mention the explanation for the delay until being asked.

In sum, explaining the lateness due to the delay of public transportation is likely to be effective in a situation like Bus scenario, but there is still a chance that an AR would perceive negatively. Therefore, when an AG hesitates in the account selection, it will be helpful that an AG first examine the reaction of the AR while apologizing for the delay and postpone explaining the blunder until being prompted to do.

5.1.1.2 Explaining the Blunder and Reasons in Scenario B (Room Scenario)

Although the results of interviews in this research reveal that the explanation for the blunder is likely to be perceived negatively, two acting subjects, AS2 and AS3, implemented EXCUSES (refer to Appendix I and Table 5.2). Additionally, both of them explained how the blunder happened (i.e., “the meeting is usually held in the second floor”), which leads an AR to recognize the account as negatively judged EXCUSES. While AS3 said the cause of the blunder is due to not reading the message carefully, which would be favorably recognized by an AR as admitting one’s own fault and as knowing the direct cause of the blunder, AS2 used the expression “confused oneself (Kanchigai suru),” which generates negative impressions of the account because an AR is not likely to perceive it as a legitimate reason. Therefore, the account given by AS2 is more likely
to be ineffective as a conflict strategy. However, both AS2 and AS3’s reason for explaining the blunder is, again, not to improve their own self-image, but to let an AR know their intention is to avoid repeating the same blunder. AS2 and AS3 said, “Because it was one’s mistake and to improve it next time (Jibun no misu de kongo no tame ni)” and “To let an AR know that I recognize what caused the blunder (Jibun de yatte simatta koto wo ninshiki shite iru koto wo aite ni tsutaeru tame)” respectively (refer to Table 5.3). This motive is also discussed by reacting subjects during interviews; the intention of improvement in the future can indicate an AG’s professionalism and a degree of regret for what happened.

The reasons why four acting subjects did not explain the blunder also correspond with the results of interviews. There are three types of reasons: 1. Because it would sound like making excuses (given by AS1 and AS5); 2. Because noting the fixing the situation is more important than offering an explanation for the blunder (given by AS4); and 3. Because the perceived harm is low (given by AS6). In addition to the reason that it would sound like making excuses, AS5 also commented that it would be better to just apologize because the blunder was due to a simple mistake. This reason relates to a reason given by AS6, due to the low severity of harm. Additionally, interview results reveal that describing a cause as being due to a simple mistake can lead the AR to identify an AG’s performance as poor; thus, it is viewed as effective to avoid mentioning a simple error, as in the comment by AS5.

In interviews, many reacting subjects show strong annoyance towards an utterance that explains how an AG had booked the wrong room because they feel that
such information is not needed for their work (Jibun ni wa kankei nai). The reason given by AS4, which states that the situation has been addressed and that this is the primary information, likely owes to that idea having been raised during interviews. AS4 added to his comment that an AG would likely ask if AG wants to know the reason why the blunder happened; thus, he does not explain the blunder but only gives the information that he views as necessary for an AG to implement a task.

In sum, the results of role-plays in Room scenario correspond with results from interviews, especially ideas of effective account strategies. One effective strategy that is lacking in acting subjects accounts is the expression of future effort or improvement. Only one subject (AS3) mentioned it.

5.1.1.3 Explaining the Blunder and Reasons in Scenario C (Document Scenario)

This study investigated the possibility that the act of blaming others leads to the formation of a poorer impression of an AG. This is in comparison to other strategies, such as telling how an AG comes to make a mistake when the locus is internal in a Japanese organization context. A Japanese AR is likely to perceive the story of an assistant’s error in Document scenario as blaming the assistant, and consequently the account aggravates the AR’s ill feelings. However, one subject (AS3) mentioned an assistant’s error in the account. Although AS3 also said that he did not check the document, the account is likely to be perceived negatively. AS3 has a tendency to explain the blunder in detail; he explains how the blunder happened in all three scenarios. The motive behind the behavior is consistent throughout the three scenarios: to let an AR know that he understands what
caused the blunder and intends to improve the situation in the future. However, it is still not strongly recommended to mention the assistant’s error in Document scenario.

Yet, there is one more subject (AS6) who mentioned the assistant. AS6, however, did not identify the assistant’s error. He mentioned it in the statement of how he is going to address the situation: i.e., “I will check it with my assistant once again, and will bring the correct document. Please wait a bit (Moo ichido ashisutanto to kakunin shite tadashii mono wo motte kimasu no de, syoosyoo omachi kudasai)” (See appendix 1). In this way, the account makes CONCESSIONS designed to generate the most favorable effects in Document scenario. Presumably, the account given by AS6 would be accepted positively by a Japanese AG because his account is simple but has the necessary aspects, such as apologies. The account would be more effective if it had added the honorific expression related to apologies, mooshiwake arimasen, some expressions that show consideration for an AR such as “I am sorry for making you wait (omatase itashimasita),” or an intention to improve the situation in the future. With those additional strategies, referring to an assistant in the context of addressing the situation can be an even more successful strategy because an AG may be able to mitigate his or her negative image or reduce responsibility by implying that the failure owed in part to an assistant.

It is also notable that in the Document scenario, three acting subjects (AS1, AS4 and AS5) delivered utterances that enable one to identify the locus as internal. Those utterances involve primary determinants that identify the accounts as CONCESSIONS (see Table 5.2). Accordingly, the reasons as to why they did not explain the blunder owe to believing that it is their fault (AS1 and AS5). AS4 has a different reason (though it is the
same reason as the one given in the room scenario), which is that giving information about addressing the situation is more primary. AS6 also gave the same reason in addition to explaining that he would feel pitiful towards the assistant if he mentions the assistant’s error. This empathy somewhat relates to AS2’s reason, ‘because it is not my fault.’ This reason, ‘pitiful towards an assistant,’ was not discussed by reacting subjects during interviews, but it illustrates one form of decision-making in regards to account selection, specifically not giving EXCUSES, from the AG’s perspective.

In sum, the results of role-plays in scenario 3 correspond with other results from interviews. The results confirm that a concise CONCESSION is effective in a situation like the Document scenario.

5.2 Other Findings on Account Strategies in Role-Plays

This section discusses other findings on account strategies. It examines a strategy that maintains an account as including CONCESSIONS but still having an AR know the association of external force in the context of a failure, and the impact of an honorific expression of apologies, mooishiwake arimasen.

5.2.1 Maintaining an Account as a CONCESSION and adding Implications

It can be effective in conflict situations to imply that an external force caused the blunder while keeping an account as a CONCESSION, notably when it is implemented with other effective account strategies as discussed in AS6’s account in the Document scenario above. In addition to AS6, AS4 also used this strategy in the Bus scenario and Document scenario.
In the Bus scenario, the locus of four out of five accounts is external, but one subject delivered INTERNAL EXCUSES whose locus is internal: the acting subject 4 (AS4) said “I left home as usual” to explain the delay. AS4 did not mention the delayed bus in his account, but he projects himself in a way that takes responsibility for being late. However, he attempts to minimize the negative effect produced by mentioning the delay by saying “left home as usual.” This implies he was not just late but something had caused his late arrival. AS4 also handled the conflict in the same way in the Document scenario. He said, “I forgot about checking it (Watashi ga kakunin suru no wo wasurete imasita.)” Although a subject of action is often not mentioned when a speaker assumes that interlocutors understand what and/or whom the speaker is talking about in Japanese, AS4 adds a subject of action “I (watashi)” as well as connects the noun to the verb, “forgot (wasurete imashita)” with a phrase particle ga, which brings greater attention to the doer of the action instead of the action.

