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Mea culpa phenomenon: Comparative study of apologies in the Japanese, American and Hungarian Media

Abstract

In the Japanese media, individuals and corporate executives bow in front of the cameras tearfully asking for forgiveness for their misconduct. Compared to media apologies in the Europe and the United States, it is clear that the Japanese are following strict formal rules, including even the length and the degree of the bow during the apology, while Western apologies are diverse. The comparative case-study of this study shows not only the uniqueness of Japanese apologies but structural differences in apologies between cultures based on the understanding of responsibility.

Key words: apology structure, media event, cultural differences, responsibility, comparative study

Introduction

“I am sorry” is a common expression in Japan. The Japanese apologize frequently not only in their personal lives but also on television, in which “apology interviews” are held in various situations, such as a politician who had an affair with a colleague, a singer who stripped naked and shouted in the park at night, and a company that poisoned millions by outdated dairies. In the apology interviews, the apologizer typically stands in front of the cameras; bows deeply and apologizes and promises not to act in that way again. They usually dress formally, and some may even cut their hair as a blatant expression of remorse. There are such scandals in Europe and the United States, but apologies are less frequent. In addition, Japanese apologies tend to have similar patterns, but Europeans and

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Americans apologize in various ways, sometimes just merely uttering sorry.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how apologies function in different cultural fields, by scrutinizing the differences of media apologies in each culture. This paper argues that the apology interviews held in Western cultures predominantly imply both social and economic responsibilities, while in Japan, apologies are mainly for emotional appeals. Further, the Japanese apologize within a day after the incident, but in Europe and the United States, it is common that the apology comes 3 or more days after the incident; if at all. The purpose of the Japanese apology interview is to express the apologizer's remorse in an effort to mitigate the public's anger and media's criticism. In shaping of Japan's media apologies, TV journalists assume key roles as mediators between the accused and accusers.

To verify my hypothesis, this study compares apology conferences in the media from Japan, Hungary and the United States, and analyses the apologies with understanding the cultural background of crisis communication. The three countries were chosen based on Hofstede's cultural typology, which states¹ that Japan is a collectivist country, the United States is an individualist, and Hungary has changed from collectivism to individualism after the collapse of the communist system. The aim of this research is to clarify the apology differences in each country and create a cultural typology of apologies.

Research method

Comparative content analysis is used to investigate differences in crisis management between the three countries. Table 1 shows the eleven cases from the three countries categorized in five types for analysis. In the first type, "Celebrities' apologies", responses to moral failures of professional entertainers were compared and analysed. In the United States, Mel Gibson was arrested for driving under the influence and while sitting in the back of a police car he said that "Jews are responsible for all the wars on the world²." In Hungary, András Stohl (popular actor and TV personality) crashed his car while drunk causing injuries to two people. In Japan, Tsuyoshi Kusanagi (member of the popular male idol group

¹ Hofstede, "National Cultural Dimensions" www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/ (accessed 10.02.2017)

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDfUhlBgfoU> (accessed 15.04.2017)

SMAP) caused a night-time public disturbance at Tokyo park while drunk and naked. In the second type, “Politician apologies”, American and Japanese politicians’ apologies on private issues were compared. In the United States, former President Bill Clinton apologized for his sexual affair with Monica Lewinsky. In Japan, parliamentary vice minister of the Agricultural Ministry and member of the Liberal Democratic Party, Yuko Nakagawa apologized for kissing her married colleague Hirofumi Kado after a photo was published of the couple kissing in public. The third category of apologies, “Corporation accident apologies”, focused on accidents of companies that occurred in Japan and Hungary. In both cases, it was unclear as to whether natural damage or personal mistake caused the failure. In Hungary, an aluminium factory’s dam broke and 800,000 cubic meters of red mud flowed out destroying surrounding villages and causing the deaths of 11 people. In Japan, highway tunnel ceiling panels fell down causing 11 people’s death. The fourth type, “Corporation apology”, centered on corporate moral issues from the United States and Japan. In the U.S. a passenger with cancer was removed from an Alaska Airline flight with the reason being that no emergency landing could be made if the passenger experienced a medical emergency. In Japan, JR railways had an overhead pillar problem between two Tokyo stations, which disrupted train service and caused problems for passengers. In the fifth type, cross cultural comparisons of corporate apologies were conducted. The two cases included Toyota’s apology to the U.S. Congress over three recalls of its automobiles, and McDonalds apology in Japan for using chicken from China instead of Japan and founding plastic and other items in McDonald’s products.