Compare his utterance to the other two subjects who deliver CONCESSIONS; neither mention the doer of the action: “(I) carelessly brought it without checking [Chotto ukkari minai de motte kite shimatta]” and “(I) made a mistake. [Machigaete shimaimashita].” On the contrary, AS4 expresses the doer of action, “I (watashi ga) handed it to you without checking it,” which draw hearer’s attention to the doer of the action. In the Document scenario, AS4 implements CONCESSIONS, but he implied the other party’s involvement in the blunder by adding “I (watashi ga).”

It is AS4’s strategy to mention something for which one is taking full responsibility and expressing an account as a CONCESSION, but also subtly touching on
something that reduces his responsibility by implication. Further research is needed to
determine the effectiveness of this strategy, but at least a Japanese AR is likely to form a
good impression of the account because the AG has taken some responsibility and
because of the positive effect of CONCESSIONS.

5.2.2 The Use of Honorific Expressions in Apologies, *mooshiwake arimasen*

As described in the results of interviews, many comments concerned the AR’s
desire to hear some form of apology. For successful account-giving, it is also necessary to
apologize first before saying something else. Many comments in both interviews and
role-plays indicate the importance of an initial apology. In addition to the importance of
the timing of the apology, this study also found the effective linguistic features of
apologetic expressions of the genre in a Japanese organization setting. In interviews,
some reacting subjects formed negative impressions of accounts due to the use of
apologies, *sumimasen*. In other words, the lack of the use of an honorific expression of
apologies, *mooshiwake arimasen*, results in aggravating the AR’s feelings. In role-plays,
honorific expressions of apologies, *mooshiwake arimasen* or *mooshiwake gozaimasen*,
were used most often.

Every subject apologized in the Bus scenario at least once (AS3 apologized twice
in a form of pleading and at the end of the interaction), but only one subject (AS5) did
not use the honorific expression of apologies. In Room scenario, three subjects, AS1,
AS2, and AS3, expressed their regret, but only one subject (AS1) used the plain
expression of apologies, *sumimasen*. Four subjects, AS2, AS3, AS4, and AS5, expressed
their regret in Document scenario too. Only one subject, AS3, used *sumimasen* once at
the beginning of his utterance. However, he apologized three times in this account-giving interaction; two of those expressions were honorific: _mooshiwake gozaimasen_. Those results illustrate the expectation of the use of honorific expressions of apologies in a Japanese organization setting.

5.3 **Research Question 2: Account Strategies from AG’s Perspective**

The research question 2 examines what account strategies people use in a Japanese enterprise when perceived harm is low. The strategies found in role-plays correspond with findings in interviews. In role-plays, a majority of acting subjects explained the blunder when reacting subjects desired to hear it; for instance, when an AG comes late for an appointment. In contrast, few acting subjects mentioned how the blunder happened when reacting subjects would form a negative impression of receiving the explanation for a blunder, such as other people’s error or when the blunder is a simple mistake and the locus is internal.

In a situation like the Bus scenario, Japanese ARs were likely to expect to hear a reason for the delay, and _EXTERNAL EXCUSES_ were likely to generate a favorable impression in a Japanese organization context. In other words, ARs are likely to take the account positively. The study also found a few cultural expectations in the context of being late. First, the explanation for the delay due to public transportation can be recognized as an _INTERNAL EXCUSE_, not an _EXTERNAL EXCUSE_ in a Japanese organization setting. Some people in a Japanese organization setting think that it is known that public transportation is often delayed, and so AG could have arrived in advance if AG had left home earlier than usual. In this context, it is AG’s fault. When an AR identifies the
characteristic of locus as internal, explaining that the delay was due to public transportation is likely to be perceived negatively and to be identified as making. In other words, EXCUSES will not be an effective strategy.

However, the results from interviews and role-plays support that EXCUSES are most likely to be accepted favorably, and CONCESSIONS can aggravate conflict. Some subjects also mentioned that a delay due to public transportation is usually forgiven. Thus, although this study recommends that one explain the delay due to the public transportation, only if it is the first delay in a while, it is important that an AG keeps that chance in mind and carefully determine account selection. EXCUSES will help an AG reduce negative images of them in this context, but such EXCUSES will be more persuasive when implemented with other tactics, such as to apologize first, to use honorific expressions of apologies, and to show consideration to an AR.

The second notable cultural expectation in a context of being late is that explaining why one is late not only helps one improve one’s image, but also it is recognized as a form of consideration towards an AR. When being asked why acting subjects explained the cause of the delay, every subject (five out of five subjects) first mentioned some consideration for the AR. For instance, the explanation for the delay clarifies an AR’s question as to why they were late, and the explanation should be mentioned as etiquette because they made an AR wait.

As AGs desire to improve their self-image and reduce conflict, they may pay attention to expressions that reduce responsibility or maintain their positive image (their “face”) and focus on their own benefits. However, the strategy is not likely to be effective
in collectivist cultures like Japan. Collectivist cultures are more cooperative and emphasize the needs and goals of the group as a whole over the needs of each individual. Thus, these cultures pay more attention to the demand of others than individualist cultures (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 1993; Triandis, 1989). Previous empirical research has found that collectivists prefer mitigating accounts, and they are more likely than individualists to use mitigating accounts (Itoi, Ohbuchi & Fukuno, 1990; Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994). Moreover, collectivists put greater emphasis on the superiors’ concern for saving face; they are more likely to use mitigating accounts compared to individualist cultures (Tata, 2000a). This study found that expressing consideration for others verbally and through action is important in a Japanese account-giving context; for instance, a Japanese AR is likely to expect an AG to let AR know why the AG is late. This dynamic illustrates one model of how the ideology of collectivist cultures is expressed.

In the Room scenario and Document scenario, a concise account of CONCESSIONS is likely to be the most effective strategy. It may aggravate conflict when an AG mentions one’s simple mistake or other people’s poor performance because those utterances are likely to be perceived as negatively judged EXCUSES; furthermore, an AR does not desire to hear something unrelated to her work when AR can assume the location of locus. However, few subjects conveyed an account in terms of CONCESSIONS, but they still mentioned some situation or external force that an AG could not help or which reduced the AG’s responsibility by implication. In this context, an AG recognizes factors that reduce conflict or have him/her feel like asking further questions. In this situation, an AG
cannot identify the characteristic of locus and so excuses are likely to be perceived as positively judged excuses.

All acting subjects agree with not explaining the situation in detail but rather to keep utterances simple when perceived harm severity is low at a Japanese organization setting; offering too many details would sound like making excuses and would aggravate the relationship.

5.4 Conclusion (Interviews and Role-plays)

A close examination of the qualitative interview data and role-play data identifies the effectiveness of excuses in a Japanese organization context when harm is perceived as mild, finds other salient aspects of excuses, and illustrates effective account strategies.

First, the effectiveness of excuses differs depending on the characteristics of a failure event even though other contextual factors are the same, such as the role of participants and the function of each utterance in the script. When an AR is not able to identify the characteristic of locus and controllability, an AG is likely to prefer hearing excuses to concessions. When controllability is identified as uncontrollable, excuses are likely to be perceived as positive. However, when an AR identifies or can easily assume the characteristic of locus as internal and when the blunder is a simple mistake, s/he does not wish to hear excuses. In this context, excuses will likely be perceived as negatively judged excuses. Thus, excuses can be both mitigating accounts and aggravating accounts depending on the type of blunder and the context. This finding suggests that when studying the effectiveness of accounts including excuses, researchers
should pay attention to the type of blunder in addition to other contextual variables, such as the influence of harm severity and hierarchy. The identification of the blunder provides a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of accounts.

Second, this study also discovers ARs’ preferences for accounts. When a blunder is being late for an appointment, EXCUSES are preferred over CONCESSIONS. When a blunder is due to one’s simple error CONCESSIONS are more effective over EXCUSES. Additionally, when a blunder is caused by both one’s own and one’s assistant’s error, CONCESSIONS are effective; EXCUSES that mention the assistant’s mistake are highly likely to form a negative impression of the AG. However, when an AG has urgency to defense oneself, there are two tactics that s/he can use. The first tactic is to postpone explaining the blunder and mention it during break time or after work such as while having meal together. Such explanations should be incorporated into small talk. The second tactic is to deliver an account as CONCESSIONS but imply a condition that an AG wants to address. The second tactic requires more advanced skills, but may be more effective than the first one. The current study (as well as previous studies) supports the effectiveness of CONCESSIONS in situations like the Room scenario and Document scenario.

Third, this study also illustrates the influence of the structure and linguistic features of a given account. These are small but important features for successful account-giving. First, an AG should pay attention to the structure of an account story; in short, apologetic expressions should be made before the explanation of the blunder. Even if perceived harm is low, a Japanese AR expects an AG to express apologies, and AG risks creating irritation if apologies are not made first. The second linguistic feature is the
use of honorific expressions of apologies, such as *moushiwake gozaimasen* or *
moushiwake arimasen*. When giving an account to a superior, even if perceived harm is low, the use of honorific expressions of apologies is expected in a Japanese organization context.

Finally, other effective account strategies can be implemented in varied account-giving situations: 1) to admit one’s error; 2) to make an account simple and concise; 3) to mention briefly what was wrong and tell how an AG will avoid repeating the same blunder; 4) to address the failure promptly; and 5) not to make excuses. If an account does not include some of these strategies, an AR is not likely to feel an AG’s sincerity, regret, and/or professionalism even if the account makes CONCESSIONS. Giving an account should be simple and concise, but if it is too simple or too short and lacks effective strategies, it will not maximize the benefits of CONCESSIONS. Furthermore, even when an AG decides to use somewhat more aggravating accounts, the strategies mentioned above will be helpful in mitigating the conflict.

All of these strategies enable an AG to implement successful account-giving. The strategies are designed to indicate behavior that shows care for an AR, such as expression of apologies, explaining the blunder when an AR does not know the context, and describing how one will improve the situation in the future so that an AR can confirm that tasks will proceed smoothly in the future.

Spinuzzi and Zachry (2000) claim the success of any genre involves finding interconnections with other genres and understanding how different genres associate together in mediating social activities. Although the ideology may appear in a different
form in different genres, such as a family community or a school community, finding interconnection and taking advantage of relevant features will promote further understanding of the norms and expectations of community members from different genre groups. Doing so will express the ways community members can comprehend one’s intention in varied genre groups. Genre repertoire not only benefits people from different institutions but also proves beneficial in cross-cultural communication.
Chapter 6: Pedagogical Implications and Conclusions

Based on the results of the present study, this chapter presents pedagogical implications with respect to Japanese account-giving strategies. The limitations of this study and areas for future research are also addressed. Account-giving strategies discussed in this research are applicable to Japanese business contexts in which a subordinate (account-giver) gives accounts to a superior (account-receiver) and where perceived harm is mild.

6.1 Performed Culture Approach

In cross-cultural communication, miscommunication happens more often compared to interactions between people from the same culture, because cultural conventions differ depending on cultures. The interpretation of social activities of a native culture may differ from those in the target culture. In chapter one, I addressed this dynamic through my anecdote of a failure (not understanding how to accept a pie at a party). Even if one has excellent knowledge of linguistic features, it does not mean that the person can behave in a culturally appropriate manner. Failure to follow cultural norms and expectations may result in offending people, which undermines the development of interpersonal relationships.

Walker and Noda (2010 p. 24) state that “Culture is situated knowledge,” and explain that situations are social and conventional. When communicating, we attempt to
act based on cultural norms so that we can communicate our intention as well as can understand an interlocutor’s intention. Social life is comprised of a sequence of *performances* (2010), and culture situates behavior in performance, and therefore it becomes a medium for the interpretation of our behavior (linguistic codes, body language, and mindset). *Performance* is the discrete frame of specific time, place, role, scripts, and audience.

Compiling cultural memory is vital in foreign language learning (Walker and Noda, 2010). Walker and Noda explain that “learning stories is a part of large process of compiling the memories” (p. 32). They define *story* as “the personal memory of having experienced a performance or a game” (p.39). Therefore, a story is a memory of actual participation of doing something, such as explaining about a failure, requesting, and offering. In order to help learners become able to communicate their intentions smoothly in the target culture, language instructors need to provide them with a number of opportunities to actually perform so that learners remember acceptable behavior in a social context that will occur in their futures. Walker and Noda (2010, p.26) argue that “Language teachers prepare their students to negotiate a new culture successfully, developing a memory that can be effectively drawn upon in the rapid flow of interactions or transactions with members of that culture.” Performed culture approach not only helps learners communicate in the target language, but also help them communicate with the knowledge of appropriate behavior in the target culture.

One of the challenges for language learners in implementing account-giving is judging what account is effective in given contexts, taking into consideration how an AR
would perceive the characteristics of causality. There are additional effective verbal tactics in account-giving, and many of these expressions are expected to be delivered in the genre, such as honorific-polite apology ‘mooshiwake arimasen.’ Those effective expressions index other affective stance, such as consideration for others, in addition to the typical meaning of the expression. Language classes are effective when they provide cultural information and ample authentic and useful activities for learners to perform to gain skills in handling conflict situations. Ellis and Larsen (2006) address the benefit of subconscious acquisition of language and the importance of the use of explicit knowledge to support building implicit knowledge. However, knowledge that is necessary to implement account-giving provides perception of how members of community approach to manage conflict, and the knowledge differs depending on cultures. Moreover, the selection of verbal tactics depends on situations as well. Since these kinds of skills and cultural knowledge are not overtly taught in business organizations, people often learn from their actual experiences. For adult learners of another culture, explicit instruction is more beneficial for developing complex and highly context-dependent moves such as account-giving.

In order to help learners to compile the target culture memory, learners must know from experience of having performed what they are capable of dealing with in the culture. The following sections discuss memory compilation in terms of sagas, cases, and genres.
6.1.1 Sagas, Cases, and Genre

*Sagas and cases*, proposed by Walker and Noda (2010), are categorization of target culture memory. They present what learners can handle in the target culture. Walker and Noda define saga as “a series of stories about a specific set of people or a specific location” (2010, p.40). It identifies what learners can do in certain locations and around certain kinds of people. Case is “a series of stories about doing something in a culture” (p.40). Saga in this research is business settings and business people. Case is giving explanation about a failure and polite formulaic expressions. Saga and case are compiled into knowledge through performance experiences and can represent how learners can manage conflict in business organization settings.

Genre provides specific linguistic features that reflect community’s norms and expectations as well as social and cultural knowledge including the social context and the ideology and the convention of community. Genres offer not only shared conventions, but also specific types of social practices of a community including linguistic behavior. Genres provide instructors with proper models of social practices for learners as well as socially authentic parameters to guide learners in practice as they expand on those models (Quinn 2003). Engraining in contextualized and authentic practices helps learners become more familiar with a genre and compile in their memory. Performed culture becomes the foundation of memory (Walker and Noda 2010), and those successful memories help them apply what they learn in the classroom to real-world situations.

Proper models of the target culture are important for learners. Additionally, the knowledge why the certain behavior is expected or what kind of affective stance the
certain expression indexes reinforces the comprehensive understanding of the target language. It is important for learners to understand the cultural norms and to follow native models. As addressed the case of Casanova, the CEO of McDonald’s Co. (Japan), in chapter 2, failure to follow native norms in the target culture can cause potentially irreparable conflicts, but modifying one’s behavior to meet that culture’s norms and expectation can generate positive effects. Casanova’s case also illustrates the significance of expressing consideration for the other (AR in this case) in Japanese account-giving to mitigate conflict.