This study is based on content analysis of newspaper articles and television images. In content analysis, the focus is on individuals’ apology style and includes: 1) their explanation of circumstances; 2) recognition of their own failure; 3) their sense of responsibility; 4) and their future commitment through their verbal and non-verbal expressions. In the case of a company apologies I focused on the leadership, either the president or upper management, and analysed their expressions and comments.

	JAPAN	USA	HUNGARY
Celebrities' apology	Kusanagi Tsuyoshi	Mel Gibson	Stohl Andras
Politicians' apology	Nakagawa Yuko	Bill Clinton	
Corporation apology (accident)	NEXCO		MAL Ltd.
Corporation apology	Japan Railways	Alaska Airlines	
Cross-cultural corporation apology	McDonalds	Toyota	

Table 1. Selected cases for comparative research

Apologies in Social Orientation Aspects

Celebrities' Apology

Two cases from the United States³ and Hungary⁴ were compared in which the accused spoke about their mistakes from their point of view in deep-interviews, searching the psychological reasons for their

³Mel Gibson (a popular American actor) was arrested for drunk driving on July 28, 2006. While he sat in the police car he said to the officer, "You are a Jew, and Jews are responsible for all the wars on the world." This anti-Semitic expressions hurt many people's feelings. Gibson gave a special interview to GMA Exclusive and talked about his feelings on that day. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDfUhlBgfou> (accessed 15.04.2017)

⁴András Stohl is a popular entertainer in Hungary. He was also an actor and was working as an announcer on many TV programs. In 2010, a couple of people were injured in a car accident where Stohl was driving drunk. He lost more than half of his media and theater work shortly after the accident. The trial judgment announced him guilty and he entered the prison for five months. The special interview was taken about his feelings before entering prison. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtE8fxHOVPc> (accessed 06.03.2016)

misconducts. However, they not only apologized but showed self-punishing, saying that “I know I was stupid” or “I should not have done that” in order to gain sympathy and compassion from the viewers. As Otani⁵ pointed out in an NHK TV program, “by crushing your face by yourself and punishing yourself first, you protect yourself from being punished by others.” For this reason Japanese apologizers often resort to “*marugari*” (cutting their hair very short, or even shaving their head) as a sign of remorse. However, in the case of Western celebrities, self-punishing can be seen in the same way, but cutting hair is not considered a show of regret. Gibson and Stohl showed self-punishing in order to reduce the anger of the public and to restore their reputation, but they did not shave their hair.

In Japan⁶, Kusanagi apologized in a TV show after his incident; however, as a punishment, his agency isolated him from Japanese society for five weeks by confining him to his apartment. It can be also seen as a self-punishment to get forgiveness from the society. At his apology show, he did not go into the details of the act, but he did apologize for disturbing the society. As seen in the case study, it is common to the apologizers to speak from the perspective of the people being apologized, using expressions like “I am really sorry”, “I caused you trouble”, “I made you worry”. However, in the case of the United States and Hungary, such expression are very rare, they rather use, “I was stupid”, “I shouldn’t have done that.” Moreover, there was an expression in Gibson’s interview, where he did not even understand the feelings of Jews. As such, while self-centred individualist Americans and Hungarians first see how much inconvenience the incident caused to them, group-focused collectivist Japanese first judge how much trouble they caused to the group, and do not see the incident from their own point of view. This reaction may come from the difference of collectivist and individual cultures.