Learning language and cultural knowledge is not sufficient. Learners need experiences of actually using the knowledge. Walker and Noda (2010) explain that learners first should see the model performance and imitate the script through much repetition practice, and when presenting, specified elements of performance must be presented so that learners can build a memory of knowing what to do in the culture. They also state that improvisation is necessary in order to expand repertoire of stories in role-play. During improvisation, they suggest that instructors present a performance that is similar to the prior performance so that the level of difficulty can rise gradually. The following section presents some concrete pedagogical suggestions based on the research results.

6.2 Suggestions from the Research Results

In addition to assessing whether or not excuses tend to be regarded positively or negatively in a given context, there are other salient strategies that can maximize the benefit of implementing effective account. This section presents when excuses are likely
to be received positively and negatively, and suggests things that help to generate positive effects.

**Japanese business contexts in which excuses are likely to be evaluated negatively**

Excuses tend to be regarded negatively and perceived as making excuses in Japanese business contexts when AR can assess the cause of failure is due to AG and the failure could have been controlled. In business contexts, making simple errors are easily identified as AG’s fault. In this kind of situation;

a) avoid excuses (e.g., avoid an explanation about how the failure happened); and

b) instead of excuses, practice using alternate accounts, such as concessions.

Concessions are the most effective in mitigating conflicts in these contexts. With concessions, AG admit one’s association with the failure. When implementing concessions, be aware of the following items:

c) a Japanese AR will not feel AG’s sincerity when concessions are too short;

d) add an honorific expression, mooshiwake arimasen;

e) include the expression of a short future improvements such as kongo ki o tsukemasu ‘I’ll be careful from now on;’

f) make a prompt action for repair when applicable.

**Japanese business contexts in which excuses are likely to be evaluated positively**

Japanese AR is likely to want to hear excuses when they cannot assume how the failure happened, and in that situation providing an explanation will be recognized as an act of consideration for the AR. Consideration for the other is an important cultural theme that underlies not only mitigating conflicts but also forming and maintaining a good
relationship with Japanese. EXCUSES are likely to be judged positively when AR evaluates the failure happened due to something over which AG does not have control. For instance, the delay in public transportation is an explanation that is likely to be accepted positively. When EXCUSES can be considered positively, use them carefully:

a) add an honorific apology first;

b) provide a simple and concise explanation for a failure;

c) include the expression of a short future improvements such as kongo ki o tsukemasu ‘I’ll be careful from now on;’

d) make a prompt action for repair when applicable.

Judging whether providing an explanation for a failure can be challenging. When AR seemed not favorably accepting the given account, the expression of admitting one’s fault will release AR’s annoyance. It is important to be aware that AG can always accommodate conflict strategies based on how AR reacts.

6.3 Sample Practices of Account-Giving

The selection of account type, such as either invoking EXCUSES or CONCESSIONS can be challenging for learners. In order to help them develop the ability to choose an effective account and to be successful at account-giving, a) selection practice and b) implementation practice will be useful.

Selection practice helps learners develop a skill of assessing the situation to choose the proper account (i.e., EXCUSES or CONCESSIONS). The challenge for native English learners is to identify a context in which CONCESSION are more effective in Japanese than EXCUSES when the latter would be more effective in English. Previous studies (Itoi et al., 1996; Takaku, 2000) find that Americans tend to invoke EXCUSES and
JUSTIFICATIONS more than Japanese do. Therefore, when giving instructions to them, instructors need to provide practices where they can practice choosing a context that call for CONCESSIONS. The followings are some sample contexts:

a) you have not been able to complete a task, making copies for a meeting, that a senior colleague asked one hour ago because a copier has been used by other workers;

b) last month, the subway got delayed and you could not meet on time for a meeting. Today, the subway was delayed again, and you arrived 3 minutes late for a meeting.

In the first sample, making copies, locus is external and controllability is uncontrollable; therefore, native English learners tend to implement EXCUSES and explain a condition that can reduce their responsibility for a cause of failure. However, Japanese are likely to form a negative impression of blaming others or pushing one’s responsibility onto other people, CONCESSIONS are the most effective account in mitigating conflict. Some Japanese may consider the failure could have been controlled by AG. Therefore, CONCESSIONS with an apology and prompt action of repairing the failure will be able to mitigate AR’s negative feelings. In the second sample, being late for a meeting, learners may want to invoke EXCUSES because the cause of the delay is external force from them. However, since the same blunder is repeated again, Japanese is likely to recognize controllability as controllable instead of uncontrollable, and therefore EXCUSES are very likely to be recognized negatively. Thus, in this situation, CONCESSIONS with an apology and an expression of future improvement will mitigate a conflict.
Having a right order of utterances in account narrative matters. This research finds that Japanese AR expects to hear an apology before an explanation about failure and forms a negative feeling toward hearing explanation at the beginning of account narrative. Therefore, as a part of implementation practices, instructors can provide an activity that can draw learners attention to the importance of ordering types of utterances and help them develop the skill. For instance, providing a list of utterances that are used in account-giving, and have students put them in the appropriate order. The list, for instance, may include: a) an explanation for a blunder, b) an expression of future improvement, c) an apology. The list may also include something that are not be used in account-giving. For instance, non-honorific apology, sumimasen. In this case, instructor can raise leaners’ awareness of adding formality to increase the effectiveness of excuses. Adding other types of accounts will also be a good practice to develop a skill, selecting an effective account.

The following are a sample model conversations. They are created based on the findings of this research. These conversations can be presented as a model performance. The situations are the same as those used in the present study: 1. AG arrives ten minutes late for a meeting due to a bus delay; 2. Reporting fixing of wrongdoing that is pointed out by an AR, reserving the wrong room for a meeting that will be held in two weeks; and 3. Bringing the wrong document to a meeting, which was given to AG by an assistant before the meeting.
Late for a meeting due to bus delay

1AG: 遅れてしまい、申し訳ありません。
Okurete shimai mooshiwake arimasen
“I am sorry [honorifics] for being late.”

2AR: どうしたんですか。
Doo shita n desu ka.
“What happened?”

3AG: 今日は渋滞でバスが遅くなってしまって、遅れてしまいました。今
後気をつけます。
Kyoo wa jyuutai de basu ga osoku natte simatte, okurete shimaimasita.
Kongo ki wo tukemasu.
“I was late because the bus was delayed because of a traffic jam today. I
will be careful next time.”

Reporting fixing of wrongdoing that is pointed out by an AR, reserving a wrong room
for a meeting that will be held in two weeks

1AG: 会議の予約の件ですけれども、すぐに訂正致しました。ご迷惑をお
かけいたしました。
Kaigi no yoyaku no ken desu keredomo, sugu ni teisei itashimasita.
Gomeiwaku wo okake itasimasita.
“It is about the reservation for a meeting, I corrected right away. I am
sorry for causing you trouble you.”

2AR: 分かりました。
Wakarimashita.
“OK”

3AG: 申し訳ありませんでした。
Mooshiwake arimasen deshita.
“I am sorry [honorifics]”
Bringing the wrong document to a meeting, which was given to AG by an assistant before the meeting

1AR: これ、今日使う資料ですか。
Kore kyoo tukau shiryoo desu ka.
“Is this a document that we need today?”

2AG: 申し訳ございません！間違えていました。至急取り替えできませんので、少々お待ちいただいてよろしいでしょうか。
Mooshiwake gozaimasen! Machigaete shimaimashita. Shikyuu torikaete kimasu no de shooshoo omachi itadaite yoroshii desyoo ka
“I am sorry [humble honorifics]! I made a mistake. I will change it right way. Could you please wait a little bit?”

3AR: お願いします。
Onegai shimasu
“Please.”

4AG: 大変お待たせいたしました。こちらが正しい書類です。今後確認してお渡しするように致します。申し訳ありませんでした。
“I had you wait for a long time. This is the correct document. I will give you (a document) after checking (it) from now on. I am sorry [honorific].”

6.4 Limitations of the Study

This study has two main limitations: the hypothetical scenario used in the study and the generalizability of findings.

Limitations Regarding the Hypothetical Scenario

This present study sheds light on the effectiveness and influence of EXCUSES in a very specific conflict situation, namely a conflict situation between a superior person (AR) and a subordinate person (AG) in a Japanese organizational setting when perceived harm is low. The use of hypothetical scenarios permitted clear and efficient investigation of the objectives of this study. Although using hypothetical scenarios has advantages, the
problem with hypothetical scenarios is the applicability of the results to actual interactions. The results from these hypothetical scenarios may not necessarily apply to actual interactions. Future research may consider using actual interactions to examine the effects of accounts and conflict strategies.

Limitation Regarding the Generalizability of the Findings

Another limitation of this study is the generalizability of the findings. The effectiveness of an account changes depending on a situation, such as genres, personal relationships, and perceived severity of harm. The findings regarding the effectiveness of EXCUSES in this study only apply to situations where a subordinate person invokes EXCUSES to a superior person when the perceived severity of harm is mild. The effectiveness and influence of EXCUSES are likely to be changed when those independent variables are different. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to diverse conflict situations, for instance, an interaction between friends or when the perceived severity of harm is high.

In addition to contextual variables, different genres also contribute to the change of behavior due to various shared expectations and norms across genres. The present study focuses on the genre of interactions within a business setting, specifically a Japanese organization, and it investigates whether EXCUSES are effective when AR does not know how the blunder happened versus when AR knows or can easily assume how the blunder happened. These findings may not be applied to different genres, such as in a school setting, for instance, when a student explains a failure to a professor at a Japanese university. However, some of expectations and norms are shared even across different
genres (Spinuzzi & Zachry, 2000). Therefore, when contextual elements are the same, there is a possibility that the same or similar effectiveness of excuses can be observed, even across different genres.

### 6.5 Areas for Future Research

This section presents some possible areas for future research that would build upon the investigation of the present study. The studies which might be useful are (1) contrastive studies (for instance, English and Japanese) and (2) studies analyzing the effectiveness of using multiple accounts.

#### 6.5.1 Contrastive Studies

Among the possible types of contrastive studies that might be conducted, the following would be most informative: (a) analyses of the perception of excuses in different languages in parallel contexts to those appearing in this study; (b) analyses of Japanese language learners’ behavior in parallel contexts; and (c) studies of non-business settings in Japanese.

The present study analyzed the effectiveness of excuses and other language tactics in conflict management only in Japanese. The question is whether the findings can be extended to different cultures. Previous contrastive studies (Fukuno & Ohbuch, 1998; Itoi et al., 1996; Takaku, 2000; Tata, 2000) in account-giving have shown the influence of culture on the preference and effectiveness of accounts. Takaku’s study shows that although concessions are the most effective account in both English and Japanese, native English speakers are more likely to use excuses and justifications than Japanese
speakers. His research studied interactions from AG’s perspective; thus, native speakers of English may perceive EXCUSES more favorably than Japanese speakers.

Itoi et al. identify three motivations of account-giving (i.e., emotional alleviation, impression improvement, avoidance of punishment) and find that the motivation of selecting accounts are very similar between Japanese and Americans, and speakers choose CONCESSIONS to alleviate anger while JUSTIFICATIONS and REFUSALS are motivated by the desire to avoid punishment; EXCUSES, however, are motivated by both. In the present study, it was found that Japanese speakers are motivated to use EXCUSES for the sake of AR; a Japanese AG explains a failure event when he thinks that AR is wondering how the blunder happened. Explaining a failure when AR is left wondering is also considered business etiquette. This finding is extracted from a context where AG’s arrival to a meeting has been delayed. The question is whether or not people from different cultures also choose EXCUSES with the same motivation.

Additionally, the present study also found effective tactics for conflict management in Japanese, for instance, expressions of apology, expressing how to prevent repeating the same errors, and prompt actions for repairing harm caused from a failure. Much research has studied the effectiveness and preference of each account, but discussions of other tactics have been rare. Future research can analyze the effectiveness of those tactics as well as find new effective strategies in the culture.

Another cross-cultural contrastive study could be to analyze the degree of perceived severity of harm caused from different types of blunder. The present study manipulates perceived severity of harm by creating a context in which AG repeats the
same wrongdoing; it finds that the perceived high severity of harm has little influence on AR’s perception of excuses. However, there are other ways to manipulate the perceived severity of harm, for instance, having others wait for a longer period of time or fixing a problem right before the promised due date. The question is whether or not the perception of excuses changes with different ways of increasing perceived severity of harm. Furthermore, future research could also study the cultural difference in the perception of severity of harm. The previous study found (Itoi et al., 1996; Fukuno and Ohbuchi 1998) that Japanese people tend to perceive the severity of harm more significantly than Americans. However, researchers have not identified what types of blunders are likely to be perceived more severely or more lightly in Japan and the U.S. Future research can analyze the degree of perceived severity of harm caused from different types of blunders.

The analyses suggested above help raise the awareness of cultural diversity and understanding of cultural norms and expectations. These findings not only contribute to the study of accounts, but also benefit language learners in encouraging participation in the culture with proper understanding and behavior. In cross-cultural communication, cultural differences may cause misunderstandings by allowing the speaker to deliver a message that he or she does not intend, due to different expectations and behavior. When learners do not understand norms in the target culture, they are very likely to apply norms of their native culture when communicating in the target language.

The analyses of Japanese language learners’ behavior in parallel contexts identify common positive and negative transfers. This finding is useful not only for learners but also for instructors when developing pedagogical materials. The analyses provide
necessary information to instructors, who can then develop materials that help learners converse in Japanese in a culturally appropriate manner. Those materials draw learners’ attention to cultural differences and they deepen learners’ understanding of norms and help them behave in a culturally appropriate manner. Additionally, the analyses can test learners’ cultural fluency (Oyserman, 2011), the recognition and use of specific cultural knowledge; namely, whether or not learners successfully transfer what they learn in the classroom to actual interactions.

Lastly, contrastive studies in non-business settings should be undertaken to find possible similarities and differences from the findings in the present study. Some genre researchers (Spinuzzi & Zachry, 2000) advocate the importance of finding interconnections with other genres and analyzing how different genres are associated, in order to mediate social activities, because doing so helps to accomplish complex objectives. Spinuzzi and Zachry (2000) state that the success of any genre depends on finding interconnections with other genres and how well the knowledge applies to activities in different genres to accomplish one’s goal. Moreover, Orr (1999) also claims that in order to understand professional communication, researchers should analyze the different communicative activities of different genres. He believes that exploring relations between the different genres promotes genre repertoire and that developing such familiarity is part of what it means to be a member of a community.

6.5.2 Studies Analyzing the Effectiveness of Using Multiple Accounts

Future research may find value in studying the effect of account-giving utterances that includes multiple accounts to better understand people’s choices and evaluations of
accounts. The present study focuses on the examination of account-giving utterances that include only one type of account, EXCUSES. However, AGs often have multiple goals of account-giving, such as alleviating AR’s anger and reducing AG’s responsibility; moreover, AGs often use more than one type of account (Yao, 2009). Previous studies on accounts often asked participants to choose only one account that is most likely to be effective in the given conflict situation to test the effectiveness and preference of accounts. Although this approach provides a measure that can be adapted in other situations, accounts that people invoke in an actual conflict situation may prove to be much more complicated. Future research may use both self-reporting of actual account-giving and natural data to analyze the effectiveness of the sequences of accounts instead of a single account.