⁵ “丸刈りでおわび！？ニッポンの”謝罪” NHKG 週刊 FU.KA.YO.ML.”:21:02

⁶ Kusanagi Tsuyoshi is a member of the Japanese idol group SMAP. In 2010, he got drunk and stripped naked in a Tokyo park and behaved unacceptably until the police arrested him. Immediately after the incident he lost many of his work for a while, advertisements featuring him were suspended, and he was forced remain in his apartment for five weeks as punishment. After the five week isolation, he apologized again in a live show and returned to show business. Itaya, "Kusanagi Tsuyoshi return SMAP SPECIAL LIVE."2009.06.01. FUJI TV.

Politician's Apology

In this category an American⁷ and a Japanese⁸ politician's apology interviews were compared. Nakagawa was forced to apologize by the Parliament, she showed regret, she was ashamed, but did not mention the incident and did not use the typical Japanese apology words. During the whole apology, she did not look up, she apologized for disturbing the society, but not for her act. After the apology, she shifted the focus of the topic to her work and emphasized how much she can do for the society in the future.

On the other hand, former President Clinton admitted his lie and his sexual affair 40 seconds into his apology announcement. However, he did not consider this act as a sin against the public and did not apologize to the society at all. Clinton's aim was to restore relations with the American public, and to recover the relationship with his family. Therefore, he admitted his action, and said "I was wrong" but also expressed that this situation is nobody else's business but his family's and his. Clinton's apology ended in success, after the apology media focused on his job rather than his scandal. Clinton's approval rating returned to 66% by the end of his presidential term.⁹

According to Kellerman¹⁰ and Tavuchis¹¹, whether politicians and leaders apologize or not is an important issue. Basically, politicians consider their mistake carefully, and if the mistake has future impacts they apologize, but if there is no impact they do not. Furthermore, since all the words they use have deep meanings, words are chosen very carefully.

⁷ Bill Clinton was the President of the United States from 1993 to 2001 and began a relationship with Monica Lewinsky who worked at the White House as an intern in 1995-96. Lewinsky talked to her colleagues about the affair, and the story was recorded on tape. The scandal was released in January 1998, Clinton refused comment. However, on August 17, 1998 he apologized to the U.S. public.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEmjwR0Rs20> (accessed 22.02.2016)

⁸ Nakagawa Yuko is a politician of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan. A tabloid magazine reported the details and published a photo, that in 2015 February she kissed a married colleague. Nakagawa hospitalized herself for two weeks after the scandal and later made a public apology in the Parliament. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wKVbg-3FJA> (accessed 02.11.2016)

⁹ <http://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/08/18/clinton.poll/> (access 20.05.2017)

¹⁰ Kellerman, Barbara. "When Should a Leader Apologize—and When Not?" Harvard Business Review, 2006. <https://hbr.org/2006/04/when-should-a-leader-apologize-and-when-not> (accessed 10.12.2016)

¹¹ Tavuchis, Nicolas. *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*. Stanford University press, 1991. p6.

Corporate apology (accident)

For this comparison, two serious accidents were selected from Japan¹² and Hungary¹³, and both received widespread attention in their respective countries. The level of the two accidents, the number of the casualties were similar. In the two cases, it is clear that the Central Nippon Expressway Company (NEXCO) was well prepared in advance. NEXCO had crises management plans before the accident, and this is why they held a press conference immediately after the accident and apologized twice. The president apologized in the first instance and the president of safety service division apologized in the second instance. Also, it can be seen that they carefully selected the words they used. They strongly emphasized apology for the victim's family without mentioning the word "responsibility". In Japan, apologizing immediately after an accident, does not mean also taking responsibility. The words they used rather referred to the future, ignoring past actions and facts.

On the other hand, Magyar Aluminium Zrt. (MAL) in Hungary seemed to have no preparation for crisis situations. After the accident, the president of the company did not show up. Four days later he finally conducted a press conference, but he only emphasized that "MAL has done everything according to the rules." It was a major failure of MAL that they did not provide information to reporters. In not disclosing more information, it encouraged reporters to investigate the accident, and eventually tarnished the reputation of MAL.

Corporate apology (Misconduct)

A big difference in corporate apology was that in the case of Alaska Airline¹⁴, press conference was not held and the president did not appear.

¹² On December 2, 2012, a concrete board (1.7 tons) suddenly fell down in a highway tunnel about 1,700 meters from the exit Otsuki-shi Yamanashi City, Yamanashi Prefecture. Three cars were crushed and nine people were killed. The Sasago Tunnel was managed and operated by Nakanihonkousoku Ltd. (NEXCO). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzf1wPbak-c> (accessed 16.10.1017)

¹³ On October 4, 2010, at a aluminum factory located in Ajka City, northwest of Hungary, the wall of the waste accumulation dam broke, red mud of 800,000 cubic meters flowed out, destroying the surrounding villages, and killing 10 people. MAL Co., Ltd. managed and operated the aluminum factory. source:TV2 Tenyek 2010.10.08.

¹⁴ On April 6, 2015, a cancer patient was taken off from Alaska Airline's plane flying from Honolulu to San José. Alaska Airlines said it was in order to protect the passengers' health, because there is no possibility for emergency landing from Hawaii to the continent, so they decided not to take this passenger. Finally, the company apologized. Source:KTLA5 News (accessed on 09.05.2015)

Alaska Airlines only apologized by sending a comment to AP news agency and to all media. The comment included the apology, saying, “We regret the inconvenience Ms. Sedway experienced yesterday and are very sorry for how the situation was handled.”¹⁵

In the case of Japan Railways Company¹⁶ (JR), they similarly posted an apology comment on their website, briefly explaining the circumstances and apologizing to the customers. However along with the apology comment, they also held an apology conference, where JR executives bowed and apologized.

In both United States and Japan it is a common practice that companies release comments on their homepages, but in Japan not only the comment but visually apologizing in front of the media is also required. In other words, in Japan, it is considered insufficient to apologize only by text.

Cross comparison of corporate apologies

It happens sometimes that a company causes trouble overseas, and they need to apologize in different countries. In this situation should the apology collate to the culture of the country where the problem caused or should they apologize in their own cultural way? Kellerman¹⁷ says apologies are formalized by culture, content and gender. Furthermore, the apologizer must understand that different cultures’ viewers differently interpret apologies.

Analysing Toyota's apology¹⁸ more emotional words appeared than in Japanese apologies. In Japan, emotions are expressed in a subtle way, bowing, showing tears, but in the United States emotion is primarily expressed with words rather than body language. Conversely, it means that Japanese do not put as much emphasis on the selection of words as

¹⁵ KTLA5 News (accessed on 09.05.2015)

¹⁶ On April 12, 2015, JR East had a problem that the overhead pillar between Kanda and Akihabara stations in the Yamanote line collapsed, and the train was stopped. On the 12th, train service delays affected about 400,000 people. On April 12, JR East issued an apology comment and also held a press conference and apologized. Fuji TV NEWS 04.13.2015.

¹⁷ Kellerman, *When Should a Leader Apologize—and When Not?*

¹⁸ In America, Toyota caused a recall problem three times. In 2009, the floor mat and the accelerator pedal caused problem, and in 2010 a problem of accelerator pedal occurred again. Also in 2010 due to the problem of anti-lock brake system a recall has happened. It is recorded that 37 people died together due to the three problems. Toyota recalled 9 million cars as a whole and also apologized. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZeiD2-Rbg4&t=221s> (access 27.02.2017)