6.6 Conclusion

This study attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of EXCUSES in Japanese business contexts when the perceived severity of harm is mild, and it examines the effectiveness from the point of view of an AR. The findings in this dissertation provide a more complete picture of the nature of EXCUSES in terms of the effect of EXCUSES, how accounts mitigate or aggravate, and whether or not ARs always prefer CONCESSIONS to EXCUSES. Japanese ARs are likely to want to hear EXCUSES when they do not know how the failure happened; and when ARs identify the cause of a blunder as beyond an AG’s control, it is highly likely that EXCUSES will be perceived as genuine explanations for what had happened; hence they will be less likely to aggravate the conflict. Additionally, providing an explanation is likely to be taken as AG’s consideration for AR. On the other
hand, EXCUSES are likely to aggravate conflict when AR already assumes how the blunder happened and when the cause of the blunder is identified as AG’s wrongdoing. Furthermore, this study also finds that EXCUSES are more effective than CONCESSIONS, and Japanese ARs may form a negative impression even in the context of CONCESSIONS when ARs feel that the given account is too brief (i.e., expressing that one admits his/her wrongdoing and apologizes for the failure).

Most of the existing research has focused on the preference and effectiveness of a single account from AG’s perspective. Those studies agree that CONCESSIONS are the most effective account in reducing AR’s anger and conflict, and EXCUSES are less mitigating than CONCESSIONS. Researchers have generally viewed EXCUSES as mitigating accounts since the findings of McLaughlin et al. (1983). However, Yao’s (2011) study finds AR’s strong annoyance toward EXCUSES. These confounding characteristics of EXCUSES are the driving forces for this study. This study investigates cultural expectations and norms within Japanese business contexts; it reveals in what kind of contexts EXCUSES become mitigating accounts and in what kind of contexts they become aggravating accounts.

This study contributes to the field of conflict management, business communication, and Japanese language learning in general, in that it provides appropriate genre-specific behavior and cultural knowledge of account-giving and offers models for effective accounts. The findings provide practical implications for the understanding of Japanese account-giving that are effective in mitigating conflicts.

Account-giving is common language behavior; it is a vital skill in forming and maintaining good relationships with others. This study suggests that it is vitally important
for AGs to explain how a mistake happened without being seen as an individual who makes excuses; such effective communication projects professionalism and contributes to workplace success in a Japanese business context. The findings also demonstrate the inseparable ties of culture and language and how language use is determined by cultural norms and the shared expectations of a specific community.
Bibliography


Appendix A: Background Questionnaire (Japanese)

研究をすすめるにあたってのアンケート

1. 性別：男性 ・ 女性

2. 年齢 18~29 30~39 40~49 50~59 60~69 70~79

3. ご出身はどちらですか。__________________都道府県

4. 外国の滞在経験はありますか はい いいえ
   「はい」の方、お手数ですが、国名、期間、目的をお教えください。

   国________________ 期間________________ 目的______________________

   国________________ 期間________________ 目的______________________

   国________________ 期間________________ 目的______________________

5. 日本の企業で働いた経験はありますか
   アルバイトとして 正社員として 非常勤として

   期間_____年 部門（例：営業、企画など）________________
Appendix B: Background Questionnaire (English Translation)

1. Gender: Male / Female (Circle one)

2. Age:

3. Where are you from? (Country, State)

4. Have you ever lived in any countries other than America? If yes, write where, how long, and purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. Have you ever worked in a company?

Yes, I have worked as a:

Part-time worker Full-time worker Temporary Employee

Duration ________ Area/Department ________________
Appendix C: Hypothetical Scenario (Japanese)

Interview

Scenario A

＜状況 A＞
今日は１年年下の後輩の鈴木さんと午前８時半にミーティングの約束があります。約束の時間の８時半になりましたが、鈴木さんはまだ来ていません。そして、１０分後の８時４０分になって、鈴木さんが来ました。鈴木さんはこう言いました。

＜Script A1＞
遅くなって、すみません。いつも乗っているバスを使ったのですが、今日道が混んでいて遅れてしまいました。これからはもっと早く出るようにします。すみませんでした。

＜Script A2＞
遅くなってしまい、すみませんでした。

Scenario B

＜状況 B＞
再来週の水曜日に大きな会議があります。会議は２階の会議室を使うことになり、あなたはその会議室の予約をアシスタントの川口さんにメールでお願いしました。そして、すぐに川口さんが予約が出来た旨の返信をもらいました。しかし、今日会議室の予約を確認すると、２階ではなく１階の会議室が予約されていることに気がつきました。あなたは川口さんに会議室のことを確認すると、川口さんは：
<Script B1>
あ、2階なんですか。すみません。いつも1階の会議室なので、今回も1階だと思っていました。これからもっと気をつけます。今すぐ訂正します。

<Script B2>
あ、すみません。勘違いしてしまいました。今すぐ訂正します。

Scenario C

<状況 C>
2年後輩の伊藤さんと経費に関する会議をしている。伊藤さんが渡してくれた書類は、経費に関する書類ではなく、契約に関する関係のない書類でした。あなたは「経費に関する書類じゃないですけど」とそのことを問うと伊藤さんは:

<Script C1>
あ、すみません。すぐに正しいものを印刷してきます。

(戻って来て)
お待たせして、すみませんでした。アシスタントに書類の印刷を頼んでおいたんですけど、間違いてしまったみたいですね。でも私も確認すべきでした。すみませんでした。

<Script C2>
あ、すみません。すぐに正しいものを印刷してきます。

(戻って来て)
お待たせしてすみませんでした。こちらです。
Appendix D: Hypothetical Scenario (English Translation)

Scenario A:

You have a meeting today with your subordinate, Ms. Suzuki, at 8:30 a.m. Even though it’s past 8:30 a.m., Ms. Suzuki has not shown up yet. 10 minutes later, at 8:40 a.m., Ms. Suzuki finally comes, and she says:

<Audio Script A1>
I’m sorry for being late. I took the bus that I always use, but the roads were congested. (From now on, I will leave home much earlier. I’m very sorry.)

<Audio script A2>
I’m sorry for being late.

Scenario B

There will be an important meeting on Wednesday two weeks from today, and it’s been decided to hold the meeting in a meeting room on the second floor. You emailed your assistant, Ms. Kawaguchi, and asked her to reserve the meeting room. Then soon after, Ms. Kawaguchi replies, saying that she reserved the meeting room. However, when you check the reservation for today, you notice that Ms. Kawaguchi mistakenly reserved a meeting room on the first floor, instead of reserving a room on the second floor. When you ask her about the room reservation, she responds by saying:

<Audio Script B1>
“Oh, is it on the second floor? I’m sorry, it’s always held on the first floor, so I thought that it would be on the first floor this time too. I will read my e-mails more carefully next time. I will make the correction right away.”

<Audio script B2>
“Oh, I’m so sorry. I misunderstood! I will correct this right away.”
Scenario C

You are having a meeting on expenditures with Mr. Ito, your subordinate. Mr. Ito hands you a document that supposed to be about expenditures, but the document was about a separate contract that has nothing to do with expenditures. When you point this out to her and question her as to why she brought this document instead, she responds by saying:

<Audio Script C1>
“Oh, I’m sorry. I will bring the right one now.”
(She returns)
“I’m sorry for making you wait. I asked my assistant to print out the document, but it seems she printed the wrong one. But I still should have checked it when she gave it back to me. I’m sorry.”

<Audio script C2>
“Oh, I’m sorry, I will bring the right one right away.”
(She returns)
“I’m sorry for making you wait. This is the right one.”
Appendix E: Interview Question (Japanese)

インタビューの質問

1. 正当な理由に聞こえましたか。
   はい
   いいえ→どの様に聞こえましたか。（言い訳に聞こえましたか。）

2. 言わなくてもいいことがありましたか。
   はい→なぜそう思いますか。
   いいえ

3. 自分の仕事の責任の誠意が感じられましたか。
   はい→どんな所から感じられましたか。
   いいえ→どんな所から感じられないと思いましたか。

4. 状況の深刻さはどのくらいだと思いますか。
   10（非常に深刻）～1（全く深刻ではない）

5. 以前にも同じ様なことがあったとして、この返答に対する印象は変わりますか。（正当に聞こえますか。）
   変わる→どの様に聞こえましたか。
   変わらない

6. 二つを聞いて、どちらの方が印象がいいですか。
Appendix F: Interview Questions (English Translation)

1. Did you think that what s/he said was a valid reason?
   If not→ How did it sound to you?

2. Is there any line that the speaker should not have said?
   If yes→ Why do you think so?

3. From what the speaker said, did you get the impression that the speaker is aware of his/her responsibilities toward the job?
   If Yes→ What makes you think so?
   If No→ What makes you think so?

4. On a scale of one to ten, please rate the level of severity of the situation.
   10 (very severe) ~ 1 (not severe at all)

5. If the speaker did the same or similar things a couple of times before, does your impression of the speaker’s response change? (Does her response still sound like a valid reason?
   If your impression of his/her response changes→ How does her response sound to you?

6. Which of the two responses gives you a better impression of the person? Why?
Appendix G: Role-Play Scenario (Japanese)

ロールプレイ

この度は私の研究に参加くださりありがとうございます。これから3つのシナリオが提示されます。それぞれのシナリオはこれから渡される紙面で紹介され、そこには簡潔な状況設定が説明されています。私が会話相手となり、何か質問したり、コメントしたりしますので、置かれた状況においてご自身が普段会話されるようにお答えください。

＜全体の状況設定＞
日本で仕事をしています。あなたはその会社で働き始めて丁度一年が経ちました。

状況設定1

今日は一年先輩の山根さんと午前8時半にミーティングの約束があります。いつも会社に午前8:10に着くバスを使っていて、今日はいつも通りそのバスに乗りましたが渋滞のため遅れてしまいました。急いで会社に行きましたが、約束の10分後の午前8:40に着きました。山根さんが待っている会議室に来ました。

状況設定2

1年先輩の中島さんからメールがきて、再来週の水曜日の大きな会議のために会議室の予約をするように頼まれました。あなたはメールを読んずにすぐに、いつも使っている1階の会議室の予約をし、中島さんに予約した旨をメールでその中に伝えました。

数日後また中島さんから連絡があり、「2階の会議室を予約するように頼んだが、1階が予約されているから、すぐ確認して訂正して下さい」と言われました。あなたはもう一度前に送られた中島さんのメールを確認すると、2階としっかりと明記されていました。あなたはいつも会議は1階であるため、今回も1階だと勘違いして、メールをしっかり読んでいないことに気がつきました。すぐに訂正をして2階の予約を済ませました。これから直接中島さんに伝えに行きます。
状況設定 3

二年先輩の佐藤さんと経費に関する会議をしています。あなたは会議に必要な書類の印刷をアシスタントに頼んで、コピーされたものをさほど確認せずに持って行きました。そして、佐藤さんとの会議中にアシスタントから誤った書類を渡されたことに気がつきました。これから正しい書類のコピーをとりに行きます。
**Appendix H: Role-Play Scenarios (English Translation)**

Thank you very much for participating in my research. In this section, you will be presented with 3 scenarios. Each scenario is introduced by a written document that contains a short description of the scenarios to follow. I will be your conversation partner. I am going to either say something or ask you a question. Please respond how you normally would in this situation.

**Overall Setting**
You are a full-time worker for a company in the United States. It has been a year since you first started working for the company.

**Situation 1**
Today, you have a meeting at 8:30 am with your superior, Ken. You always take the bus that arrives at your company at 8:10 am, and today you take the same bus. However, due to a traffic jam, the bus was delayed. You hurry to the meeting room, but you are 10 minutes late, and get there at 8:40 am. You see Ken sitting in the meeting room, and say:

**Situation 2**
You receive an e-mail from your superior, Mr. Smith, and he asks you to reserve a meeting room for a meeting on Wednesday the week after next. Right after you read the e-mail, you reserve the meeting room on the first floor where meetings are always held, and you reply to her informing her that you made the reservation.

A couple of days later, Mr. Smith sends you an e-mail again, and says “I asked you to reserve a room on the second floor, but it seems that you reserved a room on the first floor. Please make the correction and reserve a room on the second floor.” After reading this e-mail, you checked the earlier request once again, and realized that Mr. Smith clearly stated to reserve a meeting room on the second floor, and that you did not read the message carefully. You make the correction right away, and are going to tell her in person that you made the correction.

**Situation 3**
You are going to have a meeting with Ms. Brown, who started working here two years before you started. You asked your assistant to make a copy of a document that will be used in the meeting, and brought the document that your assistant copied to the meeting, but you didn’t check it carefully. During the meeting with Ms. Brown, you
realized that the document that your assistant gave you was the wrong document. Now, you are going to go make a copy of the right document. What will you say to Ms. Brown before you go to get the right document?
**Appendix I: Transcription of Role-Plays and English Translation**

*Note.* Portions of utterances by the acting subjects that explained the blunder are highlighted.