Americans do. The structure of Toyota's apology, can be divided into three parts: 1) Toyota's ideology; 2) the explanation of the recall problem; and 3) quality control management. Aiko Toyota repeated about customer safety three times and finished his speech with an emotional appeal, "My name is on every car, you have my personal commitment that Toyota will work vigorously and seriously to restore the trust of our customers."¹⁹

In comparison, the apology of Sarah Casanova, President of McDonald's Japan²⁰ was unique in Japan. She apologized twice, first in December 2014 on the company earnings announcement and second February 2015 in an apology conference. A clear difference can be seen between the two apologies. In the first apology, Casanova held an American style press conference without a fixed apology and bowing, but in the second one, by looking at her nonverbal communication, it is evident that Casanova delivered a setted Japanese apology. At the beginning of the second apology conference, along with her other company directors Casanova bowed, and the length of the bow was longer than a usual apology bow. Although her both speech were held in English in the second one she used the strict Japanese apology phrases in English and structured her apology in a Japanese way.

In comparing Casanova's first and the second apologies, her outfits also changed drastically. In the first one, she appeared with untied hair and in casual dress, but in the second apology, she tied her hair and dressed a little less causally (or a little more formally) with a white shirt and grey suit. In this way, the second apology fit the usual apology paradigm of Japan. According to Asami²¹, an apology symbolizes the sincere intention of not hiding anything. Because of this, Casanova changed her clothes, and deeply bowed at the second interview. However, according to Era²² in McDonald's apology he said, "I felt that something was not quite right. I got the impression that it was choreographed."

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZeiD2-Rbg4&t=221s> 10:07 (access 28.10.2017)

²⁰ In July 2014 it developed that McDonalds was using chicken from China, and in December 2014 a plastic part was found in McDonald's sundae. Because of the many troubles two apology conferences were held, one was in December 2014, the second one on Feb. 5, 2015.

²¹ Ito, Masami. "Apologizing in Japan: Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word." *The Japan Times Online*, February 21, 2015.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/02/21/national/social-issues/apologizing-japan-sorry-seems-hardest-word/> (access 13.05.2016)

²² Ito, *Apologizing in Japan*

Conceivably, Casanova was forced to apologize in the Japanese style and therefore she was not really able to muster the necessary emotional skills.

Conclusion of the Study: Structure of the Apology

This paper compared individual apologies and corporate apologies from three countries. The target countries were Japan classified as a collectivist country and the United States and Hungary classified as individualist countries. As such, it is evident that apologies in different cultural circumstances, especially apologies in the media are delivered following different procedures. The next section of this paper focuses on where exactly these differences come from.

(1) Individual Apology

By comparing the three countries' apologies, similar patterns in America and Hungary can be found, while the Japanese apology manner is completely diverse. In the case of Europe and the United States, usually an interview is held, and the apologizer utilizes the self-punishing method. In these countries, it is understood that self-punishing is one of the processes needed to eventually receive societal approval, leading to forgiveness.²³ However, in Japan, punishing yourself is represented in the change of appearance (*marugari*; cut or sometimes shave the hair) or an act (bowing, *dogeza*). In Western apologies, sincerity is shown by the apologizer through participation in some type of "volunteer" activities. There is a tendency to destroy the image by yourself and to restore it with volunteer activities. However, in Japan, there is no volunteer activity, indicating that the apology process ends with the apology itself. In other words, the apology itself has an important role in Japan, and it always assumes a fixed style. If the apologizer does not show sincerity in the apology, the society will provide some form of punishment. In the case of SMAP's Kusanagi, sincerity was shown through five weeks of isolation from the world; a severe punishment in a collectivist country. Of course, it can be said that all celebrities' apologies are performances, but the culture defines the method in which sincerity is proved. In Western countries it done through words; in Japan through appearance.