**Scenario A**

Acting Subject (AS) 1 (Bus scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:38</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>申し訳ありません。</td>
<td>I’m sorry for being late. (Honorary expression of apologies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:39</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>連れていえ</td>
<td>Not at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:39</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>今日はバスが早く遅れてしまったので、遅れない本当に申し訳ありません。</td>
<td>The bus got delayed because of a traffic jam today. I am very sorry for being late. (Honorary expression of apologies)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AS2 (Bus scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:17</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>申し訳ございません。</td>
<td>I am sorry for being late. (Honorary expression of apologies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:20</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>連れていえ</td>
<td>Not at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:22</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>どうかしたんですか。</td>
<td>What happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:25</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>バスが遅れていたので、遅れてしまいました。</td>
<td>Because the bus got caught in a traffic jam, I was late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:33</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>そうですね。</td>
<td>Is that so?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### AS3 (Bus scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:18</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>お持たせして大変申し訳ありませんでした。バスが遅れてしまって、到着が遅れてしまいました。申し訳ございません。</td>
<td>I am very sorry for having you wait. <em>(Honorific expression of apologies)</em> The bus was behind schedule, and so my arrival was delayed too. I am very sorry. <em>(Honorific expression of apologies)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:23</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>いえいえ</td>
<td>That’s all right.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AS4 (Bus scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:18</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>申し訳ございません。本来なら早く家を出なければいけないのに、いつも通り家を出てしまい、遅れてしまいました。</td>
<td>I am sorry. <em>(Honorific expression of apologies)</em> Although I should have left home early, since <em>I left home at the usual time</em>, I was late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:27</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>そうですか。</td>
<td>Is that so?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AS5 (Bus scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:45</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>交通遅滞でバスが遅れてしまって、遅れてしまいました。申し訳ありません。</td>
<td>The bus was stuck in a traffic jam, and so I was late. I am sorry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:51</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>いえいえ</td>
<td>That’s alright.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AS6 (Bus scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:07</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>今日はミーティングに遅れてしまって、すみませんでした。</td>
<td>I am sorry for being late for our meeting today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:10</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>いえいえ</td>
<td>Not at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:10</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>交通機関が渋滞で遅れててしまったので、時間通りに家を出たんですが、そんな時間に着いてしまいました。申し訳ありませんでした。</td>
<td>I left home as scheduled, but since the public transportation was delayed due to a traffic jam, (I arrived) at this time, I am sorry. <em>(Honorific expression of apologies)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Room scenario (Scenario B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:22</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>すみません。色々手違いがあったようですねけれども、あのう、二階の会議ちゃんとできるようには、予約はできました。</td>
<td>I am sorry. It seems that there were mistakes, and um, the booking has been completed so that the meeting on the second floor will be able to be held.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:29</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>あ、そうですか。じゃあ、二階の予約出来たんですね？</td>
<td>Ah, is that so? Then, you could reserve the second floor, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:34</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>二階でいいですよね？二階とれました。</td>
<td>It’s alright with the second floor, right? I was able to book the second floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:4</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>分かりました。</td>
<td>Okay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AS2 (Room scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:42</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>失礼いたします。先日会議の予約の件なんですねけれども、勘違いをしていつも一階だったので、一階を予約していたんですけれども、あのう、ご指摘いただいたように二階に変更しまいしたので、ご迷惑をおかけして申し訳ありませんでした。</td>
<td>Excuse me. It’s about the booking for a meeting (that you asked me for) the other day. Since it’s always held on the first floor, I was confused and booked the first floor, but um, I changed it to the second floor as you indicated. I am sorry for any inconvenience that I may have caused you. <em>(Honorific expression of apologies)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:48</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>いえいえ、じゃあ、二階予約できたんですね？</td>
<td>That’s alright. Then you were able to reserve the second floor, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>はい、予約できましたので、24日の会議は二階の会議室で行う予定でございます。</td>
<td>Yes, I was able to make a reservation, so the meeting on the 24th is scheduled to be held in the meeting room on the second floor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### AS3 (Room scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:05</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>予約の件なんですがけど、私メールを確認するのをちょっと不足していました、間違えて、普段一階なので一階を予約してしまいました。申し訳ありませんでした。すぐに訂正して、予約を取りましたので、今後このようなことにないようにメール読んで対応するようにさせていただきます。申し訳ありませんでした。</td>
<td>It’s about the booking; Because I didn’t check my email carefully and because meetings are usually (held on) the first floor, I booked the first floor by mistake. I am sorry. (Honorific expression of apologies) I corrected my mistake right away and I reserved (the room). In the future, I will handle requests(your request) after reading my messages more carefully so that this kind of mistake won’t happen again. I am sorry. (Honorific expression of apologies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:27</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>いえいえ</td>
<td>That’s alright.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AS4 (Room scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:13</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>会議室の予約の件ですけど、すぐに訂正いたしました。ご迷惑をおかけいたしました。</td>
<td>It’s about the booking the meeting room, I corrected it right away. I caused you inconvenience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:18</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>二階、予約できたんですね？</td>
<td>You could reserve the second floor, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:20</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>ご迷惑おかけいたしました。</td>
<td>(I’m sorry for) inconvenience that caused you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:23</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>いえいえ</td>
<td>That’s alright.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AS5 (Room scenario)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:09</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>間違えて一階の会議室を予約してしまい、申し訳ありませんでした。二階の会議室が取れましたので、よろしくお願いいたしました。</td>
<td>I am sorry for booking the meeting room on the first floor by mistake. (Honorific expression of apologies) I was able to book a meeting room on the second floor,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and so please (treat it) favorably.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:18</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>はい</td>
<td>Alright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:19</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>以後気をつけます。</td>
<td>I’ll be careful from now on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AS6 (Room scenario)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:48</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>この前会議室一階予約してしまったんですけれども、二階の会議室正しく取り直しましたので、その旨を伝えに参りました。</td>
<td>I booked a meeting room on the first floor the other day, but I came to let you know that I rebooked the correct room on the second floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:58</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>じゃあ、二階の予約できただんですね？</td>
<td>Then you could reserve the second floor, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>はい、予約いたしました。</td>
<td>Yes, I reserved it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Document Scenario (Scenario C)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:23</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>書類違いますよ。</td>
<td>This is the wrong document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:25</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>あ、そうですよね。あ、ちょっとうっかり見ないで持って来てしまったので、すぐあのう、取り替えます。</td>
<td>Ah, it is, isn’t it? I carelessly brought it without checking, so um I will replace it right away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:34</td>
<td></td>
<td>＜持って来た＞</td>
<td>＜Brought (the document)＞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:37</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>あ、すみません。これでいいと思います。確認してください。</td>
<td>Ah, I am sorry. I think it’s alright with this (document). Please confirm this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:43</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>そうですね。</td>
<td>It is (the correct document).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AS2 (Document scenario)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:26</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>書類違いますよ。</td>
<td>This is the wrong document.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 6:28  | Account-giver   | あ、申し訳ございません。これからすぐにあのう、正しいものを印刷持って来ますので、 | Ah, I’m sorry. (Honorific expression of apologies)  
Right away, um, I will make a copy of the right document |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:39</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>はい、すみません、お願いします。</td>
<td>Okay, thanks. Please.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:42</td>
<td>&lt;持って来た&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;Brought (the document)&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:44</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>大変お待ちさせてしまった。正しいものを持って来ましたので、こちらが資料です。</td>
<td>I had you wait a lot. I brought the right one, and this is the document.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AS3 (Document scenario)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:52</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>書類違いますよ。</td>
<td>This is the wrong document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:56</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>すみません、アシスタンテさんに頼んだんですけど、私がよく確認していないでそのまま渡してしまいました。今すぐコピーを直して来ますので、申し訳ございません。</td>
<td>I’m sorry. I asked my assistant to prepare it for me, but I handed it to you without checking it first. I’ll redo making a copy and will come back. I am sorry. (Honorific expression of apologies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:07</td>
<td>&lt;持って来た&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;Brought (the document)&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:07</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>正しいコピーを持ってまいりました。すみません、今後確認してお渡しするようにいたします。申し訳ありませんでした。</td>
<td>I made a copy of the correct document. I am sorry. I will only hand it over to you after checking from now on. I am sorry. (Honorific expression of apologies)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AS4 (Document scenario)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:11</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>書類違いますよ。</td>
<td>This is the wrong document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:12</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>大変失礼しました。私が確認するのを忘れてしましました。ただいま取りに行きますので、少々お待ちいただいてよろしいでしょうか。</td>
<td>I am very sorry. I forgot to check it. I will get (the right document) now. Would it be alright with you to have you wait?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Japanese Transcriptions</td>
<td>English Gloss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:19</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>はい</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:20</td>
<td>&lt;br&gt;2:20</td>
<td>＜を持って来た＞</td>
<td>〈Brought (the document)〉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:22</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>大変お持たせしました。こちらが正しい書類です。</td>
<td>I had you wait a lot. This is the right document.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AS5 (Document scenario)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Japanese Transcriptions</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:04</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>書類違いますよ。</td>
<td>This is the wrong document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:07</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>あ、申し訳ございません。間違えてしまいましょ。</td>
<td>Ah, I am sorry. (Honofific expression of apologies) I made a mistake. I will make a copy (of the correct document), and bring (it) right away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:16</td>
<td></td>
<td>＜持って来た＞</td>
<td>〈Brought (the document)〉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:18</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>すみません、持って来ました。</td>
<td>I am sorry. I brought it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:18</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>はい</td>
<td>Okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:19</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>申し訳ありませんでした。</td>
<td>I am sorry (Honorific expression of apologies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:20</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>いえいえ</td>
<td>That’s alright.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AS6 (Document scenario)**

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:55</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>書類違いますよ。</td>
<td>This is the wrong document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:58</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>あ、そうですか。ちょっとと確認させてください。</td>
<td>Oh, is that so? Let me check (the document) a bit. Oh, I am sorry. This is wrong. I will check it with my assistant once again, and will bring the correct document. Please wait a bit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:10</td>
<td></td>
<td>＜持って来た＞</td>
<td>〈Brought (the document)〉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:13</td>
<td>Account-giver</td>
<td>こちらが正しい書類です。</td>
<td>This is the correct document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15</td>
<td>Account-receiver</td>
<td>どうも</td>
<td>Thanks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>