In the case of politicians, both cases were held due to private issues, both were carefully prepared, the manuscript was written for them. Apologizers admitted their failure, but they did not apologize for their

²³ “丸刈りでおわび！？ニッポンの”謝罪” NHKG 週刊 FU.KA.YO.MI.”

mistakes to the society. Unlike celebrities, politicians do not easily apologize for private matters. However, since the media broke their image due to the incident, for their future they need to recognize and admit the failure. The significant difference between the cases in Japan and the United States is that while former President Clinton put strong effort on choosing the words he used, Ms. Nakagawa's non-verbal expressions were more emphasized. Furthermore, in Clinton's apology, he stated a strong opinion about the facts, he directly addressed the camera (and in this way, the American public), he declared that it is not a public matter rather it is between his family and God. In Japan, religion never appears in the apology in any form. In Nakagawa's apology, she avoided eye contact, kept her head down, and although she accepted the failure, the apology was not for her personal failure but for disturbing society. She strictly used the standard Japanese apology expressions and did not expressed any own opinion. No matter what the apology is for, it is expected that the word "sorry" must be used.

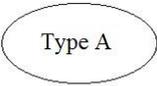
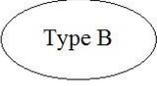
	Foreign	Japan
Individual	 Type A	 Type B
Corporation	 Type C	 Type B

Table 2. Structure of apology

Based on the aforementioned cases, individual apologies can be divided into two types: Type A (Foreigner Type) and Type B (Japanese Type).

Type A (Foreigner Type): The characteristics of this type include: 1) Recognizing and admitting one's own failure; 2) willingness to appear in front of the media in order to recover the broken image; 3) having a strong opinion about the situation; 4) willingness to share the opinion with the public; 5) in some cases, engaging in volunteer activities to prove sincerity in order to repair the broken image; 6) choose words with intentionality and use facial expressions carefully; and 7) viewing society as an audience but not apologizing to them.

Type B (Japanese Type): The characteristics of this type include: 1) admitting the failure sufficiently and apologizing within a day after the incident happens; 2) using society as a victim of the incident therefore saying apologetic words to society, but being vague about what they are actually apologizing for; 3) not revealing their opinion about the facts of the incident to the public; 4) scripted text with fixed expressions; 5) greater emphasis placed on expressions than words (etc. bow, crop the hair, *dogeza*, and tears); and 6) presentation of the apology is important.

In the case of individuals, the appearance in the media is similar but the contents are diverse according to the cultural fields. In Table 2 above, these apologies are indicated with the ellipse around them.

(2) Corporate Apology

In the corporate apologies, the structure is different. In case of a foreign company, either a general apology announcement is released or there is no apology at all. However, in Japan, similar to individual apologies, companies apologize within a day after the accident and they definitely bow in front of the media. To provide clarity for the reasons behind this, it is necessary to understand legal and cultural differences.

In all three countries, in case of corporate incidents, there is a distinction between legal responsibility and moral responsibility. Legal responsibility is determined by the courts, but moral responsibility and any kind of act towards the society is decided by the company itself. In Western cultures, legal responsibility and moral responsibility are clearly distinguished, but if someone admits his failure, it is believed that this is acceptance of both legal and moral responsibilities. In cases where responsibility is decided by the trial, moral responsibility is usually not expressed, but if the case is not a legal problem, many companies take

moral responsibilities. However, even in the case of moral responsibility, usually only apology announcements are released²⁴.

On the other hand in Japan, even if the incident infers legal responsibility, many companies take moral responsibility as well. Why is the manner of taking responsibility different from that in Western countries? In the United States and Hungary, it is understood that the apology shows the admission of responsibility, and this action will not be profitable for the trial. In other words, if an apology is issued prior to the trial verdict, it means that all mistakes are accepted and it is believed that it will affect the judgment. However, in Japan, these responsibilities are clearly separated, and the apology includes moral responsibility, but not legal. In Japan the common thinking is that the apology will not impact financial support for the aggrieved party. However, for example in Hungary it will²⁵. This is why Hungarian and American companies avoid apologies even in a moral sense, and it is the reason why Japanese companies are unconcerned about apologizing immediately after the incident (and before a trial?).

From a cultural point of view, individualistic Americans, even if they own companies, do not take responsibility for the failure of another person²⁶. Of course, they will make efforts to restore the damaged company image, but apologizing in front of the media for the failure of other employees is uncommon. Furthermore, in European and American companies, it is clearly defined who is responsible for what, and therefore, easier to tell who made the mistake. However, in a collectivist country like Japan, the company is a united group, and thereby is responsible for the individuals of this group²⁷. The company is like a family and success and mistakes are equally shared. In short, this is why corporate apologies are similar to individual ones.

As shown in Table 2, in the case of foreign companies, there is a Type C (Foreign Company Type) named apology. However, Japanese companies' apologies are performed in the same way as individual ones.

²⁴ Emese Kovacs: *社会的機能としてのメディア「謝罪」* *The social function of media apologies* Musashi University, doctoral thesis, 2016. p.108.

²⁵ Kovacs: *社会的機能としてのメディア「謝罪」* *The social function of media apologies* p109.

²⁶ Harry C. Triandis: *Individualism collectivism*, westview Press, 1995. p78.

²⁷ Takie Sugiyama Lebra: *Japanese Patterns of Behaviour*, University of hawaii Press, 1976. p36.

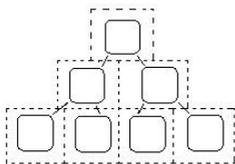
Type C: The characteristics of this type include: 1) always happens after the incident has been carefully investigated (in some cases, after a number of days); 2) minimize the apology words and show feelings of sympathy; 3) no mention of responsibility and avoid those questions; 4) non-verbal expressions, apologies should not be expressed; and 5) apologies can be completed with a short announcement.

Type B: The characteristics of this type include: 1) admitting the failure sufficiently and quickly after the incident happens; 2) using society as a victim of the incident therefore saying apologetic words to society, but being vague about what they are actually apologizing for. Although they must have opinion about the fact they never show it to the public. Words are prepared, using fixed expressions. More emphasis are put on expressions than words (etc. bow, crop the hair, *dogeza*, and tears). Visualizing the apology is very important.

It is clear from this aspect that Japanese companies are in a different position from foreign companies, which is proved by the presence of company presidents at apology conferences. It is commonly understood that companies should apologize when they fail, but is it necessary for the president to personally appear at the apology? In Japan, the president apologizes in case of crises, even for actions that they were not personally responsible for. However, in case of American and Hungarian companies, the president will appear depending on the importance and level of the scandal. However, for small problems, the responsible officer, not the president, should apologize.

So why does the president always apologize in Japan? The answer can be found in the characteristics of company structure.

American corporation



Japanese corporation

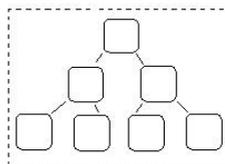


Table 3. Structure of responsibility in the United States and Japan.

As shown in Table 3, in foreign companies, all employees have the scope of responsibility of their jobs; therefore, failure can be clearly identified. As an individualistic country, each employee is responsible for their own failure and shared responsibility is unnecessary. As Kellerman²⁸ writes, according to the importance of scandals or failure not only the president but also an officer can apologize. However, in Japan, company officers' apology is not thought to be proper or sufficient. As indicated previously, one of the reasons for this thinking is that companies are considered as family and the family head needs to stand above and take responsibility for all the members. This also explains why company apologies in Japan are similar to the apologies issued by individuals, and why presidents must appear in most corporate apology cases. The president of Toyota who appeared in the hearing in the United States, was greeted by the chairman as follows: "Let me thank you both for being here. I think it's very good that you came, it shows your concern in the part of Toyota."²⁹ We can interpret this greeting as a signal that the appearance of company president was appreciated.

(3) Comparing cross cultural corporate apologies

Finally, looking at the cross-cultural comparison of apologies, a clear difference can be seen between a Japanese apology in the United States and an American apology in Japan. The similarities in both apologies was the appearance of the company president and that the president's announcement had no concrete explanation for the incident. In the Toyota case, the president expressed feelings of sympathy rather than an apology, and promised to make efforts to avoid such accidents. Of course, Japanese bows or other typical Japanese nonverbal signs were not part of the apology. Surprisingly, the president clearly took responsibility. In order to restore the company's image, there were some emotional expressions, for example, he mentioned the he loves cars, more than anyone. Such an expression would not be used during an apology in Japan.

In the McDonald's case, usual expressions were evident; a foreigner president bowed in front of the Japanese media during the apology. There was no mention of responsibility, but the president made emotional

²⁸ Kellerman, *When Should a Leader Apologize—and When Not?*

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MahW7IG8t8o> 00:15 (accessed 18.09.2017)

remarks at the end of the presentation regarding regaining customers' confidence.

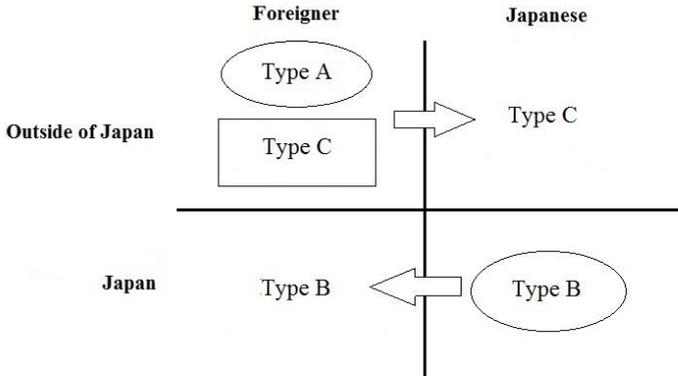


Table 4. Types of apologies according to cultural areas

In this cross-cultural comparison of apologies, the most important aspect is the setting where the apology is held. Apologizers must apologize to viewers on each setting, and the apology needs to be settled to every society. Even if they apologize in the same way and use the same words as in their own cultural background, in a different social orientated community it might not be understood. Furthermore, when considering an apology as performance, there is a possibility that a completely different meaning will be conveyed unless the performance is tailored to the new setting. There are important characteristic apology marks in each cultural setting which are essential in presenting a suitable act. In America's case, it is important to take responsibility, but in Japan responsibility is a secondary question; the speed and the visualization of apology matter more.

Finally, it is possible to clarify the structure of apology in foreign countries and in Japan. The apology presented in a foreign country is different in the case of individuals and companies, but in Japan it is similar for both. Furthermore, Japanese companies' apology in the United States lose the Japanese characteristics and visualize elements of apology, and much more emphasis is placed on the question of responsibility. On the other hand, foreign companies apologizing in Japan showed a typical

form of Japanese apology including bowing and typical apology expressions. In short, the most important matter when apologizing is to adjust actions to the cultural expectations where the apologies are performed.

Apology is a global phenomenon. With an apology conflict cannot be avoided, but apology is a gesture to accept what happened and bring closure.³⁰ It is a transaction between the apologizer and the victim, a gesture to show regret and confession which is motivated by self-interest but performed due to social pressure. It is an act that shifts from the past to the future. As a conclusion the research shows the variation of apologies in intercultural aspects. In the Japanese apology visualization is the most important element, strongly reflects the social norms and cultural characteristics of Japan. Outside of Japan, in all apologies aside from visualization responsibility is a delicate but serious topic, which needs to be clarified. Each social field needs to be researched and fully understood what the cultural expectations are in apology and every act and verbal manifestation need to format to those apology expectation in order to achieve transculturally forgiveness.

³⁰ Tavuchis, Nicolas. *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* p 5-6.

